

# Living Their Best Life?

The Social, Cultural, and Linguistic  
Positionings of Swiss High School Students  
Studying Abroad

**Murielle Ferry-Meystre**



*Living Their Best Life?* is centered on the study abroad experiences of high school students enrolled in French-English programs in Switzerland. It aims at exploring students' experiences abroad regarding their social, cultural, and linguistic positionings and their possible impact on the experience. In this book, Murielle Ferry-Meystre provides valuable insights into the understudied subject of adolescents' experiences abroad. She also suggests practical recommendations for developing support programs for high school students before and during study abroad. Scholars, educators, and institutions will gain valuable insights, including a nuanced understanding of adolescents' experiences abroad and the benefits and drawbacks of such programs, as well as critical considerations related to social justice and equity.

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**Murielle Ferry-Meystre** is a lecturer at the HEP Vaud, Switzerland, where she teaches EFL didactics to aspiring high school teachers. In addition to her academic role, she continues to work part-time as a high school EFL teacher.



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# 1 General Context and Perspectives

Study abroad (SA) as a field of research reflects the unprecedented expansion of SA stays, which have become commonplace in higher education. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, some 220 million students took part in varied SA programmes worldwide, and it was estimated that this number would increase by 4.2% each year to reach more than 300 million in 2025 and almost 600 in 2040 (Calderon 2018). In a world which has become increasingly globalized, student mobility is believed to favour “participants’ employability, language skills, intercultural awareness, and a sense of European [or global] citizenship” (Mitchell and Tyne 2021, 3). As a result, participants’ motivations range from instrumental, such as future career prospects, to “more experiential and concerned with personal development” (4). Over recent decades the general goal of SA has moved beyond language learning and now tends to be more about the internationalization of students (Lewin 2009; Isabelli-Garcia et al. 2018). Studies focusing on SA have followed a similar trend; although most studies initially tended to measure linguistic development, many more recent studies have envisaged the experience of SA globally and looked at learner identity and agency (Isabelli-Garcia et al. 2018). The expansion of SA programmes in higher education and the prevalent positive discourse which praises their benefits have encouraged the development of different programmes for a more diverse public, including younger

students. The introduction in 2014, in the canton of Vaud, of a new high school degree – a French-English bilingual Matura mostly consisting of a year spent in an English school – follows that trend. These types of programmes are only budding and, consequently, research on these more singular programmes remains rare and limited. The present study investigates adolescents' SA experiences to understand the challenges they face, how they cope, and what kind of support such a programme could implement. It describes teenagers' experiences globally – analysing them from a social, cultural, and linguistic perspective – thus revealing their extreme variability and underlining the courage and motivation it takes to embark on such a challenging experience.

The aim of the following introduction is to contextualize the present study in very broad terms, mentioning key contextual, methodological, and theoretical elements and raising the important questions it seeks to answer. The introduction will also frame it as a sociocultural and poststructuralist study in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

## **1.1 The French-English Bilingual Matura in the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland**

The Swiss education system offers different professional or school-based training options for teenagers once they reach the end of compulsory school at 15. The high school Matura is the most demanding and selective option, granting access to all Swiss universities and technical schools. As part of the Matura, most Swiss cantons offer bilingual programmes in either German, French, Italian, or English through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classes, that is, with different subjects taught in the target language (Lys and Gieruc 2005; Gajo and Berthoud 2008; Naef and Elmiger 2009; Naef 2012; Elmiger et al. 2010; Gajo et al. 2020). In the canton of Vaud – where this study took place – high school students can opt for a different type of bilingual Matura that integrates a long immersive stay. The canton of Vaud is actually a rarity in Switzerland as only the canton of Geneva and two specific high schools in different German-speaking cantons have similar programmes (Elmiger, Sigenthaler, and Tunger 2022). Elsewhere, sojourns in cantons or countries where the target language is spoken are often proposed or required, but only for a short period of time (Elmiger 2008; Elmiger, Sigenthaler, and Tunger 2022). The canton of

Vaud has been a forerunner in offering these types of programmes; it started with German in 2000, then added English in 2014 and Italian in 2015 (Lys and Gieruc 2005; Elmiger 2008; Elmiger, Siegenthaler, and Tunger 2022). High school students can now spend their second year (out of three) in an English school while living with a host family, provided their grades allow it. However, few students take this opportunity (less than 3%) as it represents a highly challenging – and rather expensive – experience for teenagers. But what types of challenges do they face in their host family and school settings, and how do they cope? What does it take for teenagers abroad to “live their best life”, an expression that was used several times in their narratives?

## 1.2 Identity, Positioning, and Narratives

A high school student's year abroad is envisaged here as a global experience and not simply a linguistic one, and has therefore been approached from various angles. The concept of identity has been chosen as the lens through which to look at this year abroad since it seems to encompass all the challenges students must face and allows a comprehensive reading and understanding of their experiences. As Kinginger (2013a, 341) noted:

[SA students'] success depends both upon how [they] are received in the contexts they frequent (e.g., classrooms, homestays) and upon how these same students choose to interpret the social, cultural, and linguistic practices of their host communities. In this way, the challenges that students face in study abroad settings can be seen as related to identity.

Within the concept of identity, the three main foci of the social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of students' experiences are used to present a multidimensional analysis. Immersed in a foreign environment where they have to deal with a new language, a new culture, and new social networks on their own, high school students' identities are inevitably revisited and questioned, to then be reinforced, temporarily left aside, or abandoned (Pellegrino Aveni 2005; Block 2007a; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017; Tullock 2018). The concept of positioning (Davies and Harré 1990) has become key to analysing and supporting students' experiences as it offers a dynamic and pragmatic understanding of identity. It has thus been used to decipher

students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences independently and comparatively.

While this study first and foremost explores students' experiences abroad on these three levels, it also seeks, to a lesser degree, to support students as they deal with these three types of challenges. To gain access to students' experiences and collect the desired data in a climate of trust and benevolence, a support programme was designed to accompany students before, during, and after their SA sojourn. Key concepts covering social, cultural, and linguistic identities were compiled from previous SA studies, and some of them were briefly introduced and discussed with nine high school students before their departure to England in August 2019. Once abroad, the participants wrote about their experiences in an online diary and on a forum, either freely or by replying to regular questions or general solicitations. The objective of these regular interactions between participants and researcher was dual; first, it aimed at understanding and analysing students' positive and negative experiences and second, at responding to the participants with appropriate comments or suggestions. At this point, positioning theory also offers a highly practical lens to read, analyse, and reply to participants' diary entries and then suggest new positionings and possibly bring about change. A final interview with the participants enriched the data and the analysis of their experiences. The data mainly consist of students' stories about their experiences written during their stay in their diaries or re-told after their return in the interview. A narrative inquiry approach has been chosen to remain coherent with the data and not distort their narrative accounts. Narratives clearly underlie and connect the various stages – from the support programme to analysis of the data, as well as the reading and interpretation of the present study.

Collecting experiences from adolescents abroad provides an important contribution to the field of SA research, as so far “little research has been conducted with teenagers in an SA context” (Llanes 2018, 465). Testing different identities and positions is part of adolescence (Erikson 1968; Cross and Markus 1991), and this inevitably influences their SA experiences. As such, it is important to investigate adolescents' SA experiences specifically, and not simply assume that they will be similar to those of university students. To my knowledge, no research has ever been conducted with Swiss bilingual Matura students going abroad. This study fills that lacuna with a comprehensive

exploration of Swiss adolescents' social, cultural, and linguistic positionings throughout their SA experience in England. Based on their stories, informed propositions of support will then be formulated. The support programme developed here was designed as an exploratory tool, which proved to be essential in the data collection. It also appeared to be an interesting proposition for initial interventions, which, once refined, could provide a form of support for future bilingual Matura students. Because, as Tullock (2018, 270) intimates, once the challenges have been identified, the next step is determining how to best support students:

SA research on identity has highlighted some of the challenges that sojourners face abroad, which include encountering limited access to social networks, difficulties with self-presentation through the L2 and with establishing equitable relations with interlocutors, and a tendency to adopt ethnocentric stances rather than negotiate cultural differences. In light of these findings, the question practitioners must ask themselves is, **“What kinds of interventions are possible, practical, and effective in order to create maximally positive conditions for successful negotiation of identities during the SA experience?”** (emphasis mine)

### 1.3 A Sociocultural Approach to (Language) Learning

The present study takes a sociocultural approach to language learning, an approach which gained importance towards the end of the 20th century. Following Chomsky's legacy of the innate quality of language acquisition, the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) was originally dominated by an essentially cognitive and positivist perspective, and the arrival of *sociocultural* approaches within the field of SLA was a difficult and highly debated process, although these new perspectives had already developed elsewhere (Larsen-Freeman 2002, 2007; Zuengler and Miller 2006). After Vygotsky (1986) and Bakhtin (1981), Lave and Wenger (1991) were among the important precursors of the sociocultural approach with their *situated learning* model, which locates learning within social interactions and different forms of co-participation, and not in the mind of individuals. As they pointed out, “learning as internalization is too easily construed as an unproblematic process of absorbing the given, as a matter of transmission and assimilation” (1991, 47). Thus, the questions they asked were not about the kinds of

cognitive processes involved, but rather about the kinds of social participation and acceptance necessary for learning to take place. Their concept of *Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (LPP) frames learners' participation in asymmetric forms of social interaction as a positive practice and an active process, with potential for change. It is proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991, 35) "as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent" as well as "an empowering position" since one moves toward "*full participation*" (37), i.e., towards one or several of the diverse forms of relations entailed by membership in any community. Issues of access to practice are essential as well – learners can be legitimate in a community but if their access to it is denied, they will not be able to participate peripherally. In Lave and Wenger's (1991) view, learning is not reified as one activity but conceived as an aspect of all social activities. Moreover, they noted that although viewing social practice as primary may seem to veil individuals, the focus on their participation in social practice envisages, on the contrary, the individual as a whole and points to the construction of their identities as member of sociocultural communities. *Communities of practice*, which underlie the notion of LPP, are another central concept in their framework: "A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge" (98). Language, whether an additional language or the specific discourse of a community, is perceived by Lave and Wenger as central to LPP as well.

Issues about language [...] may well have more to do with legitimacy of participation and with access to peripherality than they do with knowledge transmission. Indeed, [...] learning to become a legitimate participant in a community involves learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants. (1991, 105)

Therefore, in Lave and Wenger's view, learning is an essential part of most social interactions and of ourselves: "Learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: They are aspects of the same phenomenon" (115). It is needless to say that many other important authors developed sociocultural approaches to learning, but the latter were chosen for their relevance in the elaboration of the present study.

Although the sociocultural approaches to language learning are now well established within the field of SLA, scholars are still questioning its scope and aims – as well as the methods used to achieve these aims – in order to stay connected with our increasingly globalized world. For example, responding to the great changes brought by “globalization, technologization and mobility,” The Douglas Fir Group (2016, 19) proposed a *Transdisciplinary Framework for SLA in a Multilingual World*. The Group composed of highly recognized SLA scholars, and in their paper they acknowledged the recent expansion of their field toward concepts and theories more socially attuned and coming from diverse traditions of research such as sociology, anthropology, education, psychology, and others. Nevertheless, with their framework, they wished to address the “pressing needs of people who learn to live – and in fact do live – with more than one language at various points in their lives, with regard to their education, their multilingual and multiliterate development, social integration, and performance across diverse contexts” (Douglas Fir Group 2016, 20). Their framework is built around three levels: the micro-level (the individual), the meso-level (sociocultural institutions and communities), and the macro-level (the ideological structures that shape and are shaped by the sociocultural institutions and communities). None of these levels exists on its own and they all need to be understood and analysed through their interaction with each other. Another key aspect of the Douglas Fir Group’s (2016) framework is that, in their view, research needs to be transdisciplinary. More precisely, they proposed “a new, rethought SLA [that] begins with the social-local worlds of L2 learners and then poses the full range of relevant questions, from the neurobiological and cognitive micro levels to the macro levels of the sociocultural, educational, ideological, and socioemotional” (39). In fact, they invited SLA researchers “to expand their analytic gaze to different dimensions of social activity and — without necessarily giving up or even expanding their particular approach — to think integratively” (39).

This study is a product of this evolving field and is imbedded in a sociocultural and transdisciplinary approach to language learning, where *community, norm, choice, identity* and *agency* (Douglas Fir Group 2016) are key constructs that will help capture the social nature of language learning and, more precisely, the potential participation of learners in particular discourses as legitimate speakers – with the right to speak and to be heard.

## 1.4 A Poststructuralist Perspective to (Language) Learning

If language learning is envisaged here primarily as a social practice, this practice is also understood as unequal, which inscribes this study in a poststructuralist approach (Foucault 1977, 1980; Bourdieu 1977a, 1991; Norton Pierce 1995; Norton 1997, 2013b). Poststructuralists take a critical stand and look at language learning through the lens of power and inequalities. Scholars interested in this approach discuss issues of “language, gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, popular culture, education, immigration, teaching practices, curriculum development, and other concerns” (Pennycook 1999, 333), and how they intertwine. Criticising the mainstream cognitive approaches in SLA, the idea is to deal critically with the contexts in which language learning takes place and to bring solutions for change. These means of transformation start with raising awareness on the different contexts (Fairclough 1992). The interactionist approaches (Long 1981) did not deal with contexts critically, and poststructuralist theories advocate not taking an individual’s access to linguistic resources or opportunities of interactions for granted. This perspective allows us to analyse the ways linguistic status (for example, the non-native speaker status) as well as social, class, gender, age, or race status, grant access to additional language practices and resources, as well as the ways identities are constituted and reconstituted in additional language learning. Language learning attitudes and beliefs are envisaged as the reflections of discourses and ideologies, highlighting their constructed nature (Pavlenko 2002).

Second, issues of individual agency are also central to poststructuralism, and scholars taking this approach try to understand where the point of balance between individual freedom and structural constraint stands in order to bring about change. The individual is conceived as complex with multiple and changing identities, and through different positionings, language learners can become agents and create learning opportunities from which they could be otherwise excluded (Norton Peirce 1995). Agencies are, however, always co-constructed, and they cannot exist if the language learner’s contexts do not allow them. Cultures are also envisaged as complex, multiple, and changing, and not stable and monolithic as previous SLA approaches have understood them. As Pavlenko (2002, 295) pointed out, “poststructuralist approaches recognise complex stratification in all societies and

communities and acknowledge a range of, possibly multicultural, communities in which L2 users may seek membership.” In all these aspects, the social and individual aspects are in constant interaction, and not in opposition. The former cannot be envisaged without the latter and vice-versa, as an individual’s identity is always co-constructed and constantly redefined in different contexts. Resulting from the conception of the language learner as a social actor with unique and dynamic trajectories, the poststructuralist theories do not try to identify factors and generalize them as predictors of successful language learning but recognize language learning outcomes as highly unpredictable (Pavlenko 2002). These concepts underlie the understanding and analyses of students’ multiple positionings abroad and their respective challenges.

These preliminary remarks are aimed at fixing the general frame of the book, which is structured as follows; in Chapter 2, “Identity, Culture, and Study Abroad”, identity and culture are considered in relation to language learning. Study abroad (SA) as a field is then developed more specifically and detailed through concepts and conclusions drawn from previous research. After an overview of SA research studies which assessed language gains, the focus turns to the development and impact of social, cultural, and linguistic identities while abroad. The importance of accompanying SA students and the specificities of adolescents abroad conclude this second chapter. In Chapter 3, “Data and Narrative Analysis”, the different phases of data collection are defined in more detail, and the narrative approach is presented, including its relevance in the present study. Chapter 4 is concerned with the results and analyses, and presents the social, cultural, and linguistic narratives of each participant. After the narration of their global experience, one specific experience is analysed in more detail. A comparison of the different participants closes this chapter, referring back to the different key theoretical concepts. To conclude, Chapter 5 offers suggestions for further studies and ways to support high school students abroad in the future and takes a critical look at the bilingual Matura programme.



# 2 Identity, Culture, and Study Abroad

## 2.1 Identity and Language Learning

“Every time language speakers speak, read, or write the target language, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target community, they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation.” (Norton 2013b: 4)

### 2.1.1 A Poststructuralist Understanding of Identity

Following the general epistemological stance taken globally in the present study, identity is explored in its sociocultural and poststructuralist definition, therefore as fluid and variable and from a non-essentialist perspective. In her ground-breaking study of immigrants learning English, Norton Peirce (1995, 15) underlined the change in perspective regarding identity:

Whereas humanist conceptions of the individual – and most definitions of the individual in SLA research – presuppose that every person has an essential, unique, fixed, and coherent core (introvert/extrovert; motivated/unmotivated; field dependent/ field independent),

poststructuralism depicts the individual as diverse, contradictory, and dynamic; multiple rather than unitary, decentred rather than centred.

Norton's work on identity and language learning (Norton Pierce 1995; Norton 2000, 2013b) has been highly influential in the field of SLA. She was one of the first to develop "a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context" (Norton 2013b, 44). Before her, in the theories of the *good language learner*, learner motivation was often seen as the sole explanation for access to the target language. Norton brought unequal power relations to the fore and argued, following Bourdieu (1991), for the addition of the *right to speak* to the definition of communicative competence. In her view, the learning of an additional language is a complex social practice in which the identities of language learners are strongly engaged, and which had hardly received any attention in the field of SLA before. For Norton (2013b, 45), language is more than its linguistic constituents, it constitutes someone's identity and is constituted by it:

It is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak. Thus language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning.

Norton also developed the construct of *investment*, which has proven highly relevant and useful in many regards. Finding that the concept of motivation did not sufficiently integrate the power relations present in interactions, Norton (2013b, 6) theorized *investment* using Bourdieu's (1977a) construct of *cultural capital*:

If learners "invest" in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money), which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power.

She contrasted investment and motivation showing that an individual can be highly *motivated* to learn a language but can decide

to *invest* in language learning in some situations and not in others, depending on the types of language practices available (Darvin and Norton 2023). She stated that “while motivation can be seen as a primarily psychological construct, investment must be seen within a sociological framework and seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner’s desire and commitment to learn a language, and their complex and changing identity” (Norton 2013b, 6). More precisely, some language practices can exclude the learner due to unequal power relations – for instance, between learners and native speakers – or due to possible racism, sexism, elitism, homophobia, or other forms of discrimination. Investment is thus intrinsically linked to identity as Norton Peirce (1995, 17–18) initially outlined:

The notion of investment [...] attempts to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world. It conceives of the language learner as having a complex social identity and multiple desires. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space.

Based on Bucholz and Hall (2005), I synthesize here the main principles of identity from a poststructuralist point of view. First, identity emerges during interaction. Second, an identity can be momentarily inhabited depending on locally situated cultural elements or social roles. Third, identity is overtly or covertly indexed by the speaker or their interlocutor through different processes such as the use of a specific linguistic repertoire or the reference to identity categories or labels. Fourth, identity is inter-subjectively constructed within binaries of self and others. And finally, an identity is never whole and stable as it can be deliberate or unconscious, and an outcome of the others’ perception or of social discourses. Therefore, it keeps shifting through the interaction. These five principles highlight the interdependence of the individual and the social world. Identity is always co-constructed; it is at the same time constitutive of and dependent on the social world. As a result, the negotiation of identity is a constant interplay between *self-positioning* and *interactive positioning* (Blackledge

and Pavlenko 2001), or between self-chosen identities and identities ascribed by others. As Norton (2012, 2) convincingly put it:

The individual is conceived of as a “subject,” in that the individual can be subject *to* a set of relationships in one social site, or subject *of* a set of relationships in another social site. In the former, the individual would be in a relatively powerless subject position; in the latter, the individual would have greater power relative to other individuals.

Elsewhere, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) proposed a framework in which identities can be imposed, assumed, or negotiated. Identities are seen as “social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives” (19). Moreover, in their view, identity becomes relevant in relation to language use when struggles occur and individuals – perceived as agentive beings – try to resist an undesirable but imposed identity, produce new ones when one is unavailable, or change the meaning of some devalued or misunderstood identity options. Thus, as already expressed before, the issue of *agency* is central to the poststructuralist understanding of identity. To a certain extent, an individual can choose to inhabit a specific identity, whether this means assimilation, adaptation, or resistance. Agency is also perceived as central and extremely important in additional language learning (Flowerdew and Miller 2008; Duff 2011), but the importance of social structures must be recognized as well, as the role of power relations and ideologies should not be neglected (Block 2007b). Identities are thus conceived as “multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change” (Norton 2012, 3); they constitute and are constituted by the social environment.

Drawing on the different theories explained above, the present study thus envisages language learning as a social practice, in which meaning is socially constituted and social positions are defined, negotiated, and resisted. As a result, who we *are* is an inescapable factor in the process of language learning. As Norton explained in the introduction to the *extended* version of her ground-breaking book “Identity and Language Learning” (2013b), identity research in SLA is highly relevant in the development of a comprehensive theory which permits the integration of both the individual learner and the social world. Individuals

will thus be studied through their different positions within different social networks and social discourses. Power relations will be taken into consideration to decipher how these can influence – and be influenced by – access to language learning opportunities, representations of the self and of the other, and students' positionings.

### 2.1.2 Identity and the Self

Theorizing identity as changing and multiple does not imply that there is nothing that binds those different identities. Questioning the apparent contradiction between the concepts of identity as continuous – a result of habitus, community construction, and social reproduction (Bourdieu 1991) – and as changing – multiple, fluid, and constituted in discourse (Weedon 1987) – Menard-Warwick (2005) concluded that both approaches are necessary to understand the link between identity and learning. She saw the need “to recognize both the histories that learners bring with them as well as the futures to which they aspire” (267), and also referred to Bakhtin’s literary theories and his vision of the self as being built as a story, in which different events happening at different times and different places are made coherent, reconciling the fictitious and existential aspects of identity. A similar conception of identity as a narrative was also developed by Hall (1992, 1997) who said that “identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation” (1997, 49). He conceptualized the post-modern subject “as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. [...] [They] assume different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self.’” Hall then added that if we as individuals feel that “we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or ‘narrative of the self’ about ourselves” (277).

The *self* is not unlike identity, as it is “impossible to define in isolation from its environment” (Pellegrino Aveni 2005, 12). However, and although intrinsically linked to the social world, it is to some extent truly relevant to the individual only. As Pellegrino Aveni (11) stated, recollections of events help the individual build a “unit known as the ‘self-concept’ [which] allows [him or her] a sense of security in his or her personal strengths and weaknesses, as well as a feeling of predictability about the self’s future capabilities.” In other words, “the self is future oriented, emergent, and subject to change, but it is also

intimately linked to its history” (Van Compernelle and Williams 2012, 237). Therefore, the self is different from identity and useful mainly as it refers to individuals’ perception of their own qualities and characteristics. Although often challenged, the self gives the individual a sense of coherence and consistency through time and space; it is at the core of the individual. Identity, on the other hand, is the public expression of the self, an “intermediary between the self and the world in which a person participates” (ibid.).

### 2.1.3 Discursive Identity Construction

Discourses are given a significant role in the present study and need therefore to be precisely defined in regard to language and identity. Drawing on Foucault (1977, 1980), discourses are understood as ways to give meaning to and organize the world around us. The discourses of family, school, friendship, and study abroad – to name only a few – define what can be said and thought about these structures or entities; they also ultimately guide our actions. They are closely linked to language and identity, as it is first assumed that language is a fundamental semiotic tool in discursive representation, since discourses are realised through language. Second, people draw on pre-existing discourses to represent the world around them and themselves; our identities are defined through our positionings in different discourses. Through language, we give voice to our experiences and position ourselves within the different discourses available to us. In fact, these “discourses delimit the range of possible practices under their authority and organize how these practices are realized in time and space” (Norton 2013b, 54).

Thus, discourses allow some subject positions and forbid others. Through the process of positioning oneself – and being positioned – within the latter, potential issues of power are inevitably brought to the fore. When discourses are used by groups to construct and maintain unequal power relations, they become *ideologies*. Ideologies as a theoretical concept is not developed in the present study, as I chose to view students’ experiences abroad from their personal perspective and not from a more institutionalized and globalized standpoint. Therefore, although these issues may be shortly addressed through some of the students’ narratives, they do not frame the present research specifically. At the same time, they are not negated either

and remain present in my global understanding of studying abroad and students' experiences.

Discourses are also directly linked to language and identity in students' narratives. Lemke (1995, 24–25) stated that “we speak with the voices of our communities, and to the extent that we have individual voices, we fashion these out of the social voices already available to us, appropriating the words of others to speak a word of our own.” Bakhtin's (1981) *dialogism* is reflected in Lemke's theory through the idea of an ongoing dialogue between past, present, and future *utterances* and the meaning given to them. When students choose a specific voice – and use it in their narratives – they appropriate a specific discourse and position themselves in regard to it. Moreover, when students learn and use a new language, they must also become familiar with new discourses, which may differ from their usual references (Pomerantz 2001). Thus, discourse, language, and identity are intrinsically linked, and the concept of *positioning* developed by Davies and Harré (1990) offers a powerful tool to present their interconnection, as positioning is ultimately about positioning oneself within one particular discourse.

#### 2.1.4 Davies and Harré's *Positioning Theory*

Within a poststructuralist view of identity and drawing on an immanentist view of language – which says that language is only real when used in interactions – Davies and Harré (1990, 43) developed the concept of *positioning*, which “helps focus attention on dynamic aspects of encounters in contrast to the way in which the use of ‘role’ serves to highlight static, formal, and ritualistic aspects.” Two types of positionings are defined in their model: *interactive* positioning, where the other's utterance positions the individual and *reflexive* positioning, in which the individual can exercise some agency. Within the interactions, different discursive practices encompass different understandings of categories such as gender, age, social class, etc., and an individual is theorized as being both subjected to these practices and an agent of them. The latter can be imposed on an individual who may comply with or reject the given subject position:

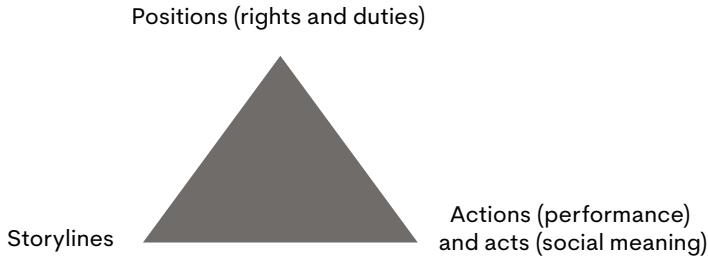
One speaker can position others by adopting a storyline which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which they are “invited” to conform, indeed are required to conform if they are to

continue to converse with the first speaker in such a way as to contribute to the storyline that person has opened up. Of course, they may not wish to do so for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they may not contribute because they do not understand what the storyline is meant to be, or they may pursue their own storyline, quite blind to the storyline implicit in the first speaker's utterance, or as an attempt to resist. Or they may conform because they do not define themselves as having choice, but feel angry or oppressed or affronted or some combination of these. (Davies and Harré 1990, 50)

As defined above, storylines are not unlike my understanding of discourses. The focus is on speakers' agency and their ability to negotiate new subject positions within these discourses, and also on stories, which "are located within a number of different discourses, and thus vary dramatically in terms of the language used, the concepts, issues, and moral judgements made relevant and the subject positions made available within them" (46). Davies and Harré interestingly added that "in this way poststructuralism shades into *narratology*" (46; emphasis mine). They went on to develop the idea – or the metaphor – further through the idea of *autobiographies* which describe our perpetual need to align all our subject positions coherently to correspond to Western culture's idea of a complete and authentic individual. This is also represented through the *ambiguity of the self*, where "human beings are characterized both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity" (46). All these processes are highly relevant, but Davies and Harré underlined that they are not necessarily conscious and intentional.

Later, Harré (2012) extended his positioning theory into the *positioning triangle* which connects positions, storylines, and actions and acts (see *Figure 2.1* below). In short, a position someone occupies in any interaction is defined by one or several storylines. The latter will define which action is taken (or not) and their meaning, or vice versa. In his model, positions are defined by a set of rights – *what you must do for me* – and duties – *what I must do for you*. They represent a cluster of beliefs about these rights and duties, whereas positioning represents the active processes by which rights and duties are assigned, ascribed, appropriated, or rejected. The storylines are based on the principle that "strips of life unfold according to local narrative conventions, some explicit, some implicit" (Harré 2012, 198). Actions and acts – which are embedded in storylines – are two different perspectives on one object;

“an action is a meaningful, intended performance (speech or gesture), whereas an act is the social meaning of an action” (198). These three elements are interdependent: if one changes, the others do as well.



**FIGURE 2.1** The Positioning Triangle (Harré 2012).

Encompassing the concepts of discourse, language, agency, and an immanent view of identity, positioning theory takes on a central role in the present study and more precisely in the analysis of students' narratives. As Davies and Harré (1990, 61) stated, “a subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons.” As an analytical tool, it allows a comprehensive and contextualised approach to the data. Previous studies referring to the concept are numerous (see, for example, Whitworth 2006; Menard-Warwick 2007; Virkkula and Nikula 2010; De Costa 2011; Coffey 2013; Amadasí and Holliday 2017), and different models based on positioning theory have emerged. One of them, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's (2008) narrative analysis framework is of particular interest to the present study as it is used directly in the analysis as well.

### 2.1.5 Bamberg's *Positioning Analysis* Framework

The *positioning analysis* framework was developed by Bamberg (1997, 2004a) in order to apply the concept of positioning to the analysis of storytelling specifically. Bamberg had first worked with narratives following a more traditional method of analysis based on what language was referentially about, and how past events were sequenced and evaluated (Labov and Waletzky 1967) (see Section 3.2.1 for more development on the analysis of narratives). Meaning to add a more interactional and social dimension to his analysis, Bamberg proposed

positioning analysis as a tool to combine answers to *what* is being said and *why* it is being said. His framework is constituted of three questions, focusing on three different levels of analysis:

1. "How are characters positioned in relation to one another within reported events?" (Bamberg 1997, 337). With this question, the focus is on the characters within the story and how the latter are linguistically positioned. This first step encompasses a fine-grained analysis of linguistic markers as well as an explicitation of the characters' positions in relation to each other. As Bamberg (2004a, 336) explained, "at this level, characters are arranged from a particular point of view in terms of descriptive details and in terms of their activities vis-à-vis one another so that they gain their roles as pro- or antagonists, as perpetrators, by-standers, or as victims."
2. "How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?" (Bamberg 1997, 337). At this level, the focus is on the listener and their potential influence on the narrator in terms of a particular discourse mode. The goal of the analysis is to ask why a story is told at a particular moment and what the narrator *is* trying to achieve with it.
3. "How do narrators position themselves to themselves?" (ibid.). The third and last level of analysis is significantly different and more difficult than the first two in the sense that the analyst needs to refer to "categories that are more interpretive and culturally loaded" (Bamberg 2004a, 337). Through this third step, the analyst proposes an answer to the question *Who am I?* by looking at the way the narrators position themselves vis-à-vis cultural discourses, "either by embracing them, or by displaying neutrality, or by distancing, critiquing, subverting and resisting them" (ibid.).

If the starting point of the analysis (question 1) remains focused on the content of stories, it then moves beyond "to consider the normative discourses (the broader ideological context) within which the characters agentively position themselves and by which they are positioned" (Barkhuizen 2010, 284). Moreover, through its "dual analytical focus on an *immanent* and *indexical* account of meaning-making, it is able to illustrate (with data) the theoretical dictum that participants are simultaneously constituting and constituted" (Korobov 2001, §33). To conclude, I would argue that positioning analysis offers an extremely relevant tool to the present study as it extends the concept of positioning – which is, as stated above, centred on language,

identity, and discourse – to the analysis of narratives, another central aspect of my research project.

## 2.2 Culture and Language Learning

### 2.2.1 A Poststructuralist View of Culture

The concept of culture in SLA and language teaching has been viewed from two very different standpoints. First, the *received view* of culture(s) “sees them in their most typical form as geographically (and quite often nationally) distinct entities, as relatively unchanging and homogeneous, and as all-encompassing systems of rules or norms that substantially determine behavior” (Atkinson 1999, 626). This traditional view – although questioned and even dismissed by some early on (Kubota 1999; Pennycook 1999) – remained well-established in the field until quite recently. For example, Morgan (2007) and Dervin (2012) regretted a still pervasive vision of culture as monolithic and essentialized in applied linguistics and SLA. The second – critical – view was developed by postmodern thinkers and presents a sharp contrast with the traditional view. In their perspective, cultural practices are understood as dynamic and context-sensitive, as opposed to static and universal. Concretely, it means that “what language learners have to acquire is less an understanding of one other national group than an understanding of ‘difference’ per se” (Kramsch 1993, 350). The focus on culture is ultimately about being or becoming aware of alternative ways of being and thinking. Reacting against the traditional view of culture, poststructuralists think that the inevitable influence of the *outside* on social groups, and the multiplicity, diversity, and inconsistency found in the *inside*, with its share of resistance, cannot be left unaddressed (see Atkinson 1999 for more details). In order to mark a clear opposition from the traditional view and to avoid confusion with a potentially misleading term, poststructuralists tend to use different concepts to replace or extend the notion of culture. Among those, *identity* takes a prominent place, as well as “*power, difference, agency, discourse, resistance and contestation*” (Atkinson 1999, 627). Similarly, Morgan (2007) argued that applied linguists working within poststructuralist ideas use identity not to replace culture but to broaden its scope. Through her concept of *investment*, for example, Norton showed that culture is an important notion, but that it remains one element

among many affecting language learning, not necessarily primary or more salient than another. Thus, “the ‘force’ of culture in such reorganization may only be marginal or, in specific situations, so tightly interwoven with other influences as to be largely indistinguishable” (Morgan 2007, 957).

Poststructuralists working with culture also brought different questions to the fore. As Morgan (2007, 958) stated, “the key question is not just ‘What is culture?’ but rather ‘What does it do?’ What forms of knowledge does it enable? And what does it diminish or hide?” These foundational questions led them to see cultures as constructed ideologies – with their embedded power issues – where differences and influences are more or less intentionally concealed. In this perspective, cultures become discourses – or ideologies – which pervade individuals and impose truths on them; they represent a means to diffuse power throughout society – working from within – in an attempt to normalize individuals. These critiques of the concept of culture are important and relevant, but they should not prevent researchers from studying cultures and cultural differences, and their concrete manifestations. On the contrary, they should help us keep a well-informed and critical look on these notions. As the anthropologist Shore (1996, 9) claimed:

Without a robust concept of culture, [...] a significant aspect of human life remains undertheorized and unexamined. The poststructuralist critique of traditional conceptions of culture is potentially of great importance to anthropology, but only if it is used to refine the notion of culture rather than discard it.

The view taken in the present study is to revisit the traditional view on culture with these postmodern notions, while maintaining its central – but not exclusive – place in the analytical stance.

Culture thus remains a useful concept which describes “historically established patterns of beliefs, norms, and social practices more or less shared by members within an ethnolinguistic group” (Noels, Yashima, and Zhang 2010, 60). The members of a social group share a common core, but individual differences remain. Their different positionings regarding these two poles – the collective and the individual – are particularly relevant. The dialectical and reciprocal interaction of these opposed but complementary forces was theorized by many scholars

very early on. Although working with language specifically, Bakhtin (1981, 1986) modelled the existence of a *centripetal* and a *centrifugal* force of social life, with one seeking homogeneity and the other heterogeneity. In his *Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1977b) expressed a similar idea with his notions of social *fields* and individual *habitus* which compete and complement each other. As we have seen, culture, like any social environment, shapes and is shaped by individuals. The essential and inseparable roles of the social and the personal – the structural and the agentive – need to be recognized and integrated in any analysis of culture. In the present study, culture is understood both as an analytical lens through which to look at the data, as well as a construct used by participants to position themselves in their social world. The importance of language in regard to culture is developed below.

### 2.2.2 How Culture and Language Intermingle

Paralleling the intimate link between language and identity, language and culture are equally closely interrelated. From a sociocultural perspective, language is understood as a social action, and its structures and meaning emerge from their sociocultural context and from real world uses. More generally, as soon as language is perceived as an element of meaning making within social interactions, the cultural component of language becomes apparent. As Liddicoat (2019, 22) stated:

Language is not only personal but also shared reflecting common culturally contextualised experiences and expectations about making and interpreting meanings and constructing affinities based around language use. As meaning making practices, languages are culturally contextualised; meaning is not made in isolation from other cultural practices of signification and conceptualisations of language also need to consider the relationship between language and culture as they function together in the creation and interpretation of meanings.

From this standpoint, the intrinsic link between language and culture is apparent on at least two levels. First, language is the medium of culture, it allows its expression and transmission. Second, language is a part of the culture as it is shared by a social group and used by the latter to speak of their reality. In language, we find encoded whatever speakers consider important in their culture (Fantini 2012, 267).

Moreover, culture is perceived as inextricable from language because it is discursively constituted. “It is both transmitted through language and created by it” (Hall 2012, 17). Language constitutes and is constituted by culture in a two-way – dialectical – relationship. In fact, linguistic forms are culturally embedded elements and as such, represent different worldviews (Bakhtin 1981) or different conceptualizations of the world of experience (Liddicoat 2009). As Fantini (2012, 264) stated: “The use of language, in fact, is our ticket to ‘membership’ into a cultural enclave. [...] Our entire view of the world is shaped in our minds, aided and influenced by the linguistic system to which we were exposed from birth.” In fact, our L1 and our culture are so interdependent that our first language may become “the biggest impediment to another view of the same world” (265).

If language and culture are intrinsically connected, what then happens when we learn an additional language or are immersed in an additional language environment? As learning a new language automatically implies learning (about) a new culture, scholars have developed different intercultural competence (IC) models to theorize this process. One well-known example is Byram’s (1997, 2012a) framework of *Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)*, which was developed primarily as a tool for second language teachers. It combines communicative and intercultural competences and models the different factors involved in intercultural communication. Basically, ICC requires that students acquire or already possess the *attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness* necessary to communicate interculturally. Intercultural speakers require attitudes such as curiosity, openness, and a willingness to question their own cultural beliefs. They must shift from their own perspective to embrace the other’s, emphasizing knowledge of how social groups and identities function in a given culture over specific cultural facts. Acquiring knowledge about the other’s culture often involves navigating stereotypes. Essential skills include discovering and interacting to gain real-time insights into cultural practices. The ability to interpret and relate is crucial for mediating between cultures, often through textual work, relying on conscious or taken-for-granted knowledge of cultural symbols. Finally, Byram (1997) advocates overt teaching of critical cultural awareness. In his interconnected framework, this capacity to evaluate cultural perspectives based on explicit criteria is closely tied to attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

### 2.2.3 Bennett's *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*

Unlike Byram's model, Bennett's (1986, 2012) is not built around language and communication but rather around culture and adaptation and is focused on people's internal development regarding cultural differences. It does not theorize a competence per se, but a personal *sensitivity* which is nevertheless an influential component of IC. In his model, *intercultural sensitivity* "refer[s] to the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" whereas *intercultural competence* is "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways" (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 422). The model was originally designed to diagnose students' positions and offer them appropriate support to develop their intercultural sensitivity and competence. In the present study, the DMIS is used as a reference, both for the participants and the researcher, to discuss and analyse intercultural sensitivity. Its different positions are described below, and, with their clear definitions and examples, are understood as particularly relevant, both to show students a desirable evolution – while avoiding personal judgement – and to conduct a well-grounded analysis.

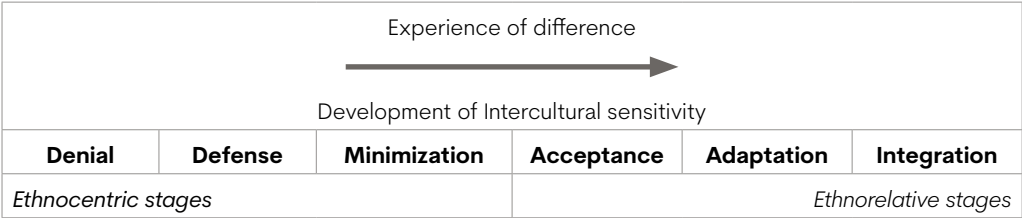
Bennett developed his *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS) from a constructivist paradigm, which "avoids the reification of culture" (Bennett 2012, 100). In his view:

Culture is a construction, but culture is not purely a cognitive invention. [...] People do not *have* a worldview; rather they are constantly in the process of interacting with the world in ways that both express the pattern of the history of their interactions and contribute to those patterns. (101)

Based on his long experience of teaching intercultural communication, Bennett designed his model to identify the different ways of experiencing cultural difference that he had encountered among his students. He defined six stages on a continuum but said that there is not necessarily a movement from one stage to the next as if these stages were totally independent and exclusive. That is why he later (2012) preferred the word *positions* instead of *stages*, which he insisted should not be used as a label to say that someone is in such or such stage. Particular positions happen in particular instances and all of them probably coexist in an individual to a certain degree. Nevertheless, there is a predominant experience (PE) which occurs more often and

that is how the stage is defined. As Bennett (104) stated: “Development occurs not through stepping from stage to stage, but from moving the peak of our PE along the continuum.”

**FIGURE 2.2** The Six Positions of the DMIS (Bennett 1986: 182).



As Figure 2.2 shows, his six stages – or positions – are organized along a continuum which moves from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism*. Bennett defined *ethnocentrism* as a position where the experience of one’s own culture is central to one’s reality. As such, the beliefs and values of the culture one was primarily socialized in remain unquestioned. For example, individuals who have only had access to their own worldview will not be able to see and understand cultural difference because, in extreme cases, they do not know that it exists. *Ethnorelativism* was coined to mean the opposite, the realization that the beliefs and values of one’s culture are just one way among many others – which are just as viable – of organizing and understanding reality. The more an individual moves along the continuum, the more competent they will become in apprehending and reacting to cultural differences: “The model then defines a sequence whereby ‘cultural difference’ becomes more real, which generates more complex intercultural experience, which in turn can be enacted as more interculturally competent behavior” (Bennett 2012, 103). In other words, “the extent to which the event of cultural difference will be experienced is a function of how complexly it can be construed” (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 423).

The first position, *Denial*, is the most ethnocentric of all. In this stage, individuals are likely to have experienced only their own culture. They understand other cultures as the sum of all tangible cultural artefacts but not as different beliefs or values. Other cultures may simply not be noticed or construed as a general and undifferentiated *other*. However, “denial is not a refusal to ‘confront the facts.’ It is instead an

inability to make the perceptual distinctions that allow cultural events to be recognized as such" (Bennett 2012, 104). Differences may be explained in terms of personal distinctness, rather than cultural. After denial comes *Defence*, where cultural difference is experienced as more real but in a very stereotypical way. As a result, the different culture is not construed as equal to one's own. The lack of sufficient understanding of cultural differences prevents individuals from seizing the complexity of another culture. At the same time, the culture of the other seems more real than in an earlier stage and therefore more threatening to one's own. "The perception of cultures is polarized into 'us and them,' where one's own culture is superior and other cultures are inferior" (105). *Minimization* is the last ethnocentric stage and comes as a reaction to the threat experienced at the defence stage. To neutralize it, the focus is put on similarities. And "because these 'universal absolutes' obscure deep cultural differences, other cultures may be trivialized or romanticized" (106). From that position, some elements of one's own culture are perceived as universal, resulting in the impossibility to apprehend the culture of the other or indeed one's own: "Particularly for people of dominant cultures, Minimization tends to mask recognition of their own culture (ethnicity) and the institutional privilege it affords its members" (107). This stage is still ethnocentric because the frame of reference is still "me" or "my culture." Although people tend to be reasonably tolerant, the key point is that similarities *and* differences need to be recognized in order to apprehend other cultures.

*Acceptation* is the first ethnorelative stage and it implies an important change in one's cultural consciousness and understanding. "By discriminating differences among cultures (including one's own), and by constructing a metalevel consciousness, people with this worldview are able to experience others as different from themselves, but equally human" (108). Thus, from this standpoint, other cultures are construed as equally complex and evolved as one's own. Notwithstanding, *Acceptation* does not necessarily mean agreement and it does not necessarily imply liking the other. "Some cultural difference may be judged negatively — but the judgment is not ethnocentric in the sense of withholding equal humanity" (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 425). The shift taking place at *Adaptation* includes elements of affect and behaviour. Understanding cultural differences is no longer only a cognitive event, but it becomes a real-life competence to feel empathy and act accordingly. "People at *Adaptation* are able to reorganize their

perception of events so that it is more like the worldview of the target culture” (Bennett 2012, 109). That reorganization then allows people to act with culturally appropriate feelings and behaviours. Then, “if the process of frame shifting is deepened and habitualized, it becomes the basis of biculturality or multiculturalism” (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 425). In the final stage, *Integration*, individuals have *integrated* different worldviews and are able to move in and out of these different worldviews making them their own, without feeling estranged, or not themselves. As Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (425) stated: “*Integration* is not necessarily better than *Adaptation* in situations demanding intercultural competence, but it is descriptive of a growing number of people, including many members of non-dominant cultures, long-term expatriates, and ‘global nomads’” who live between cultures.

#### 2.2.4 Key Concepts Defined: Representations, Stereotypes, and Othering

Representations, Stereotypes, and Othering are key to the present study as they were used in the analysis and/or with the students and therefore need defining. *Representations* and *stereotypes* are widely used concepts and to make sure a similar understanding was had of them, they were discussed with the participants. The idea of *othering*, on the other hand, is only used explicitly in the analysis and was not raised with the students directly because it presupposes more knowledge and experience. Although “representations” and “stereotypes” come predominantly from social psychology and “othering” from intercultural studies, they are presented here together, as the three of them play a significant part in the perception and understanding of, and interaction with “the other.”

**Representations** – as understood in the theory of social representations from social psychology (Moscovici 1961, 2014; Jovchelovitch 1996) – take on a central role in the study of the interplay of the individual and society. A representation usually emerges to bridge a difference between the self and the other, becoming at the same time a link between self and other and a way to differentiate the self from the other (Jovchelovitch 1996). Moreover, representations are multiple and changing, as Howarth (2006, 68) stated, they “have to be seen as alive and dynamic – existing only in the relational encounter, in the

in-between space we create in dialogue and negotiation with others. They are not static templates that we pull out of our cognitive schemas." Although the complexity of social representations has prevented most scholars from giving a comprehensive definition, Moscovici and Duveen (2000, 157) gave a useful description of their different functions:

Representations therefore always play a triple role of illuminating (giving sense to realities), integration (incorporating new ideas or facts into familiar frameworks) and partition (ensuring the common sense through which a given collectivity is recognized). Systems for the interpretation of the world and of events, they are in this way the essential vectors of opinions, judgements and beliefs, directed at ensuring the relevance and regularity of our bonds and of our conduct as a community.

Similarly, Harré and Moghaddam (2015, 224) argued that with representations, the focus is more on the collective than the individual in the sense that "every person in a collective has more or less the same representation apropos of some matter, trivial or important." At the same time, representations allow individuals to position themselves, expressing collective affiliations or distancing themselves from them. It appears relevant to use the theory of social representations and positioning theory in conjunction as once a representation is spread, it is then concretely realized through the projection, enactment, or legitimation of *the rights and duties* linked to a specific position. The same can be said about the two other elements of Harré's (2012) positioning triangle – the *storylines* and the *illocutionary force(s)* of what is said and done – which are dependent on the cultural context and social representations (Harré and Moghaddam 2015).

From that perspective, representations are also important factors when studying identity and positioning. Howarth (2002, 159), in her study of teenagers growing up in Brixton, reminded us that "identities are always constructed through and against representations." She also argued that "identification and re-presentation can be seen as different sides of the same coin. They are the delicately intertwined processes of one's collaborative struggle to understand, and so construct, the world and one's position within it." Thus, representations are not only "systems of values, ideas and practices which enable communication to

take place among the members of a community" (Moscovici 1961, xiii), but also resources used to define oneself in regard to "the other." As Hall (1997, 49) pointed out:

The notion that identity has to do with people that look the same, feel the same, call themselves the same, is nonsense. As a process, as a narrative, as a discourse, it is always told from the position of the Other. What is more is that identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation.

Representations are thus constitutive of one's identity; they help individuals interpret the world around them and position themselves within it. They are therefore very powerful and should be looked at critically.

As such, representations are not very different from discourses (Foucault 1980) as they frame our understanding of ourselves and the other. Howarth (2006, 72) asked for a more critical take on social representations in social psychology. She argued that representations "would, one may think, provide a way to criticize the social order and so provide an explicitly critical account of unequal social relations," but she regretted the limited number of studies which take this perspective. According to her, representations should allow both "a theory of social knowledge" and "a modern theory of social change" (ibid.). Within the field of anthropology, Abu-Lughod (1991, 469) stated that representations are not only "partial truths" but also "positioned truths". In fact, and most specifically with representations of the other, an ideological component is always present (Dervin 2012). As discussed earlier, multiple and often inconsistent representations exist, and the fact that one will at least temporarily "win" and "impose" its meaning and version of reality depends on power relations. Howarth (2006, 79) raised the fact that "the reproduction of power relations depends on the continuous and creative (ab)use of representations that mystify, naturalize and legitimize access to power." In the present study, the focus is put mainly on representations of "others" – be it from the students' point of view or they as others – with power relations being one important element among others.

**Stereotypes**, as a concept, are not all that different from representations. They are nevertheless used and defined here because unlike, or certainly far more than representations, they are part of a familiar

vocabulary and may frequently appear in students' everyday conversations. To be precise, "stereotypes [...] are primarily cognitive and are defined as the beliefs, shared by members of one group, about the shared characteristics of another group" (Wright and Taylor 2007, 362). Intertwined with stereotypes is prejudice, which is a socially shared judgement which includes feelings (affect). Discrimination, finally, may result from stereotypes and prejudices, materializing the latter through concrete behaviour. Stereotypes usually "involve a depersonalized view of the other" (363) and are shared within a social group, sometimes even across different groups. Stereotypes are intimately linked to intergroup relations in the sense that when a relation is harmonious, stereotypes will tend to be positive but in the case of conflictual relations, more negative stereotypes will emerge. Moreover, stereotypes "provide prescriptions for our interactions with out-group members" (364) as they drive our actions and reactions to some extent. Just like representations, stereotypes are "contextually and individually determined," they "happen in the relation between one and the other [...] and should not be generalized" (Dervin 2012, 186); the common idea that they may be static is not correct. Finally, stereotypes are also often wrongly believed to be mainly negative (Dervin 2012). Nevertheless, even positive stereotypes tend to induce negative effects (Kay et al. 2012).

Working with stereotypes – their creation, co-construction, use – allows researchers to consider people's identities. People tend to refer to stereotypes when meeting the other as well as to position themselves. Although perceived as negative and limiting, Dervin (2012, 186) warned that, "for intercultural communication, both researchers and teachers should endeavour not to try to 'break' stereotypes or merely present a list of stereotypes, hoping that these will help to get rid of them – or paradoxically substitute them with the 'Truth'. This approach is flawed as stereotypes as such cannot be suppressed." He suggested instead working on their origins and focusing on when people resort to them, with a focus on identity work. Abdallah-Pretceille (2006, 478), for her part, believed that stereotypes can only be "broken" – and thus, people perceived and understood as full complex individuals – through practice and concrete instances of communication:

To learn to see, to hear, to be mindful of other people, to learn to be alert and open in a perspective of diversity and not of differences, calls

for the recognition and experience of otherness, experience that is acquired and that is practised. Other people cannot be understood outside a communication process and an exchange.

She thought that an excessive focus on cultural differences would only enhance, “consciously or otherwise, stereotypes or even prejudices” (476). This idea is directly linked to the following concept: othering.

**Othering** is an interesting concept as it reflects the paradox of the concept of culture and the ambiguity of thinking about it and through it when meeting the other. On the one hand, “othering consists of ‘objectification of another person or group’ or ‘creating the other’, which puts aside and ignores the complexity and subjectivity of the individual” (Dervin 2012, 187). It can also lead people “towards a widespread tendency to differentiate in-group from out-group and Self from Other in such a way as to reinforce and protect Self” (ibid.). Thus, othering tends to reinforce stereotypes, which is what intercultural communication strives to avoid. On the other hand, Doerr (2017) convincingly argued that learning is about othering. In other words, we need to be conscious of a difference, something that we are not or that we do not know, to learn about it. The emphasis on cultural difference(s) is thus beneficial, or even necessary. More importantly, the process of othering can reveal meaningful elements about people’s identity and positioning. Undoubtedly, “particular differences students noticed and constructed in the process of their learning tell us not only about the culture being learned but also about the students’ viewpoints and the environments that nurtured them” (Doerr 2017, 100). Dervin (2012, 187) also stated that “just like stereotyping, Othering allows individuals to construct sameness and difference and to affirm their own identity.” To some extent, othering seems inevitable if not even essential to human development (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996).

Facing this apparent deadlock, Dervin (2012, 187) suggested working on interculturality without the concept of culture. “It means that we should put aside solid visions of culture, [...] and examine how culture is used in discourse and actions to explain and justify one’s own actions and thoughts.” Working without culture in the context of the present research is illusory as culture is deeply ingrained in the discourse of study abroad. Discovering and learning about a new culture is presented as an advantage of SA, perceived as a benefit, and

it even becomes a personal objective for students. The idea is thus to work with the concept of culture, but to warn and talk about its possible drawbacks, othering being one of them. Holliday (2016) proposed a useful framework to circumvent this dilemma by teaching students how to think in terms of “cultural threads”, instead of “cultural blocks”. Thinking of cultures in terms of cultural blocks means envisaging them as separate entities – although possibly highly diverse and varied within – which primarily define our cultural identity. This paradigm “confine[s] interculturality to observing and comparing the practices and values of one’s own and the other’s national cultures, and to finding commonalities to enhance toleration of the other culture” (319). Holliday argued that this is the perspective that most of us use when we talk about culture, as well as the one taken by some theoretical models presented before. But if we thought about culture in terms of “cultural threads”, we could cross boundaries instead of creating them. More precisely, cultural threads:

are carried by the personal cultural trajectories, where we develop different senses of culture as we encounter different small culture environments through changing life events and pull threads of experience out from the cultural resources provided by the particular structures, that form our upbringing, and are coloured by the global position and politics that these also provide. The underlying universal processes process these threads; and it is because these processes are common to all of us that we are able to make sense of each other’s threads, which in turn help us make sense of our own, thus creating a common ground for sharing and enabling interculturality. It is this commonality that provides us with the basis to engage creatively with culture wherever we find it, and with each other, wherever we find ourselves. (320–1)

In other words, focusing on threads implies awareness of and sensitivity to similarities between people and their cultural construction. This perspective, in which we look for common points, allow us to move away from the logic of us vs. them, all the while recognizing the existing differences.

## 2.3 Study Abroad

Study abroad (SA) is a broad context of research, whose development paralleled the boom of SA programmes and opportunities offered by

universities worldwide. Although SA was initially limited to some long sojourns for language learners, it has evolved into a myriad of options in terms of length of stay, types of courses, course language, accommodation type, institutional support, and so on, to satisfy all types of students and objectives. In today's globalized world, SA is increasingly viewed and understood as key to economic success. National governments have recognized SA as a means to develop students' cultural awareness and global competences, which can result in career opportunities (Isabelli-Garcia et al. 2018; Roy et al. 2019; Mitchell and Tyne 2021). SA programmes for high school students remain anecdotal, but they have followed a similar trend, with new programmes emerging in the last decade.

Starting with an overview of the evolution of SA research, this section presents conclusions drawn by some selected studies investigating linguistic gains. After that, the focus will turn to identity and SA studies which looked at students' linguistic, cultural, and social positionings distinctly and in conjunction. Two aspects specific to the present study – support for SA students and adolescents abroad – will conclude this section.

### 2.3.1 An Overview: From Early Research on Linguistic Gains to the Study of Whole, Rounded Individuals

To draw a rapid overview of the history of study abroad research, I refer to Collentine (2011) who divided SA research into two periods: the first (1967–1995) focused on the examination of additional language gains and the assessment of learners' overall abilities. During that period, SA research often compared progress made by students abroad and at home (AH) or tested SA participants' proficiency at different points in time, mainly through quantitative studies (Sanz and Morales-Front 2018a). In 1995, Freed asked for a reconsideration of SA as a specific learning context worth of research. With Firth and Wagner's (1997) call for a reconceptualization of SLA research, this change of perspective also became apparent in the field of SLA more broadly as an increasing number of scholars conceptualized language learning as a process of socialization and no longer as mere acquisition, an instrumental and transactional phenomenon (Block 2007b; Kramsch and Whiteside 2007). Although before the "social turn" (Block 2003), the main focus was to some extent on learners and their cognition, after Freed's (1995)

and Firth and Wagner's (1997) calls, foci on the social context of interactions gained in importance and interest. Language gains lost their almost exclusive place at the core of research, and scholars, such as Rivers (1998), started questioning the presumed automaticity between SA and additional language gains, which some understood as being part of a *social imaginary* (Kubota 2016). In fact, the mixed results yielded by SA research on linguistic gains revealed the important influence of social factors on language acquisition. Qualitative studies became widely used to understand how students abroad negotiate their participation in additional language communities (Curto García-Nieto 2018). Seeing learners not as learners only but as whole, rounded individuals (Coleman 2013) transformed the classic Input-Interaction-Output model<sup>1</sup> into a much more complex and dynamic system, taking social, cultural, and economic factors into consideration, through the concept of identity particularly.

The following sections present some results and conclusions drawn by research on linguistic gains. As this field of research is very broad, a more specific focus will be given to some important conclusions drawn from studies focused on social networks, intercultural competence, and age of adolescents (for more detailed and comprehensive reviews, see Llanes 2011 or Roy et al. 2019). Although the present study does not measure linguistic gains, it remains a central aspect of SA and of the bilingual Matura more specifically. Important conclusions from this field of research have thus helped guide and support students and analyse their narratives.

### 2.3.2 Studying Linguistic Gains as the Outcome of Study Abroad

#### *Language Contact, Social Networks, and Linguistic Gains*

The amount of time SA students spend in contact with the target language has naturally been perceived as key to understanding language acquisition while abroad from very early on. Freed (1995) developed

<sup>1</sup> The Input-Interaction-Output model is part of the Interaction Hypothesis. Its basic tenet is that through input and interaction with L2 speakers, learners have opportunities to notice differences between their own formulations of the target language and the language of their conversational partners. They also receive feedback which both modifies the linguistic input and pushes them to modify their output during conversation.

an early instrument, which was later slightly adapted and refined: the *Language Contact Profile* (LCP) (Freed et al. 2004). The goal of the LCP is to “assess second language contact for students entering and completing language study programmes in various contexts of learning” (349). The questions are centred on the amount of time students spend in contact with the additional language through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Several studies have used the LCP and demonstrated a positive correlation between reported language contacts and the development of pragmatic competence, for example (Taguchi 2008; Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos 2011; Taguchi, Xiao, and Li 2016). On the other hand, Freed et al. (2004), Segalowitz and Freed (2004) and Isabelli-Garcia (2010), who all compared language learners in different contexts – at home, in intensive courses, or abroad – showed mixed results as positive correlations were not always found between increased language contacts and oral fluency gains. Other instruments were also used, such as language logs and social networks surveys (see Dewey 2017, for a review of studies). The focus of the latter was no longer primarily on the quantity of additional language use – although it remained an important aspect – but the emphasis was instead put on the quality of the interactions. More precisely, authors using those instruments assume that the nature and closeness of SA students’ relationships can significantly impact additional language use as well as their investment and attitudes towards the host culture.

Two research teams have recently worked on social networks and language acquisition using a quantitative approach. The first is the Southampton Language and Social Networks Abroad Project (LANGSNAP) group (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017) and the second is based in the US (Dewey, Belnap, and Hillstrom 2013; Baker-Smemoe et al. 2014). Although they did not use the same instrument, both groups developed questionnaires that measured the quantity and quality of students’ interactions abroad, more precisely the size, durability, density, and dispersion of their social networks, as well as different tests to measure language acquisition. In Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus’s (2017) project, 29 learners of French in France and 27 learners of Spanish in Spain and Mexico spent an academic year abroad and were subject to interviews, questionnaires, and tests on six different occasions starting before their departure and ending six months after their return. Analysing the qualitative data of high gainers, Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus concluded that

“there is also considerable anecdotal evidence that intensive L2 networking was key to development, pushing sojourners to the limits of their L2 knowledge, and promoting investment in learning” (245). All high gainers had at least one intensive, or many diverse, additional language networks. Moreover, interactions with local peers were perceived as key to additional language development and success of SA by the participants themselves. Focusing on American students, Baker-Smemoe et al. (2014) investigated a large array of individual variables – personality, age, gender, pre-programme proficiency, language use, social networks, and intercultural sensitivity – to determine which would emerge as predictors of language gains. The study included 102 students, in six different SA programmes which differed in terms of (a) language and culture proximity to English, (b) length of stay, and (c) organized additional language contacts and interactions. When comparing “high to low gainers” on the OPI test results, pre-programme proficiency, pre-programme intercultural sensitivity, and, most significantly, social networking while abroad correlated positively with linguistic gains. The “high gainers” developed “stronger and deeper relationships with fewer speakers,” which the authors believed to reflect greater opportunity for “more in-depth and sustained interpersonal exchanges” (482). Dewey, Belnap, and Hilstrom (2013) investigated the relationship between social network development and perceived gains in oral proficiency by learners of Arabic in a semester programme. Predictors of gains included greater intensity of friendships, more time spent speaking with people outside of established social circles, and, most strongly, higher levels of English language proficiency of Arab friends. The last finding was quite surprising and counterintuitive, but the authors hypothesized that Arab friends with a high level of English were more likely to understand the linguistic and social difficulties faced by the learners of Arabic and were therefore more able to help and support their learning. Thus, both research groups showed significant correlation between social networks and language gains.

The results of these two significant research groups are consistent with other previous or later studies on social networks and linguistic gains. Isabelli-Garcia’s (2006) results, for example, suggested a positive correlation between engagement in local social networks and language development. She also indicated that high levels of agency tended to lead to the development of more extensive social networks.

Similarly, Kinginger (2008) found that students who reported having intense contact with the host community developed their speaking abilities further than those who barely experienced such contact. Sauer and Ellis (2019), who examined the social networks and linguistic gains of two German teenagers in New Zealand combining qualitative and quantitative data, showed that the increase in small words and direct speech use – typical of teenagers' talk – occurred when each had managed to establish meaningful social contacts with either their host families, sports clubs, or local friends. McManus (2019) investigated the social network development of 29 British students during a 9-month stay in France and the relationships between the latter and linguistic development measured through lexical complexity. He found that the participants' L1 was connected to a large proportion of their social networks and that almost no change was observed over time. Frequent additional language contact and use were nevertheless associated with a higher lexical complexity. Finally, in her study of four British students learning German abroad, Boone (2021) showed that social interactions are key to pragmatic formulaic competence development. More precisely, the two participants who showed greater improvement had a close German-speaking friend with whom they spent much time and had in-depth conversations. To conclude, unlike other variables, the studies focusing on social networks generally come to a similar conclusion, notably the greater or deeper the contacts, the higher the gains (Moreno Bruna and Goethals 2020).

### *Intercultural Competence and Linguistic Gains*

Studies focusing on the correlation of intercultural competence and linguistic gains have used a wide range of theoretical frameworks and instruments, such as Byram's (1997) intercultural speaker and Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) frameworks, Bennett's (1986, 2012) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and the related Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003), Kelley and Meyers (1995) cross-cultural adaptability, Cushner's (1986) Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS), Sam and Berry's (2010) acculturation strategies, or Ang et al.'s (2007) conceptual framework of cultural intelligence (CQ). Linguistic proficiency was also tested with different instruments which measured either oral, pragmatic, or lexical competence or more comprehensive additional language proficiency. Therefore, and as often in SA

research, results cannot be systematically compared but they still present a global trend while offering a range of perspectives on the topic.

On the one hand, many studies found a positive correlation between the initial level or development of intercultural competence and additional language improvement. Researching American students learning Spanish in Argentina ( $n=45$ ), Martinsen (2010) investigated different variables – pre-programme proficiency, interactions with locals, motivation, relationships with host families, and level of cultural sensitivity (using the ICCS) – to determine which one(s) were related to additional language improvements. The author found “direct empirical support for the idea that students who begin their time abroad with higher levels of cultural sensitivity tend to make more progress in learning the target language” (517). No other variables investigated correlated with linguistic gains. Similarly, Baker-Smemoe et al.’s (2014) study – which was mentioned earlier for its finding that social network development was the most important predictor of linguistic gains – also revealed pre-programme intercultural sensitivity as the second predictor of additional language learning. The authors noted that as this variable is a pre-programme competence, it could be trained and improved through a pre-departure preparation course. Studies which incorporated pre-departure preparation with an intercultural component showed increased language gains for SA participants (see, for instance, Cohen et al. 2005; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Page 2009).

Comparatively, Taguchi et al. (2016), who also investigated both intercultural competence and social networks in regard to their potential impact on pragmatic linguistic knowledge, found that cross-cultural adaptability (Kelley and Meyers 1995) had no direct effect on the pragmatic competence of the participants but did have an indirect effect. More precisely, cross-cultural adaptability facilitated social contacts, which in turn had a direct effect on pragmatic knowledge. In an earlier study, Taguchi (2015) found a positive correlation between his international participants’ ability to produce speech acts appropriately in Japanese and their cross-cultural adaptability. He reported that some individual “elements of cross-cultural adaptability – flexibility and openness to new ideas and practices, empathy and ability to interpret cultural cues, psychological strength in coping with new situations, and ambiguity tolerance – are behavioral repertoire critical in adapting to a new culture” (Taguchi 2015, 359), and noted

that those elements allowed additional language proficiency development. Using Sam and Berry's (2010) four acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization), Rafieyan, Behnammohammadian, and Orang (2015) correlated acculturation attitudes to pragmatic comprehension of implicatures while testing 80 Iranian students learning English in Australia. They found "a strong positive relationship between degree of acculturation attitude toward target language culture and pragmatic comprehension ability" (511). More precisely, they reported that the more immersed the students were, the greater their gains. Similar conclusions were drawn by Spenader (2011) who took a case-study approach reporting on four American students' experiences in Sweden and used Sam and Berry's framework as well. In short, the results showed that a higher level of acculturation was associated with higher linguistic gains whereas those with a *separation* or *marginalization* profile made lower gains.

Other studies drew similar conclusions but with negative results. More precisely, some studies demonstrated a negative correlation in the sense that a lack of cultural adaptability or a low level of cultural sensitivity led to lower linguistic gains. For example, Allen and Herron (2003) researched the linguistic and affective outcomes of a six-week stay in France. Cultural differences emerged as a source of anxiety in interviews, which indirectly led to fewer additional language gains. Similar conclusions were drawn by Wilkinson (1998), Kinginger (2004), and Twombly (1995) in their respective studies where cultural misunderstandings limited or prevented participants' integration – or will to integrate – offering them less opportunities to develop linguistic skills. Thus, intercultural competence seems to play an important role in language acquisition although not all studies report similar conclusions.

Through the narration of her participants' experiences, Jackson (2009) demonstrated that intercultural competence and additional language acquisition do not necessarily develop in parallel, as some students might gain an advanced level in the additional language and remain ethnocentric. Moreno Bruna and Goethals (2021) sought to understand to what extent participants in a semester programme showed progress in their intercultural (using CQ) and linguistic (lexical) competence and if and how the two constructs correlated. Although the results showed moderate to highly significant gains in participants' linguistic and intercultural competence development, "there seemed

to be no guaranteed correlations between sojourners' intercultural and pragmatic competences before SA and how they progress during the experience. This suggests that what really makes a difference is what students do during their stay, and whether they seize the opportunities that may result in learning synergies" (148). Similarly, Watson and Wolfel (2015) who investigated 279 SA students' pre- and post- linguistic proficiency (OPI + The Defense Proficiency Test) and intercultural sensitivity (IDI) on a semester programme, found improvement for both characteristics but no correlation between the two. The same can be said for Shively and Cohen's (2008) study where 67 American students learning Spanish in a semester-programme in Spain showed gains in their speech acts and intercultural sensitivity but no correlation between the two. Finally, Davidson, Garas, and Lekic (2016) found no correlation between pre-programme IDI and improvement on the OPI for the 305 American students they followed on different types of SA programmes. They noted, however, that students with advanced initial levels of language proficiency showed higher results on the IDI post-sojourn. Similar conclusions were also drawn by Fantini (2012). Thus, although intercultural competence did not seem to influence the development of language proficiency in these studies, language proficiency did influence the development of intercultural competence. To conclude, although some studies do not present conclusive results or strict correlations between intercultural and linguistic competence, most seem nevertheless to show that these constructs are intrinsically linked and remain important to consider for SA programme designers, organizers, and participants.

### *Adolescence and Linguistic Gains*

The impact of age on additional language learning has been studied extensively in SLA but mainly in naturalistic settings – in the case of migrant children, for example (Llanes 2018). In the context of SA, such studies are very scarce as most research was done with adults, more precisely university students.

Some studies did nevertheless investigate teenage participants and their linguistic gains: Sauer and Ellis (2019) examined the linguistic gains using the CALF measures (Complexity, Accuracy, Lexis, Fluency) of two German teenagers (aged 16 and 17) in New Zealand and compared their test results to the quality of their social life. They reported that both made significant progress in fluency and lexis, and that

their progress rate increased significantly when developing relations with local social networks. As for complexity and accuracy, one participant improved on both as well, the second less but her initial proficiency level was already so high that there was not much room left for improvement. Grieve (2015) measured the use of pragmatic markers typical of adolescent speech and collated it with her teenage (16–17 years old) participants' relationships with their host family and social integration. Their access to the target language afforded by the homestay families emerged as a crucial factor, as much as students' own agency and identity needs. Pragmatic markers (e.g., "like", "kind of", "and stuff", and "really") were chosen for their function as indexation of the social identity of the participants; more precisely, these markers show teenagers' desire to identify with the local teenage community. Grieve also compared 5- to 10-month exchange students and reported a significant difference in use for 10-month students. Through four case studies of American high school and gap-year students in Sweden (aged 16 to 18), Spenader (2011) reported that higher levels of acculturation were associated with higher levels of proficiency as measured by the OPI, while a rejection of the host culture was associated with lower levels of proficiency. Regretting the lack of large-scale studies, Hübner, Trautwein, and Nagengast (2021) researched the predictors and effects of SA on German high-school students ( $n=5361$ , 13% went abroad). Using achievement tests, grades, and course choice, the results showed positive effects of SA on all outcome variables. These different large- and small-scale studies seem to demonstrate the positive impact of the SA context on teenage participants. On the other hand, a study by Serrano, Tragant, and Llanes (2014) tested fluency, lexical complexity, and accuracy through a writing task and compared teenagers in a SA context to others following an intensive programme at home. The results show that SA participants did not make greater gains than their AH counterparts. The authors raised the few additional language interactions of SA participants as a possible explanation.

By and large, teenage participants seem to benefit from an SA experience in terms of linguistic gains. They are not young children anymore and may not experience implicit learning so much, but many authors see in their age another asset. Spenader (2011, 382) suggested that "pre-collegiate exchange students are generally afforded increased opportunity to interact with native speakers of the target language because they reside in a homestay environment and participate in a

mainstream high school classroom.” Similarly, Hübner, Trautwein, and Nagengast(2021) hypothesized that language exposure would be higher when studying abroad during high school than during higher education but regretted the lack of studies comparing these two populations. Tan and Kinginger (2013) examined how high school students, closely supervised by the programme organizers and their host families, reported on their experiences. They noticed that their relationships with their host families presented rich and numerous opportunities for cultural and linguistic development. The authors concluded by hypothesizing on the added value of SA for high school students but also asked for more investigation. In another study, Kinginger (2015) suggested that host parents may feel more responsible when receiving adolescents and integrate them more naturally within the family. At the same time, younger sojourners may be more willing to accept the identity of temporary child within a host family and therefore benefit from it to a greater extent. Moratinos-Johnston, Juan-Garau, and Salazar Noguera (2021) came up with similar conclusions as they interviewed 11 undergraduate university students on their past experiences abroad, either as teenagers or young adults. These conclusions underline the possible advantages of an SA experience as a teenager – as in the case of the bilingual Matura programme – linked to the homestay mainly. Nevertheless, a homestay is not systematically and automatically beneficial and needs personal investment.

### 2.3.3 Identity in Study Abroad Research

Identity in SA research has become increasingly important since the “social turn” (Block 2003) to become almost inescapable nowadays. Many studies envisage identity holistically, as it emerges in the context of SA and potentially affects the global experience. The *language learner identity* is envisaged as only one small aspect of SA participants’ identities – if it is one at all (Isabelli-Garcia et al. 2018) – and a broader perspective needs to be taken. In fact, “overall, many prospective exchange students also seemed to see the student role as a minor dimension of the sojourner experience” (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017, 205). Thus, the aim is to understand how the SA experience can affect students’ identities and alternatively and dialogically, how students’ identities can affect their SA experience. As Block (2007a, 27) noted:

Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of past, present, and future. Individuals are shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on. The entire process is conflictive as opposed to harmonious, and individuals often feel ambivalent.

Identity is a central issue in SA research as the large number of studies interested in the topic demonstrates. The privileged position of identity in SA research derives from several observations. First, SA often involves an immersion into an additional language environment which “represents an opportunity to transition from learner to user of the target language, which in itself implies identity work” (Tullock 2018, 262). More precisely, SA participants have to use new linguistic and semiotic means to project their desired identities and this process of self-construction often proves to be challenging, with real-world consequences (Pellegrino Aveni 2005). Second, as Block (2007b, 864) noted, “when individuals move across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilized and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance.” *Ambivalence* results from the negotiation of difference and is, for Block, a key concept when discussing identity. He defined it as: “the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart” (ibid.). Similarly, Preece (2016, 2) stated that: “identity only becomes an issue when a person’s sense of belonging is disrupted.” Third, sojourners often face difficulties when it comes to integrating highly beneficial local social networks and participating – first peripherally – in some host communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Perceived as outsiders or the “new strangers” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002), issues of power and unequal relationships come to the fore (Norton 2000). Finally, self-growth, increased autonomy, and resilience are omnipresent in general SA discourses, and “coming-of-age” stories (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017) are very frequent, mingling with linguistic or cultural development. These different aspects place identity in a key position when it comes to SA research and to some extent, all these aspects will be tackled in the present study through participants’ linguistic, cultural, and social positionings. As Jackson (2012, 453) noted, “to fully understand the ‘whole person’ development of L2 sojourners, one must be sensitive to their status and positioning in the host environment.”

Some important studies focusing on SA and identity – which, for most, took a qualitative approach – are presented below. To mirror the structural proposition of the present study, research with a particular (although not necessarily exclusive) interest in linguistic identity come first, then those with a focus on cultural and social identity follow successively. The few studies which took a comprehensive view of SA participants' experiences conclude the present review.

### *Linguistic Identity and Positioning in Study Abroad Research*

In the context of SA, languages – additional language(s) and L1 included – will inevitably affect participants' identities. Some scholars focused specifically on these two constructs, language and identity, and their complex relations. Two frameworks (Benson et al.'s (2012, 2013) and Pellegrino Aveni's (2005)) and one concept (Cook's *multicompetent speaker*) have been retained in the present study and developed below with related studies.

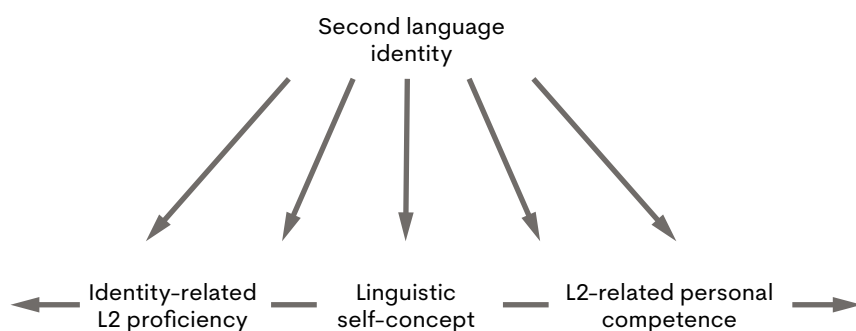
### *Benson et al.'s Second Language Identity Framework*

First, in order to understand the interdependence of language and identity in the context of SA, Benson et al. (2012) analysed the existing studies and identified five facets of identity in second language literature “including (1) people's inner sense of who they are, (2) the identities they project to others, (3) the identities that are recognized or ascribed to them by others, (4) imagined identities, and (5) socially-validated identity categories” (176). In their view, all these facets can be related to language and language use as:

Knowing a second language influences both the learner's sense of self and the possibilities for self-representation through language use. From this perspective, the acquisition of language knowledge and skills remain important, but it is viewed not as the end point of second language learning, but as the starting point for the identity developments that second language learning entails. (Benson et al. 2013, 1–2)

Based on this postulate, Benson et al. (2012; 2013) developed a framework in which they incorporated all possible outcomes of SA – from language proficiency to personal development – into what they called “second language identity”. They identified three dimensions of L2 identity: (1) identity-related proficiency, or pragmatic competence;

(2) linguistic self-concept, which may include self-esteem or self-confidence in one's L2 skills; and (3) L2 mediated personal development, or the ability to get things done thanks to – or despite – an L2. As “language proficiency outcomes can often be interpreted in terms of identity development, while personal competence outcomes can be interpreted in terms of language development” (Benson et al. 2013, 42), they represented their three dimensions on a continuum with L2 proficiency and personal competence as its two extremes (see *Figure 2.3* below).



**FIGURE 2.3** The Three Dimensions of Second Language Identity (Benson et al. 2013, 42).

The authors tested their framework in a study with nine undergraduate pre-service teacher education students in Hong Kong, who participated in 6- to 13-week sojourns in different English-speaking countries. They collected data through pre- and post-sojourn interviews, diaries, and blogs, using a narrative approach. They found that participants showed development in all three dimensions which suggested that “study abroad was indeed a context replete with opportunities for second language identity development” (2012, 188). In their data, they observed two major areas of development: self-confidence in L2 use and a sense of moving from a learner to a user of the language. They also noted that the link between personal development and second language identity was not explicit in the data and although they “infer[red] that the process of developing global awareness was mediated through interactions in English, [they could not say] exactly how this mediation worked” (2012, 189). In their conclusion, Benson et al. (2012, 190) stated that:

In contrast to proficiency gains, which can be obtained in both at home and study abroad settings, developments in second language identities are also of interest, because they appear to be specific to study abroad, or at least to the experience of using a second language in everyday environments that require its use.

Thus, the authors underlined the importance of moving from the position of an L2 learner to an L2 user – which SA allows or requires – and theorized it as essential to second language identity development. Block (2007a) had previously expressed a similar point of view and stated that a second language identity emerges through target language mediated subject position. For him, this is very likely to happen in the case of migration, but very unlikely in the language classroom. Interestingly, he remained cautious about the SA contexts and called for more research to determine its impact on second language identities.

In their study, Mitchell et al. (2021) used Benson et al.'s (2013) three-dimension framework to analyse their data collected from 14 SA participants coming from and going to different European countries. All participants spoke at least three languages and had an advanced level (mostly C1) in at least one additional language, often English. Looking at identity-related language proficiency, they found first that for English – which was used as the medium of instruction and within the international community – the SA experience had “deepened their awareness of particular types of language proficiency: youth language, informal language, interactional competence, academic/professional language were generally valued” (179). Then, the local languages, of which students often had a limited knowledge, made them realize – and accept – that they could be comfortable with a lower level of competence in a different language, by using translanguaging practices, for example. From their investigation of linguistic self-concept, Mitchell et al. concluded that SA participants developed a strong feeling of self-efficacy when using the additional language – moving from learner to user – and positive emotions associated with both their L1 and additional language(s). With the last dimension, language-related personal competence, the authors underlined again the participants' ability to get things done even in unexpected situations, but also noted the lack of intercultural competence development as “the experience abroad seemed to strengthen attachment to home language

and culture, unqualified by critical reflection” (185). In their conclusion, Mitchell et al. regretted some overlapping in their analysis due to their use of Benson et al.’s three dimensions separately, particularly between the first and last dimensions. In an earlier study where participants were 29 L2 French students and 27 L2 Spanish students in a year-long sojourn, Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus (2017) noted a clear evolution in their participants’ identity-related L2 proficiency in at least four different areas. The improvement of their oral skills, both productive and receptive were understood as key to a successful SA experience. Secondly, the sojourners’ ability to sustain interesting conversational interactions was perceived as socially important. Another essential element was the ability to use idioms and slang which reflected their “young adult” identity. Vocabulary growth was finally seen as an asset to deal with various everyday situations and encounters. Overall, the preoccupation lay more in developing informal L2 proficiency rather than a formal register of language, but dealing with all kinds of incidents resulted in a growing sense of self-efficacy.

*Pellegrino Aveni’s Model: Status, Control, Validation, and Safety*

A second relevant framework theorizing language and identity in an SA context is Pellegrino Aveni’s (2005) model. Studying American students’ experiences in Russia, she noted that most students were often “unable to present to others an image of themselves that is accurate and acceptable” (2), as the self-image they produced was often inferior to their ideal or to what they could do in their L1. Pellegrino Aveni drew an intimate relation between the self and language as the difficulty in using language is inextricably linked to a reduced image of the self. Following the assumption that to learn a language, students must use it, she noted that they are often not aware of the social, psychological, and cultural barriers they will encounter. Based on theories from a wide range of disciplines: clinical, developmental and experimental psychology, sociology, and social psychology, Pellegrino Aveni built a framework to read and analyse students’ behaviours when using an additional language. Her framework is constructed on four key concepts: *status*, *control*, *validation*, and *safety*. *Status* and *control* are linked to *social hierarchy*; *validation* and *safety* to *social distance*. Students’ *status* is often challenged in additional language interactions; they can either feel inferior or feel perceived as such on a linguistic, intellectual, social, or cultural level. *Control* is defined as “the power to manipulate

certain aspects of an interaction, influence others' opinions and impact on others' actions (Pellegrino Aveni 2005, 42) and is intimately linked to *status* as it usually increases or decreases when status increases or decreases. As Pellegrino Aveni (2005, 36) explained:

Because they are unable to express themselves completely and with sophistication, learners may feel that they lack the ability to influence others' behaviours or attitudes, gain respect, or control the environment in which they find themselves.

This may be perceived as a threat to their position in the social hierarchy, and some students may prefer to withdraw from interaction and avoid speaking as a defensive and protective measure. *Validation* refers to the interlocutors' reactions or more specifically the learner's interpretation of them. "Learners feel validated when they perceive that others view their contributions to an interaction not only worthy of attention and respect, but also as interesting and valuable to the common good" (46). Learners therefore express the need to feel *validated* by those they wish to feel close to or have a friendship with. In social interactions, students express their intention of feeling closer to some and remaining distant from others, sometimes because their sense of *safety* is threatened. "If learners sense that interlocutors have come too close socially, emotionally, or physically, they may feel in jeopardy" (48), and thus withdraw from interaction. Students need to feel socially, physically, and emotionally safe to take full part in social interactions. The consequences of a threat to their safety are overarching as it "rob[s] learners of a sense of control, invalidate[s] their efforts to be accepted, and may be degrading, thus damaging their sense of status" (48). Pellegrino Aveni theorized these four concepts as reasons which may potentially lead to a partial or complete avoidance of language use. She also understood them as potential causes of anxiety, which she perceived as a "symptom of the cognitive dissonance between real and ideal selves in L2 use, rather than a cause of L2 avoidance" (149).

Essentially, Pellegrino Aveni (2005) compared students' decision to speak or not in an additional language to decision-making processes in risk-taking: students consciously or subconsciously evaluate the potential value or harm and the likelihood of communication success or failure. However, the evaluation is not made through objective measures but through their perceptions of the environment. The potential

value or harm is measured taking *status*, *control*, *validation*, and *safety* into consideration as well as a potential discrepancy between the real and the ideal self. In this perspective, Pellegrino Aveni highlighted the importance of goals – lifelong goals, language programme goals, situational goals, etc. – which will prompt students to take risks. She distinguished three different types of goals (information exchange, social networking, and L2 practice) and concluded that for students to use the L2 in authentic communication, they need to have a goal whose “benefit outweighs the cost of performance”, to feel personally responsible for achieving it, and to “recognize that the goal is best or only performed in the target language” (33). Although Pellegrino Aveni did not restrict her framework and her analysis to language use and linguistic identity, she put emphasis on language use and the importance of learner’s sense of security; she raised the need to develop students’ meta-awareness of self-construction. Like Benson et al. (2012, 2013), she concentrated her argument on how language – or students’ level of perceived proficiency in the language – can transform a student’s identity and be transformed by it.

#### *From Language Learner to Language User and Cook’s Multicompetent Speaker*

The question of linguistic identity has also been looked at through the lens of the myth of the native speaker (NS) and the transition from a language learner to a language user, which was already mentioned above, as a component of Benson et al.’s (2012, 2013) framework. Focused on the transition from learner to user, Mas-Alcolea (2018) investigated nine Erasmus students going to Denmark, Italy, and Wales. Her participants experienced frustration and difficulties when moving from learner to user of their additional language, both in terms of communication and identity projection. Wilkinson (2002) studied conversations between SA students and their French hosts and noted the omnipresence of classroom language and roles. The difficulty of moving beyond this teacher-student relationship, which repeatedly favoured form over content, was often frustrating and limited interactions. The *learner’s identity* – often ascribed to SA participants, in which the student’s interlocutor takes the role of the teacher and focuses more on the form, paying little attention to the message – can become tiring and discouraging when students want to convey a message and share experiences (Pellegrino Aveni 2005; Wilkinson

2002). As a result, students often feel belittled, reduced to the position of a child, and their additional language development can be impeded. Finally, in a case-study, Harvey (2016) presented a successful negotiation of linguistic identity reached after several sojourns abroad. She drew on Bakhtin's dialogic relation between the self and the other to interpret Federica, an Italian PhD student's experiences and use of English during her different stays in the UK. She referred to the concept of *ideological becoming*, as "the process of the self and the other finding themselves in each other and working towards creative understanding, a process which takes place through language, through the selective assimilation of others' words" (373), to demonstrate the central role of language in intercultural learning and identity formation. Federica encountered the difficulties listed above linked to her initial inability to express herself and be heard, but then decided to work hard to become "a person with a complex and cosmopolitan identity who can engage interculturally while still speaking from a specifically located, embodied position; a person who inhabits borders" (379). Federica thus became an "Italian speaker of English" forging a new linguistic identity for herself, which she felt comfortable with.

The question of the non-native identity – including the learner's identity – is central to all studies and frameworks mentioned previously. According to Davies (2013), the native speaker (NS) myth is destructive because it gives learners the wrong message. More precisely, it makes them believe that no matter how hard they try, they will never be able to reach the ultimate goal, in other words, they will never become a NS. All SA participants will certainly be confronted with that issue, although not necessarily in a problematic way. Although, in Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus's study (2017, 214), "most participants had come to terms with a non-native speaker identity" after SA, Pellegrino Aveni's (2005, 9) participants, on the other hand, "often report[ed] feeling as if those around them may perceive them to be unintelligent, lacking personality or humour, or as having the intellectual development of a small child." A possible alternative position to the non-native speaker (NNS) position is Cook's (1995, 1999) concept of *the multicompetent speaker*. Questioning the concept of the NS traditionally defined in SLA as monolingual, all-knowing, and intuitive and the interlanguage hypothesis, Cook offered a different perspective for language learners with his notion of *multicompetence*. Defending the point of view that additional language learners

will never become monolingual NS, he stated that it is counterproductive to compare them or to present NS as the target to reach. He said that “[t]here is no reason why the L2 component of multicompetence should be identical to the monolingual’s L1, if only because multicompetence is intrinsically more complex than monolingualism” (Cook 1999, 191) and added that “L2 users should be treated as people in their own right, not as deficient native speakers” (195). The L1 affects the additional language(s) – and vice versa – and students do not remain unchanged. They develop different and wider competences than monolinguals and should be valued for them.

### *Cultural Identity and Positioning in Study Abroad Research*

Research on intercultural competence and SA has been principally carried out in two main disciplines: psychology and language learning. Like language gain, intercultural competence (IC) has initially and regularly been measured by many studies as an objective of SA, an outcome. Most of these studies used a quantitative approach and although they used a large array of different instruments to measure IC, they tend to show some IC development between pre- and post-SA measures (Rundstrom Williams 2005; Allen, Dristas, and Mills 2006; Anderson et al. 2006; Leong 2007; Watson and Wolfel 2015; Wolff and Borzikowsky 2018; Moreno Bruna and Goethals 2021). Although these studies demonstrate the potential of SA in the development of IC, they do not really explain the process, namely how and when it takes place. They do not report on situations where the development of IC does not happen – which is only apparent in the high variability found among participants – nor do they explain these difficulties. The focus of this chapter is precisely on these processes, that is, on how SA participants deal with cultural differences. The way they react when they are confronted with a different habitus or when their own is being questioned, and how they craft a “third-space” (Kramsch 1993) are central questions qualitative research on IC has explored and sought to answer.

In order to measure IC but more importantly to analyse SA student’s experiences in terms of intercultural exposition and learning, a large variety of frameworks have been used. Three important models are nevertheless most commonly referred to: Byram’s (1997) *Intercultural Communication Competence* (ICC), Deardorff’s (2006, 2011) *Intercultural Competence Model* (ICM), and Bennett’s (1986) *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS). Although these three frameworks

present differences, they all posit that intercultural attitudes or *savoir être* – such as adaptability, respect, openness to new experiences, tolerance to ambiguity – are central to the development of interculturality. They also all assume that “intercultural learning is transformational learning, which requires experiences (often beyond the classroom) that lead to this transformation” (Deardorff 2011, 70). As such, intercultural competence is defined as an ongoing process which involves experiences leading to potential transformations and is thus intrinsically linked to identity work.

*Qualitative or Mixed-method Studies Researching Intercultural Competence*

Contrasting with the generally positive results yielded by quantitative studies, qualitative studies present much more adverse results. For instance, qualitative research has shown repeatedly that when students are confronted with a different habitus, some of them tend to withdraw from the negotiation of difference and retreat into their own perceived cultural superiority, particularly – but not exclusively – for short-term sojourns. Consequently, students return home more ethnocentric (Wilkinson 1998; Block 2007a; Kinginger 2008, 2013a; Jackson 2009, 2015, 2019; Plews 2015). Cultural misunderstanding or even rejection may result from the attitudes and representations of both the student and the host community. A specific identity can be chosen by students or ascribed to them – and is often a combination of both. Students see the host community through their cultural frame and are framed at the same time by the host community. Unfortunately, stereotypes are also present in the host community and are often based on negative emotions emerging from communication difficulties. “Factors such as accented speech, cultural differences in non-verbal communication styles, and cultural variations in values, norms, and customs contribute to these communication problems” (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern 2002, 623-4). For instance, Brown and Brown (2013, cited in Kinginger 2013a) studied the use of honorific forms in Korean and noticed that a male student was repeatedly perceived as “foreign” and, as such, was not able to use strict Korean rules marking hierarchy. In fact, the foreigner identity often leads to “feelings of vulnerability, marginalization, and stereotyping” (Tulloch 2018, 265). Similarly, cultural perceptions of racial differences also held students back from intercultural exchanges in Goldoni (2013) and Talburt and Stewart (1999) because they felt judged and rejected. Gender is another

cultural construct which has regularly been studied in SA contexts. Cases of female students experiencing sexual harassment have been displayed in different studies in Russia, Costa Rica, Spain, and Egypt (Polanyi 1995; Twombly 1995; Talburt and Stewart 1999; Goldoni 2013; Trentman 2015). More generally, Brown and Brown (2013) focused on national identity and noticed that when confronted with external perceptions of their country in the UK, five of their participants re-identified with their culture of origin (Russia, Iran, Indonesia, China, and Slovenia) and resisted the discourse of Western supremacy. The global status of their country was clearly linked to personal self-worth, and developing a more positive view on their own country was a way to defend their cultural membership, and themselves at the same time. As a result, these students often disengage from the intercultural experience and exclude themselves from language learning opportunities.

But, on the other hand, SA participants do not necessarily need to be victims of discrimination to be unable or unwilling to read and understand cultural differences as such. As Goldoni (2013) noted, most students expect the host culture to be similar to their own and therefore tend to maintain an ethnocentric perspective and interpret events from that perspective. Confronted with different classroom traditions, an American student in France and a French student in Australia both construed the teachers' behaviour as disrespectful and disinterested (Patron 2007; Kinginger 2009). In another study by Kinginger and Whitworth (2005), two American students were repelled by French femininity and nudity and the norms of heterosexual relations, leading in the case of one student, to a total avoidance of contacts with people from the host community. The authors underlined that those students were unable to perceive the American gender ideologies they were raised in as such, and suggested appropriate preparation for the participants. Patron (2007) also reported culture shock – manifested through strong judgemental comments – when many of her French participants encountered the Australian pub culture and excessive drinking by some local girls.

In their reviews of SA studies focused on identity, both Block (2007a) and Kinginger (2013a) regretted the over-representation of Americans in SA research, which, with a few exceptions, tended to portray American students who “encountered – but refused to engage with – cultural differences” (Kinger 2013b, 342). Other studies, which included students from different nationalities (but still mainly

European and Asian), have been conducted since Block and Kinginger's reviews and many still report a tendency to national superiority or an inability to construe cultural events from a different point of view. In Mitchell et al. (2021, 185), for example, the authors reported a lack of intercultural competence development:

However, Byram has defined intercultural competence, as "interest in otherness and their skills in interpreting, relating and discovering, i.e., of overcoming cultural difference and enjoying intercultural contact" (Byram 1997, 70), and against this yardstick the participants generally fell short; we did not find evidence that through SA, they generally moved toward the deeper level of "intercultural speaker," able to interpret intercultural experiences including critical reflection on their own cultural background. For many participants, indeed, the experience abroad seemed to strengthen attachment to home language and culture, unqualified by critical reflection.

Similarly, Jackson (2019, 30) took a case study approach and traced a Chinese student's intercultural development. Zoe, who went to New Zealand for a semester, developed a "stronger sense of belonging to her homeland" while abroad. Zoe was an anthropology major, and although she took a course on local culture and learnt about cultural facts, in her everyday life, she remained quite detached from her host environment. In her investigation of short-term SA in Germany, Brubaker (2007) noted that students were limited in their understanding of cultural difference, although they seemed aware of it. In fact, the participants in her study "seemed to equate culture learning with identifying and comparing visible and tangible cultural differences" (121) and lacked the proper terminology and frameworks to go beyond this. Müller and Schmenk (2016) also pointed to one important limitation for students regarding IC. Investigating two Canadian students in Germany over a semester, they noticed a considerable difference between the two participants' intercultural awareness and sensitivity, but noted that they both relied on an essentialist, common-sense, and dichotomizing notion of culture as a measurable entity, which resulted in restricted interpretations of their experiences. In Dervin's (2009) study – a discourse analysis of post-sojourn interviews with nine French students in Finland – students regretted their inability to integrate, i.e., to meet the locals. Although they took some responsibility for the situation – a lack of common language

and their extended co-national and international social networks – they also tended to explain the situation with stereotypes and general representations, such as “*Finns are shy and cold*” (24). Dervin concluded that SA students could not go beyond the *same vs others* dichotomy because it is also part of SA official discourses.

Llurda et al. (2016) wondered whether the Erasmus programme had the potential to generate a sense of European identity, based on plurilingual competence, through mobility and exposure to other cultures. Although the 46 Spanish students enrolled in different Erasmus programmes expressed more self-confidence in using an additional language and more ease at the idea of travelling across Europe after SA, they did not show greater identification with Europe. The results did show, however, a larger identification with Western countries, when opposed to other nations, such as in Asia, which seemed to follow the logic of *us vs them* more than the development of an intercultural identity. Finally, using a mix-method approach, Cots et al. (2016) studied the impact of SA on ICC for 110 university students in Spain. Inspired by Byram and Deardorff’s frameworks, the authors divided ICC into three components: attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour/skills. They used pre- and post-sojourn questionnaires as well as one student’s narration of her experiences of *difference*. The questionnaires revealed that attitudes were the least likely to change during SA with only 5 out of 18 items showing a significant increase. Knowledge, on the contrary, was most likely to improve with 7 out of 10 items – specifically cultural and sociolinguistic self-awareness items – showing a significant increase. However, the qualitative analysis highlighted one student’s reluctance to change and modify her intercultural attitudes and behaviour, as well as her spontaneous use of *difference* in categorizing her experiences. With their mix-method approach, Cots et al. illustrated the contrasting results between a general tendency to cultural awareness improvement and individual stories of resistance.

Contrasting with these rather pessimistic conclusions, a few studies tend to report more positive or nuanced results. Larzén-Östermark (2011) told the story of two Finnish teacher students in England and Scotland and reported that their time abroad made them think and look at their own country and culture from a different, more critical, perspective. They also became more aware of stereotypes as they experienced cultural differences through SA. In one of the first

in-depth qualitative study of 50 SA students in Europe (Erasmus, language assistants, and international business school students in Paris), Murphy-Lejeune (2002) came up with a similar conclusion concerning the intercultural dimension of their year abroad. She noted that after an initial enhanced visibility of differences, “interest in other people’s differences wanes. Categorical judgments lose their power and are replaced by a more personal approach to others” (211). Patron (2007, 246) stated that although the process of adjustment of French university students in Australia took time and “initially confirmed [their] French cultural identity,” “a continual process of hybridity, culminating in a ‘third place’ occurred whilst abroad as a result of the sojourners’ sociological, cultural, and linguistic interactions.” More recently, in a longitudinal study focused on nine students’ representations of *cultural difference*, Mas-Alcolea (2019) also noted a positive development regarding the deconstruction of their pre-stage stereotypes. The author underlined that her participants talked about “cultural threads” (Holliday 2016), which she interpreted as “as a way of building bridges with people from different countries, and, thus, of approaching the Other in a renewed way: not based on preconceived cultural differences, but on the assumption of the existence of commonalities” (Mas-Alcolea 2019, 70). Similarly, Jackson (2016) reported on the story of Serena, a student from Hong Kong going to the UK for a semester. Her sojourn triggered her curiosity for other cultures and gave her enough self-confidence to later organize other trips, on her own, to different countries. Edmonds (2010) sought to assess the development of intercultural competence of nursing students, among other elements. She concluded that SA raised their awareness of different cultures and their ability to adapt. And finally, in their study of 56 English-speaking students going abroad, Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus (2017) reported that although many students still talked about the other in a rather stereotypical way during and after SA, others had been able to move beyond this. For example, one student, in reference to an ethnography class taken the previous year, described having understood a bull-running event from a different perspective to her own. It allowed her to understand the tradition through a different cultural lens and not define it as animal cruelty. This final example again underlines the variability of intercultural learning and introduces the importance of equipping students with appropriate tools for their culturally challenging experiences.

### *The Importance of Accompanying Students in their Intercultural Competence Development*

As developed above, although intercultural competence is often perceived as a positive outcome of SA in the “social imaginary” (Kubota 2016), this transformation is not automatic nor systematic. Consequently, scholars seem to be in agreement on the need to accompany students before, during, and after SA in order to develop their IC (Engle and Engle 2004; Pellegrino Aveni 2005; Vande Berg 2007; Jackson 2008, 2009, 2015; Kinginger 2009; Paige and Vande Berg 2012; Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou 2012; Paige et al. 2009; Kubota 2016; Jackson and Oguro 2018). Three pioneering studies are first presented below, considering their importance in the field. The three of them were designed based on a similar format comprising pre-, during, and/or post-programme intervention and the assessment of students using the *Intercultural Development Inventory* (IDI) (Hammer and Bennett 1998). This widely used and recognized instrument is based on Bennett’s (1986) *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS). His model positions six stages along a continuum which moves from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism: (1) *Denial* of intercultural differences, (2) *Defence* against intercultural differences, (3) *Minimization* of intercultural differences, (4) *Acceptance* of the importance of intercultural differences, (5) *Adaptation* to new perspectives, and (6) *Integration* of the experience of intercultural differences which becomes part of one’s organizational identity.

The first study was led by Engle and Engle (2003, 2004), who oversaw a particularly demanding and structured SA programme in the South of France for upper-intermediate and advanced American students of French. Besides their regular classes, all taught in French, their participants followed a compulsory semester-long course in French cultural patterns and were required to undertake different extracurricular activities, including weekly meetings with a “language partner”, a personal interest activity such as sport or art, and two hours of community service per week. In addition, students were housed individually in local, non-English-speaking families. The results of the IDI pre- and post-tests demonstrated the positive impact of authentic contacts with the locals and skilful mentoring. Inspired by Engle and Engle’s (2003, 2004) programme, Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (2009) also used Bennett’s IDI pre- and post-sojourn and generally found significantly greater progress in the intercultural competence of SA participants

than the home control group. But more importantly, among the SA cohort, cultural mentoring greatly affected language proficiency and intercultural development: those who benefitted from cultural intervention gained 12.47 points on average on their IDI tests, whereas those who were left on their own only gained 1.32 points. Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige suggested that programme design interventions – such as placing students with host families or encouraging community service, for example – was not enough to result in intercultural learning, a second direct intervention, in the form of cultural mentoring, was necessary. Similarly, Jackson (2015) designed a course for current or returning SA students in Hong Kong based on her long experience of SA research. Her credit-bearing course, called *Intercultural Transitions: Making Sense of International Experience* dealt with personal experiences, theoretical models and frameworks, and the intersection of both, in order to understand, analyse, and initiate change. Jackson administered the IDI at the beginning and end of her course and found an average gain of 5.3 points with students reaching the high end of the *Minimization* stage. She concluded that her course helped them resolve some of their intercultural stress. Thus, although her participants greatly overestimated their own intercultural competence both before and after the course, they showed improvement in their understanding of what it means to be interculturally competent and the necessary steps to further enhance their intercultural sensitivity.

In a review of studies using the IDI, Paige and Vande Berg (2012) aimed at identifying the most efficient measures in terms of IC development. They concluded that cultural mentoring is extremely important as it engages students in ongoing conversation about their cultural experiences with relevant feedback. Students should also be provided with some cultural content prior to their departure as it makes them more culturally self-aware. In-country reflection on intercultural experiences is also seen as beneficial for students to challenge their own cultural frame of reference. Furthermore, students must engage with the culture as this is necessary to bring abstract concepts to life. Finally, Paige and Vande Berg underlined that programmes that work through the entire experience – prior, during, and after sojourns – show the best results. The conclusions drawn from this body of research are highly relevant and have inspired many teachers and scholars to develop different projects, some of which are presented below. The following research studies

usually opted for a qualitative approach in order to analyse students' evolution in more detail.

Within the IEREST programme (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers), Borghetti (2016) reported on how efficient different activities were at making students reflect critically on their intercultural experiences. Her programme, called *24h Erasmus Life*, was centred on four main tasks: a class discussion on students' overall experience, diary writing, a more in-depth focus – with theoretical input – on one aspect of students' life (emotions, social contacts, academic life, or language use), and finally a group presentation prepared for other students who did not follow the class. Although Borghetti noted an enhanced awareness and knowledge of the issues discussed, her study design did not allow her to make definite claims about the intercultural learning of students, nor how it related to the different activities. McKinnon (2018) drew on the IEREST material to design an intervention programme for students in the School of Modern Languages in Durham University (UK). The programme included interventions before SA as well as during, and envisaged students as “whole people” (Coleman 2013) aiming for a large array of learning objectives: “academic, cultural, intercultural, linguistic, personal, and professional” (McKinnon 2018, 106). Cultural interventions and mentoring were proven efficient as one participant, for example,

was able to value social and experiential learning, become aware of and challenge pre-conceived ideas about language, culture and interculturality, develop more nuanced and sophisticated conceptualisations of these ideas, explain his experience, and articulate his learning gains. (113)

Likewise, Weber Bosley (2018) designed the *Framework for Reflective Intervention in Learning Abroad* (FRILA) which she used to accompany and assess SA students' pre-, during- and post-sojourn intercultural development in Bellarmine University (Kentucky, USA). Her interventions also proved to be highly beneficial for the students, specifically the online intervention while abroad, which allowed a “dialectic process of linking concrete experience with abstract conceptualisations” (173). Weber Bosley underlined that experiential learning demands that teachers/mentors move beyond the classical approach of delivering

knowledge and develop approaches in which knowledge is co-constructed and student learning becomes autonomous.

Other projects developed more targeted interventions, in terms of timing or instrument. For example, Peckenpaugh (2018) implemented a course designed to foster intercultural competence for returning SA students. She assumed that once students had experienced positive and negative culturally diverse situations, they could use these real-life examples to critically examine their own frames of reference. Her qualitative analysis of two students' critical reflection papers showed a clear evolution as students used new frameworks, tested new ideas, and came up with new conclusions. For their part, Elola and Oskoz (2008) used an interesting mix-method study design by implementing blogs for AH and SA American students to interact about Spanish culture. With the blog acting as a mediator between the home and target culture, SA participants were able to reflect more profoundly on different aspects of Spanish culture and were encouraged to explore more aspects in order to provide information for AH students. The latter also greatly benefitted from these exchanges as they positively changed their view of the target culture. In a somewhat similar way, Lee (2010, 2012) used personal blogs as well as ethnographic interviews as part of a cultural project. She concluded that social networking and privileged contact with locals were effective for the development of students' ICC.

To conclude, through SA students can be confronted with the reality of cultural differences or challenges and not an ideal theoretical representation where they can take whichever subject position they desire, and in dealing with this reality, a real and profound negotiation of identity is possible. As Byram (2012b) stated, learning about other cultures is different from learning other cultures as the latter implies an element of identification. As learning a language implies learning a culture, immersion appears necessary. However, although immersion is an essential part of ICC development, the latter is not automatic nor systematic. As research showed, if the "social imaginary" depicts the SA experience as transformative, there is however a high risk of a reaffirmation of one's self-identity and the consolidation of a "Self vs Other binary" (Kubota 2016, 354). In the case of SA, negotiation of difference and identity is possible, but students need to be accompanied to construct a satisfying image of themselves, maximize language gains, and allow the emergence of an intercultural identity.

Moreover, intercultural competence development is made possible mainly through contacts with the local community. As Jackson (2016, 334) stated, “when L2/intercultural interactions are unsatisfactory or infrequent, international sojourns may not lead to greater intercultural understanding and individuals may return home with heightened negative stereotypes of host nationals.”

Based on three case studies, Stewart (2010) demonstrated that contact with locals was key to developing a target community identity. Social interactions – with locals but also co-nationals and international students – are thus key to a successful SA experience, both in terms of intercultural and linguistic outcomes. Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige. (2009) found that students who had more contact with the target language – for example, through content courses in an additional language, target language courses, or more time spent with their host families – made greater IDI gains than those who did not. On the other hand, the authors also found that participants who had classes with other co-nationals made greater IDI gains than those who were with host nationals only. Similarly, participants who spent 26–50% of their free time with host nationals made greater gains than those who spent more than that. The authors used the “challenge/support” hypothesis to explain these findings suggesting that the lack of support by their fellow co-nationals led participants being overwhelmed and reject the host culture.

### *Social Identity and Positioning in Study Abroad Research*

From a sociocultural perspective, learning occurs in social interactions and all research combining language acquisition and social networks presented above showed consistent results: the more local networks, the greater the progress (see Section 2.3.2.1). Moreover, as Dewey (2017, 54) stated, “when learners develop social networks, they benefit from more than simply increased time of exposure to the L2.” Social identity and positionings in the present study are understood as an individual’s various group memberships, combined with the different values and emotional significance attached to each of them. As social positioning is context-dependent, complex, and multiple, the analysis of SA students’ social networks offers unique insight into students’ sojourn and helps unravel their global SA experience. Thus, the impact of social networks is very broad, ranging from personal well-being and satisfaction to cultural adaptation and linguistic gains. Starting with

Coleman's three concentric circles model, the following sections present studies which analysed the development of SA students' social networks and the assets of each of them.

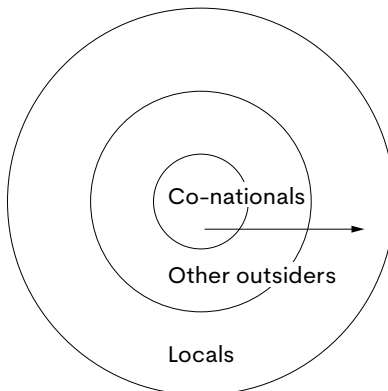
*Social Networks: Coleman's Three Concentric Circles*

In his well-known call to envisage SA students as *whole people* and not as language learners only, Coleman (2013, 2015) underlined the importance of studying students' social networks. In his view, social networks are key to understanding students' global experiences – through their different positionings – as the development of new social networks is fundamental to learning and transformation while abroad.

If you go abroad as an autonomous individual, then you are free of the constraints of the social identities which your previous social circle imposes upon you. Meeting new people can nurture new activities and new attitudes. This is the fundamental basis of learning through mobility. The new perspectives of new acquaintances allow and prompt you to re-invent yourself. (Coleman 2015, 42)

In an attempt to model socialization patterns while abroad, Coleman (2013, 2015) proposed a concentric circles model (see *Figure 2.4* below) which resulted from his long experience in researching and administering SA.

The model presents three circles – the inner, middle, and outer circles – and is more concerned with the dynamic of social networks than



**FIGURE 2.4** Three Concentric Circles Model (Coleman 2013).

their intensity. It does not portray a “universal, automatic or uni-directional” (Coleman 2013, 31) process or progression but a general, largely documented tendency. In short,

students begin by socialising with co-nationals. With time and motivation they add other non-locals to their social circles. If circumstances (including sojourn duration) permit and their own motivations, attitudes, actions, and initiatives allow, they can additionally include locals. One circle does not replace another; rather, the process is additive, with the circle broadening during the sojourn. (44)

In the middle circle, the other out-group members are often other foreign students, in other words, the international student community. In his papers, Coleman insisted both on the importance of student motivation and agency to move towards the middle and ultimately the outer circle, and on the relevance of preparing students. More precisely, making them aware of the difficulties they would potentially encounter. Suggesting strategies to reach locals appeared essential to Coleman. At the same time, he also underlined that programmes – and discourses – asking SA participants to “short-circuit the natural process, to jump directly from the inner to the outer circle” (2013, 32) may not be realistic and may be counterproductive as they could engender frustration and low self-esteem.

As he himself indicated, Coleman’s model was inspired by previous studies which had already documented a similar progression without turning it into a theoretical model. The most important of them is De Federico de la Rúa’s (2008) study, that examined the social networks of Erasmus students. She collected her data on two different occasions: once in 1995 from 80 students in France, where she was an Erasmus student herself, and a second time in 1999 from 217 students in different European countries. In her analysis, she differentiated “three types of friendship ties” (97) – local people, people from other countries, and compatriots – and noted a slow centrifugal movement from the compatriots and internationals to the locals.

Once the immediate needs were satisfied with same nationality or Erasmus friends, students seem to have been more and more able to access locals in a slower rhythm of friendship renewal, and the security provided by sharing familiar norms and the same mother tongue may have become less important. (De Federico de la Rúa 2008, 101)

The question of security and comfort appears central to the progression towards locals, a condition not met right upon arrival but only after some time in the host country. In her study, De Federico de la Rúa not only reported a general dynamic process of social network formation but also focused on the intensity of the different relationships. Comparing co-national and cross-national friendships, she noted a difference in the strength of those ties:

Friendship relations among people with the same nationality are more frequent but when cross-national friendships occur, they are more reciprocal, that is, stronger than same-nationality friendships. Maybe it is easier to mingle with people with the same background as no effort is needed to understand and interpret behaviour, but if friendship is established with someone who is different, it may be because the person him/herself is particularly interesting. It may also be that a more unique friendship with someone from another country is more valued than friends from one's own country, who can easily be found at home. (De Federico de la Rúa 2008, 100)

Her detailed analysis led her to conclude that there was a predominance of international students in Erasmus students' social networks, a conclusion also reached by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) and Patron (2007) before and Van Mol and Michielsens (2015) some years later. In fact, international students offer SA students cultural difference – which co-nationals do not – and at the time remain easily accessible, unlike many of the locals.

Reflecting Coleman's model, many studies reported on the difficulties in meeting locals and feeling integrated within the host country. A national survey coordinated by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (Ward et al. 2004) concluded that measures to increase the frequency and quality of the contacts between international and domestic students deserved "high priority". More precisely, the report showed that one student out of four had no social interactions with locals and one out of three had no local friends. Moreover, 70% wanted more friends among locals. In England, a similar large-scale study (UKCOSA 2004) identified social integration as a key problem for SA students. The results were even more alarming than Ward et al.'s study as only 29% of international students had UK friends. Both these studies also reported that having local friends was associated with higher

satisfaction and had positive academic and psychological outcomes. Other, more locally situated and qualitative studies also demonstrated similar difficulties in reaching locals. For example, in a mixed-method study, Brown (2009b) reported on the rapid and almost exclusive formation of international students' co-national networks for 150 Asian students at Bournemouth University (UK). Despite their awareness of its drawbacks, SA students could not "resist the pull towards the reassurance of sameness in a diverse community" (187). And once "the ghettos had formed [...] they felt inescapable" (191). Elsewhere, Brown (2009a) also documented the lack of contact with the hosts and related the disillusionment and disappointment felt by SA students. Likewise, Allen (2010) sought to measure the different social networks of 18 American students in France for eight weeks and understand how the latter perceived them in terms of linguistic affordances. She reported that contacts with their host families was perceived as an important affordance for cultural and linguistic development despite difficulties and challenges. Allen also reported on the high number of hours participants spent with their peers and the almost inexistent contacts with the locals, except routine service encounters in the community. Allen concluded by underlining the importance of individual agency in the development of social networks, combined with the way participants were received in the different communities.

However, difficulty in meeting the hosts does not mean impossibility. Other qualitative studies reported highly divergent integration stories, relating experiences of both failed and successful integration. These authors insisted on the importance of personal agency in the development of social networks. For instance, Goldoni (2013, 365) found that many of her 44 participants "did not become part of the Spanish-speaking community of practice" during their time in Spain. However, 16 students reported strong friendships or intimate relationships with the locals. In their stories, a close connection with the host family, volunteering in non-profit organizations, and joining clubs or societies were often key to their successful integration, as other studies also demonstrated (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; UKCOSA 2004; Whitworth 2006; Campbell 2011; Meier and Daniels 2013). Through four case studies, Whitworth (2006) showed how four American students in France for a semester accessed – or did not access – different social networks. Although Deirde, one of the participants, withdrew from all contacts very early on and found refuge in her room and her American boyfriend

left at home, Jada managed to reach the locals with her sex-appeal and met many men who were intrigued by her. She also developed a strong friendship with a girl her boyfriend introduced her to, a friendship that actually outlasted her love story. Benjamin turned to his host family to get access to different local activities and social practices, and Bill managed to develop extended local contacts through his participation in a local organization, his host family, and a professional internship. Whitworth's case studies are interesting as all her participants found refuge in the cohort of American students at first and then decided, on an individual basis, to become agents and develop other local friendships, with the exception of Deirde. Jackson's (2008) four stories of Hong Kong girls in England also portrayed different stories of integration and contact with the hosts. While the first two girls in her study remained distant from the host community, Elsa and Niki decided to invest in intercultural friendships, mainly through their host families. As each story is complex and diverse, Jackson avoided rapid conclusions and wondered if the difference in investment was due to the girls' readiness or reluctance to socialize or to their hosts being more or less supportive. Finally, Meier and Daniels (2013) investigated the SA experience of students ( $n=24$ ) and young professionals ( $n=11$ ) in terms of expectations, perceived achievements, and social ties. They reported on the disappointment of "just not being able to make friends", as almost two thirds of the participants interviewed encountered real difficulties in establishing meaningful relationships with the locals, with some not succeeding at all. Nevertheless, those who managed to reach the locals were more likely to be professionals or students who were ready to take risks and leave their comfort zone. One of their conclusions emphasized the importance of agency and the need to support students in "adopting a more proactive and agential stance" in order for them "to benefit from greater social interaction with native speakers during their year abroad, which is likely to improve their language development and [...] satisfaction from their year abroad" (234).

But sometimes, rejection or indifference by hosts can be a real barrier to integration and agency does not suffice. Many SA students felt ignored, discriminated, or even rejected by locals, leading to the impossibility of reaching them (Pellegrino Aveni 2005; Ward et al. 2004; Brown 2009a). In Brown's (2009a) study, Asian, European, and African students in England perceived local students as out of reach

and completely disinterested in them. Even the most motivated and outgoing students met reluctance to engage from the hosts, which showed that motivation and personal agency were not sufficient when there was no reciprocity. In situations where distinctiveness was visible, some students even experienced racist and Islamophobic comments and abuse. As Tullock (2018, 268) underlined:

learners' access to L2 interaction and learning opportunities is constrained by their hosts' perceptions of them as individuals who are worthy of engagement and who are legitimate speakers of the target language.

Murphy-Lejeune (2002, 191) also stated that "native indifference is a major force driving student travellers to connect socially within their own ethnic group or the international group." The natives "who are ready to 'invest time' with foreigners" are rare: they need to "possess a curiosity for foreignness or previous personal experience abroad" (200).

Other contextual, structural, or linguistic factors also appear central in understanding students' failure to integrate with the locals. Van Mol and Michielsen (2015), for example, noted two important factors influencing the formation of relationships with locals: shared social places and language proficiency. More precisely, the authors noticed that although Erasmus students might share some classes at university, their different degrees and objectives led them to have different study programmes. Second, lacking a sufficient level in their additional language, some participants in their study did not feel confident enough to reach the locals nor were they easily welcomed among them. Likewise, Wyatt Brockbank (2011: *in title*) investigated the predictors of social network development and concluded "that better speakers made more friends." Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy (2021), for their part, reported on the inevitable, but regrettable, formation of "Spanish ghettos in Italy" through four case-studies of Spanish students. Although students were warned about the risk – and although some tried to resist interacting exclusively with their co-nationals at first – all four of them ended up spending their whole stay (5 to 10 months) with Spanish students only. The authors pointed to the different factors which explained this "inevitable" situation. Some of them were programme-related such as the large size of the co-national

cohort, the fact that the university did not provide enough opportunities to use Italian and interact with Italian students. Other factors were maybe more student-related, such as a self-perceived and apparently real, poor, and insufficient level in either Italian or English, which excluded Spanish students from meaningful interactions with either the locals or international students. Other factors were their priorities while abroad, linked to Erasmus students' distinctive lifestyle, and the security and sense of belonging provided by co-nationals. In any case, Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy did not blame SA students for their lack of integration but asked for a more careful monitoring of Erasmus programmes, in terms of the number of students going to one destination, a required minimum command of the additional language, and institutional opportunities for interactions with the locals, three key elements among others.

*Roles and Assets of the Different Social Networks: Co-nationals, Internationals, and Locals (including Host Families)*

As discussed above, the ties SA students develop with their **co-nationals** are natural and almost automatic. The benefits of these friendships have been studied and recognized by different research projects. Specifically in the earlier stages of the sojourn, co-nationals provide emotional support which is often essential to students' well-being (Ward et al. 2001; Brown 2009a; Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy 2021). In Brown's (2009b) study, SA students reported on the reasons which drew them to their co-national cohort. First, they mentioned sharing the same language and culture, which implies relief from the stress of the foreign environment. Co-nationals also offer instrumental support and assistance with everyday difficulties. Murphy-Lejeune (2002, 199) came to similar conclusions regarding linguistic relief and emotional support and added a third, interesting benefit: The presence of co-nationals allowed SA students to "talk about the experience with peers involved in the same venture and to reflect upon it, which enhances the process students are living through." Thus, their positive impact is both emotional and cognitive. But the ambivalence of socializing with co-nationals almost always completes the positive picture presented above and qualifies it. The double-edged position of co-nationals is well represented by one of the participants in Dervin's (2009, 23) study, who wrote that: "Communities unite people so it is like a safety buoy but in my case, I wanted a small safety buoy not a big ship." More

precisely, the presence of co-nationals may become an obstacle to the desired immersion, often necessary for cultural and linguistic development (Coleman 2013). As Murphy-Lejeune (2002, 185) stated: “The issue then is to balance out the comforting shelter of the native group with other more adventurous associations.” And this is not always easy due to a lack of motivation or openness. Speaking one’s own language in the host country can, in fact, prevent integration as “this behaviour is interpreted as social absence, in spite of physical presence: ‘you’re not here’” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 186). Consequently, contacts with the host community become even harder. Finally, spending too much time with co-nationals can also be detrimental to one’s well-being, as Geeraert, Demoulin, and Demes (2014, 93) found that “over time [...], close co-national contact was associated with lower levels of adjustment and higher levels of stress.” In SA research and SA discourses, socializing with co-nationals is thus rarely described as beneficial. Nevertheless, it remains essential for many SA students, and they should not be made to feel guilty about it. Discussing the natural but possibly problematic aspects of these friendships seem the best way to help students navigate between those contradicting positions.

The status of **international** students is interesting because they seem to bring similar benefits in terms of students’ well-being and emotional support and slightly fewer drawbacks. Patron (2007, 142) even concluded that “the coping strategies employed by the French sojourners to minimise their culture shock that proved most successful in relation to support groups was the international network, followed by the co-nationals and finally the host national group.” Similarly, Kashima and Loh (2006) investigated the role of international ties for sojourners in Australia and found that they had a positive influence on psychological adjustment and on their identification with the host university. As discussed above, studies focusing on Erasmus students tend to show a predominance of international ties – over both co-national and local friendships – due to a constellation of factors: accessibility, diversity, equality (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Patron 2007; De Federico de la Rua 2008; Van Mol and Michielsens 2015). More precisely, within the international student community, unlike with locals, “parity is regained” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 189) because they share a similar condition as newcomers in a foreign country, and access is facilitated. Friendships with international students are also valued because they offer cultural and linguistic diversity, which co-nationals

cannot. Another advantage of the international community is that the additional language – or English as a *lingua franca* in some countries – is often chosen as the preferred means of communication and additional language use with other international students has proven to be beneficial to language improvement (Magnan and Back 2007). On the other hand, if the development of international friendships is beneficial on many levels, the separation or even isolation of the international student community – which, some argue, serves “the wider process of elite class formation and social reproduction” (Water and Brooks 2011, 476) – may again deprive SA students of greater contacts with the hosts.

The uncontested importance of developing relationships with **locals** in terms of linguistic and cultural gains has already been discussed above and will only be briefly repeated here. For example, Goldoni (2013) noted three main benefits of maintaining meaningful relationships with locals as reported by the participants in her study (Americans in Spain), which presents, in my view, a comprehensive summary. First, it allows SA students to use the additional language extensively but more importantly in a relatively comfortable setting. Second, students are introduced into larger social networks of locals with many new friendship opportunities. Finally, privileged contacts with locals offer opportunities to experience the host country culture and people first-hand, to move from being a spectator to being a “spect-actor” (367) and to feel that they belong. Relationships with locals are unquestionably key to cultural adjustment as other studies demonstrated (see Smith and Khawaja 2011 for a review). Kashima and Loh (2006, 472), among others, reported that “for sociocultural adjustment, or the ability to ‘fit in’ and navigate successfully in the new cultural environment, the benefit of social ties with locals seems greater than those with conational ties.” Murphy-Lejeune (2002) also emphasized the fact that meaningful relationships with the hosts were key to the deconstruction of stereotypes. Interestingly, Patron (2007, 140) noted that “the French students put their successful integration into Australian society down to a coping mechanism based on becoming intercultural thanks to international and host national friendships,” underlining both the benefits of locals and internationals in becoming interculturally sensitive and competent. Contact with hosts also prevents loneliness and favours well-being and satisfaction (Smith and Khawaja 2011; Geeraert et al. 2014). As a privileged local interlocutor,

host families present most of the benefits mentioned above and should therefore be used or invested by students, as their access is greatly facilitated (Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart 2010).

*Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Identities and Positionings Studied Together in Study Abroad Research*

Following Coleman's (2013) call to study SA students as whole people, the present study regards student experiences as complex and multiple and looks at them from different points of entry, namely social, cultural, and linguistic. These three specific facets were chosen for their salience and importance in student experiences abroad. More precisely, meeting new people, discovering a new culture, and learning a new language are the three most common positive outcomes in the SA discourse. They logically, and almost systematically, appeared in students' objectives and motivations before departure. Most of the studies mentioned in the three chapters above also envisaged SA students as whole people and addressed their experiences from multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, they tended to take a favoured perspective and focused more precisely on one, be it social, cultural, or linguistic. Studies which put the three dimensions on equal terms, with an explicit aim at correlating them, remain rare.

Beaven and Spencer-Oatey (2016) reported on the adaptation story of Angela, an Italian student on an Erasmus programme in Glasgow. They focused on different facets – her social life, her daily life, her language use, and her academic adjustment. On a social level, Angela rapidly met co-national and international students, friends she kept until the end of her stay and who made her adaptation process comfortable and pleasant. She only had one Scottish friend – who happened to be her flatmate – but did not seem to regret the situation too much, as she equated the Erasmus experience with an international one. She was relatively positive about her daily life as well, with the exception of sharing a flat with a Scot, which was sometimes demanding in terms of language and cultural adaptation. English became problematic in two different contexts mainly, but for different reasons: first, when used as a lingua franca with the other international students as she felt she could not really be herself, something she had not anticipated at all. Second, it also became problematic on an academic level, as it prevented her from understanding some of her classes. Angela's adaptation to her courses was actually very difficult, which made the authors

conclude that “personal and academic domains can follow noticeably different trends in the adaptive journey of a student abroad” (363). Noels, Yashima, and Zhang (2010) affirmed that identity in intercultural communication is problematic in at least three respects, encompassing social, cultural, and linguistic elements. First, the competence of interactants can impede successful communication due to insufficient linguistic and intercultural confidence or competence. Second, if power relations between interlocutors are unevenly distributed, access to some resources may be impossible, impeding intercultural or linguistic development. Finally, as identity is negotiable and thus variable, individuals may feel lost, unable to find an acceptable and coherent positioning; it may therefore be difficult to maintain a sense of consistency when facing inevitable changes. Finally, Jackson (2012, 453) referred to all three levels as well, while commenting on the great variability of SA student experiences, and underlined the importance of agency:

Agency plays a key role in how sojourns unfold. Students are individuals (“social agents”) with their own aims, needs and concerns. Their mindset (e.g., degree of openness to other cultures) and the actions they take in the host environment can have a profound impact on sojourn outcomes. Some sojourners aspire to enhance their L2 social skills and actively cultivate friendships with host nationals. With resilience and a positive frame of mind, they take full advantage of linguistic and cultural affordances in the local speech community (e.g., frequently initiate conversations in the host language, make an effort to include host nationals in their social networks). In contrast, sojourners with a fear of cultural difference and a more rigid mindset may limit themselves to formal, academic contexts and shy away from social intercultural interaction, thereby curtailing exposure to the host language and culture. These individuals may even return home with heightened xenophobia. The learning situation of student sojourners is variable and complex.

It is needless to say that the social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of an SA experience are intrinsically linked and influence each other permanently; their separation remains theoretical. Moreover, this interdependence is not always straightforward, with one cause leading to a different consequence depending on the context and circumstances, and cannot easily be theorized. Social positionings depend on, and are constitutive of, cultural and linguistic positionings, and vice

versa. The aim of the present study is to try to apprehend how these three dimensions interact and to identify whether one tends to predominate or have more impact on high school students' experiences.

#### 2.3.4 Preparing and Accompanying Students Throughout the Study Abroad Experience

The importance of preparing and accompanying students before, during, and after SA has already been discussed above, in relation to intercultural learning (see Section 2.3.3.2(2)). Although research showed that most students return home with enhanced linguistic skills (even if only slightly), the conclusions were less optimistic for intercultural learning, with some students returning home more ethnocentric; hence, the specific need and focus on intercultural awareness. In fact, helping students develop intercultural competence is believed to yield larger benefits:

As international experience alone does not guarantee interculturality, intercultural communicative competence must be nurtured before, during, and after a sojourn. When students are well prepared for the sojourn experience, they may set more realistic goals for their stay, cope better with the natural ups and downs of adjustment, employ more effective language and culture learning strategies, be more willing to interact with host nationals and, ultimately, reap the benefits of more satisfactory intercultural interaction. (Jackson 2012, 457)

In many programmes, the intercultural component is actually only one among many. Two large-scale projects, *Maximizing Study Abroad through Language and Culture Strategies* in America (Cohen et al. 2005; Paige et al. 2009) and *Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers (IEREST)* in Europe (Beaven and Borghetti 2015) proposed extensive and varied activities aiming at social, cultural, and linguistic development while studying abroad. These projects were evidently accompanied by research which concluded that learning abroad outcomes can be maximized by guided interventions. Smaller studies also implemented different support programmes and assessed their benefits. For example, Moreno Bruna and Goethals (2020) implemented a pre-programme course aiming at supporting students (n=14) through the development of social networks and intercultural

sensitivity. Compared to a control group (n=20), the authors found higher scores on additional language measures and social network questionnaires for the experimental group, although the limited number of participants qualified these results. Dewaele, Comanaru, and Faraco (2015) investigated the effects of a 2- to 4-week pre-session course at the University of Aix-Marseille in terms of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Having tested the participants (n=93) before and after the course, the results showed a significant decrease in levels of FLA and a significant increase in WTC. Finally, Eyckmans (2021) tested an application, the *Study Abroad Language Support App* (SALSA), accompanied by a preparation course to encourage student agency (Moreno Bruna and Goethals 2021). She also referred to Baker-Smemoe et al.'s (2014) conclusions, which argued for the importance of students' training on how to develop friendships and engage with cultural differences, and DeKeyser (2007) who suggested giving SA students assignments to engage in meaningful interactions. Thus, the app Eyckmans imagined incited students to write about their experience and complete little tasks while abroad as well as comment on each other's texts. The experiment proved to have encouraged student agency as the tasks incited them to develop deeper contacts with some locals and reflect on their experiences. Fixing realistic goals in advance, during the preparation course, also helped them keep up their efforts while abroad. These studies demonstrate the wide range of possible benefits of support programmes – linguistic, cultural, social, and personal – and inspired the present study. A description of the aims and content of the support programme developed for the students in the present study appears later, in the section dedicated to methodology (see Section 3.1.2).

### 2.3.5 Researching Adolescents in Study Abroad Research

With the exception of a few studies, very little research has been conducted in the context of high school students going abroad. The dearth of research is certainly due to the scarcity of SA programmes for high school students as well as the concentration of scholars in tertiary education where they can find a myriad of research participants. Nonetheless, some studies do exist, with many taking place in Germany, where SA is quite common and becoming more popular in high school. Around 20,000 students went abroad in 2009,

through sojourns coordinated by private – and often pricey – organizations (Hübner, Trautwein, and Nagengast 2021). As for Switzerland, although new programmes have recently started to emerge, SA programmes for high school students remain exceptional (Elmiger 2008; Elmiger, Siegenthaler, and Tunger 2022), and no research regarding identity development has been found. The question of age in relation to linguistic gains was raised earlier and highlighted – despite very few existing studies – the possible advantage of an easier integration into a host family and therefore richer interactions with locals (Spenader 2011; Kinginger 2013b, 2015; Moratinos-Johnston, Juan-Garau, and Noguera. 2021) (see Section 2.3.2.1(3)). The aim of this section is thus to focus specifically on identity-related issues which are specific to high school students – from 14 to 18 years old – going abroad. Adolescence is a critical stage of life, in which adolescents' sense of self is questioned even in their home language and culture. What then happens when an additional language comes into play, adding a new layer to their self and identities? As Taylor (2013, 2) noted:

It is sometimes said that learning a language means learning a new identity. Being an adolescent also means learning a new identity: the identity that one will manifest in one's community, at the hub of an intricate network of social relationships. [...] Expressing ourselves in a foreign language can also be an excellent tool for identity exploration, and that is especially relevant during adolescence, when identity exploration is of paramount importance.

Hence, it appears important first to outline the main general characteristics of adolescence resorting to selected key psychological and sociocultural concepts to see if and how it could affect their experience in a new linguistic and cultural environment, before turning to the few existing studies.

### *Implications*

To start with a brief definition, “adolescence encompasses elements of biological growth and major social role transitions, [... it] captures the notion of the growing individual who is able to take increasing responsibility, but who still needs more protection than an adult” (Sawyer et al. 2018, 223). In his ground-breaking work and theories, Erikson (1968)

wrote about adolescent identity crisis and focused on two processes: crisis and commitment. Identity crisis – which was later called explorations – refers to a period when individuals are struggling to make decisions about who they wish to be and explore themselves and their interactions with family, peers, and communities – in other words, their commitments. Erikson stated that adolescents “are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototype of the day” (128). Thus, adolescents seek to find a comfortable positioning juggling with social discourses, their parents’ and peers’ expectations, and their own aspirations. In this process of transformation and exploration of the self, Erikson also noted that adolescents can become particularly intolerant to differences as a means of protection. As they face biological and psychological changes and constantly have to redefine their positions in the social world, they can feel the need to identify strongly with some of their peers, which is often combined with the rejection of those who are *different*:

Young people can become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others who are ‘different,’ in skin colour or cultural background, in tastes and gifts, and often in entirely petty aspects of dress and gesture arbitrarily selected as the signs of an in-group or out-group. It is important to understand in Principe (which does not mean to condone in all of its manifestations) that such intolerance may be, for a while, a necessary defence against a sense of identity loss. (Erikson 1968, 132–3)

These elements appear extremely relevant in relation to SA where identity is questioned, repositioning is constant, and differences are omnipresent.

Based on Erikson’s theory of identity crisis among adolescents, several functional models were later developed. Two of them will be mentioned here: Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus’s (2008) three-dimensional model, and Bosma and Kunnen’s (2001) model, which aimed at conceptualizing the mechanisms and possible shapes of identity development. First, Crocetti, Runini, and Meeus (2008) added a third dimension – reconsideration of commitments – to the traditional first two which are commitments and in-depth exploration. More precisely, a *commitment* refers to a relatively firm choice among different possible

self-concepts, along with the self-confidence that derives from that choice; *in-depth exploration* stands for active consideration of one's present commitments through researching, talking, and thinking about them; and finally, *reconsideration* happens when adolescents are dissatisfied with their commitments and seek to revise their choices and find alternatives. The authors noted that among the adolescent population, commitments were positively associated with in-depth exploration, which was in turn positively associated with reconsideration. This shows that adolescents continue to actively explore their choices and keep examining possible alternatives. On the other hand, Bosma and Kunnen's model focused on what drives change in identity development. They theorized *conflict* as essential in the development of identity, which is itself conceived as an iterative process. Each interaction with a context is an iteration. A person's commitments and the context can fit, in which case commitments are confirmed. If there is a conflict between the two, it triggers action, which does not necessarily lead to identity development. In their model, two different types of action are possible: assimilation or accommodation. Assimilation always comes first, often automatically, as the person tries to change the situation itself or their perception of it in order to make it fit with their existing identity. If the assimilation is successful, there is no need for identity change. Accommodation, on the other hand, leads to changes in commitments. More precisely, if assimilation is not possible, people will have to accommodate their sense of self. This can happen rapidly if a conflict is very urgent, or in the long run, when repeated conflicts weaken existing commitments and allow the development of new or adjusted commitments. In the context of SA, where adolescents are almost permanently in conflict with their environment, identity issues become even more fundamental and identity development can certainly be accelerated.

### *Previous Studies*

In the field of psychology, the effects of SA on adolescent identities have only recently been touched upon specifically. Previously, the effects of SA were confined to general conclusions phrased as a disruption of continuity and a redirection of teenagers' identity development. Greischel, Noack, and Neyer (2018) were among the first to study adolescent identity development before, during, and after SA, with a specific focus on *Friends* and *Home* identities, two elements which are

known to be the most influential factors on adolescent identity development. They based their study on Crocetti, Runini, and Meeus's (2008) model of identity development in which adolescents "form, evaluate, and revise their identity by processes of commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitments" (2153). Greischel, Noack, and Neyer compared 457 German sojourners to 284 non-sojourners, all aged 15 or 16, measuring commitments and reconsiderations of their social networks 6 weeks before departure, 7 months after their arrival abroad, and again 7 months after re-entry. The comparison showed an expected difference between sojourners and non-sojourners' identity trajectories, with the latter remaining quite stable as opposed to the sojourners'. For the adolescents abroad, the authors found strong commitments to home relationships while abroad, which they interpreted as both the need for the support of parents and friends while abroad but also potentially "an attempt to distance oneself from becoming immersed in the new culture" (2162). However, once back home, adolescents showed greater reconsideration of friends and parents, through distancing themselves from certain relationships. The authors hypothesized that the sojourn may have led adolescents to reconsider some friendships and that getting back to old friendships may have been a challenge. In addition, the adolescents' distancing from their parents may have mirrored – and potentially accelerated – the natural process of seeking independence. The "coming of age" narrative, which has been reported in length among university students thus seems to be even more true for teenagers (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017, 205). Before Greischel, Noack, and Neyer (2018), and Hutteman et al. (2015) investigated German high school students' self-esteem before and after SA (n=876; medium age=16). They reported stronger increases in self-esteem for SA participants after the sojourn than for the control group (n=714), which also tends to confirm, through one particular component, the "coming of age" narrative. Hutteman et al. also noted a positive correlation between levels of self-esteem and social inclusion while abroad, highlighting, once again, the essential role of social networks during SA.

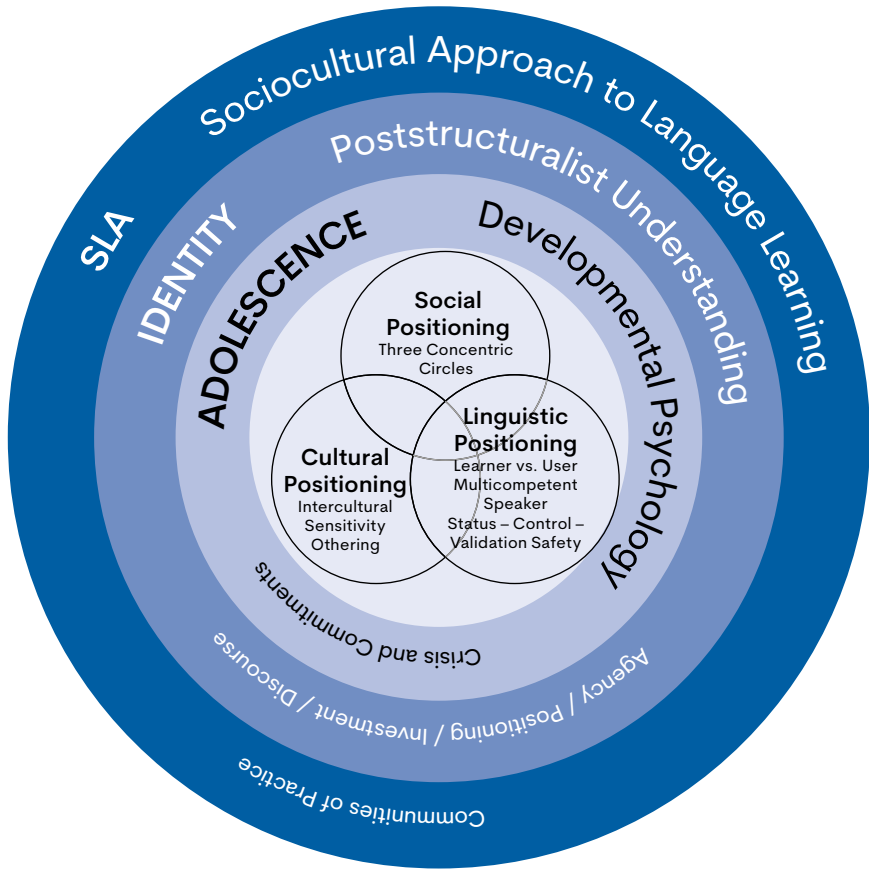
As Erikson (1968) pointed out, identification with peers is often essential to teenagers in the development of their identity and the process of detachment from their parents. Identification can take different paths and use different means, language being one of them. Grieve (2015), for example, showed that teenagers used pragmatic markers

typically used by local teenagers in order to index their social identity. Moreover, their use of pragmatic markers mirrored their integration in the target culture. Perrefort (2008) compared the representations of German university students in France and French high school students in Germany and noted that university students tended to portray themselves as marginal spectators, unable to develop meaningful relationships with locals. Consequently, they drew negative conclusions about their hosts, based on cultural stereotypes and did not identify with them at all. On the other hand, high school students demonstrated more intercultural openness and reported on many different types of interactions with hosts from all generations. These elements allowed a more fruitful experience, at least partially due to their integration within their host families. Thus, the SA experience for adolescents is a challenge added to the multiple challenges of their age where identity development is central. Almost paradoxically, we may argue that the constant redefinition of themselves may help them adapt more easily – within their host families, for example (Kinger 2013b) – and at the same time, may lead them to reject differences in certain situations (Erikson 1968). To my knowledge, no other studies focusing on adolescent identities abroad exist, and the present study aims to fill this void and bring new insights both on the impact of SA on adolescents and the impact of adolescence on SA experiences.

## 2.4 Framing the Study Abroad Experience of Adolescents: Key Concepts

In conclusion, it may be useful to propose a visual representation of the key frameworks and concepts used in the current study (see *Figure 2.5*). The objective is to frame the experiences of adolescents abroad as conceived here, progressing from SLA and broad ontological and epistemological perspectives on language learning, to considerations of identity and of adolescence, to finally reach the three specific positionings. Each new level is understood as nested within the previous one(s) – for instance, identity is explored in its relation to SLA, adolescence in its relations to identity and SLA, and so forth. All levels are outlined through their key frameworks and concepts.

Within the broad field of second language acquisition, a socio-cultural approach is favoured emphasizing the significance of social



**FIGURE 2.5** Key Frameworks and Concepts.

participation and interactions. Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice frame the analyses and understanding of students' experiences. Identity is understood in its poststructuralist definition with agency, positioning (Davies and Harré 1990), investment (Norton Pierce 1995), and discourse (Foucault 1977, 1980) as the conceptual foundations of the study. Erikson's (1968) crisis and commitments define adolescents' exploration and construction of the self in their SA context. Finally, the three positionings are defined with their key concepts. Adolescents' social positionings are examined through Coleman's (2013) three concentric circles model, and their cultural positionings through Bennett's DMIS (1986) and othering (Dervin 2012; Doerr 2017). Linguistic positionings are shaped by the concepts of learner vs user (Benson et al. 2012, 2013), the multicompetent speaker (Cook 1995), and

Pellegrino Aveni's (2005) status-control-validation-safety framework. A Venn diagram is used to illustrate the overlapping characteristics of the three positionings to display their theoretical separation. As mentioned earlier, all these frameworks and concepts played a pivotal role in shaping the study and in analysing adolescents' narratives. To a lesser extent, they were also introduced and discussed with the students, either explicitly or implicitly, during the preparation meetings.

# 3 | Data and Narrative Analysis

## 3.1 Data Collection: Participants and Support Programme

The different phases of data collection extended over a period of thirteen months. It started at the end of June 2019 with the presentation of the project to the students and ended at the end of June 2020 with the final interviews. *Table 3.1* is a visual representation of the different phases of the study. Each of them is described more specifically below.

### 3.1.1 Participants

#### *Recruitment of Participants*

Recruiting students was challenging as I did not know any of them beforehand and had to convince them that the project was worth their attention and time. I therefore presented the project as a support programme tailor-made for them, with many suggested advantages: a peer group for support, a place to share their questions and troubles, an enhanced understanding of their experiences and the English culture, everlasting memories thanks to their diary, and new friendships. I also framed the two preparation meetings as a unique occasion to meet peers and students who were just coming back from a

**TABLE 3.1** Calendar of the Different Phases of the Study.

2019							2020					
June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
Participants in CH			Participants in England						Participants in CH			
Recruitment of participants			Online diary – Online forum									Inter-views
24 June: Presentation to all BM students in Renens		Pre-prog. questionnaires 19-20 Aug: Prep. meetings							Covid-19 pandemic: students return home		Post-programme questionnaires	

similar experience, as well as discuss key elements of study abroad. I presented the programme orally, in French, to the students and their parents at an information meeting organized by the high school in charge of the bilingual Matura programme. After a few weeks, I sent all of them an email as a friendly reminder, and then a second email targeting male students only as none had initially replied. In the end, 9 students – 8 female and 1 male – agreed to take part in the project.

*Pre-programme Questionnaire*

An online questionnaire was sent to the nine participants before the preparation meetings. Its aim was threefold. First, participants had to provide some personal information, such as age, phone number, name of UK school, etc. Then, some questions addressed their personal and family background in terms of language and education. Finally, participants were asked about their motivations and objectives, as well as their initial apprehensions regarding their future SA experience. Their motivations, objectives, and apprehensions were compiled and helped in the preparation of the introduction meetings.

### *Participants' Profiles*

The nine participants were all volunteers and decided to take part in the project for personal reasons. They were all second-year high school students, aged 16 at the time of their departure, and they came from different parts of the canton of Vaud, in Switzerland. Eight participants were female and only one was male, which could be a sign that the different aspects of the project corresponded more to the wishes and expectations of female participants, but which also reflected the percentage of male participation in the bilingual Matura more generally. More precisely, out of the 75 students going to England in 2019, only 22 were male, which is approximately 30%. *Table 3.2* below presents some basic information on the participants' profiles linked to school, languages, and their socio-cultural background.

### 3.1.2 Collecting Data: The Support Programme

#### *Preparation Meetings*

The preparation meetings consisted of two sessions of about 3 hours, two afternoons in a row, on 18 and 19 August, approximately one week before the students' departure. They took place in a classroom at the HEP Vaud in Lausanne; the tables were placed in a circle to avoid having all the students facing me and to favour discussion; food and drinks were provided and within reach at all times to create a relaxed atmosphere. The content of these two meetings derived from previous research and studies which were developed earlier in the theoretical framework. I referred to different discourses and theoretical frameworks which I expanded on, without necessarily giving precise references. First, the popular discourse of immersion – which conveys the idea that going to a country where the additional language is spoken will automatically lead to language and cultural gains – was contrasted with the need for agency which underlaid most of our discussions (Norton Peirce 1995; Ryan and Mercer 2011; Schedel 2021). Indirectly referring to Kubota's (2016) social imaginary, the four main perceived advantages of SA were questioned: language skills, intercultural competence, personal growth, and identity, and to a lesser degree career opportunities. Then, the three positionings were addressed. On a social level, the large array of learning benefits gained from interactions with locals were explained but balanced with the natural need for co-nationals (Coleman 2013). The

**TABLE 3.2** Biographical Information of the 9 Participants.

	Age prior dep. (YOB)	Specific Option (OS)	Prior SA experience	Family or friends with BM experience	Language(s) spoken at home
MANON	16 (2002)	Economics and Law	2 weeks in Germany (ELEV.ch)	–	French
BILLIE	16 (2003)	Economics and Law	2 weeks in Malta	–	Cantonese, French
CHLOE	16 (2003)	Economics and Law	–	Older sister	French
ROSE	16 (2002)	Physics and Maths	4 weeks in London	Older sister	Swiss-German, German, French
AUDREY	16 (2002)	Physics and Maths	2 weeks in Germany (ELEV.ch)	–	French
MELANIE	16 (2002)	Economics and Law	–	–	French
ALBERT	16 (2002)	Biology and Chemistry	–	–	Portuguese, French
LEA	16 (2002)	Spanish	–	–	French, Spanish, Italian
LILY	16 (2003)	Economics and Law	2 weeks in Germany and 4 weeks in the USA	–	French (Italian)

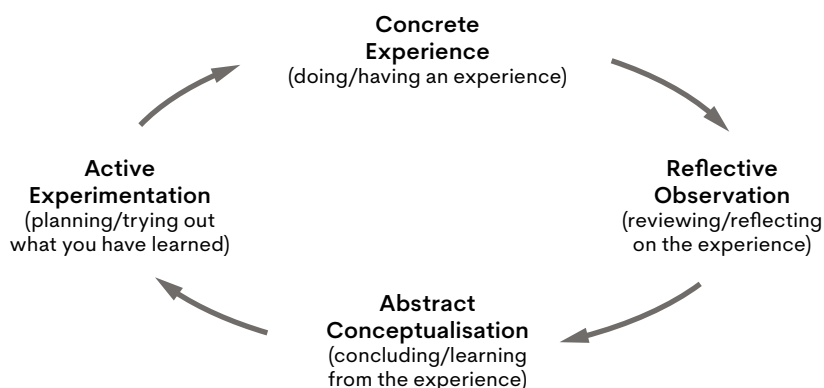
concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) was alluded to to describe the naturally slow process of integration. On a cultural level, the meaning of culture and stereotypes were discussed before introducing Bennett’s DMIS (1986). The paradox of learning through and about others, which makes learning necessarily about “othering” (Doerr 2012, 2014, 2017), was also briefly addressed. Finally, on a linguistic level, we discussed the possible impact of a foreign language on our identities and (self-)perception (Pellegrino Aveni 2005). Cook’s (1995, 1999) idea of the *multicompetent speaker* was used to offer

Mother's L1	Mother's additional language(s)	Mother's highest qualification	Father's L1	Father's additional language(s)	Father's highest qualification
French	–	Master's degree	French	–	Master's degree
Cantonese	French, English, Mandarin	Higher professional degree	Cantonese	French, Mandarin	Compulsory school degree
French	–	Professional degree	French	English	Master's degree
Swiss-German, German	French, English	Professional degree	Swiss-German, German	French, English	Master's degree
French	–	Master's degree	French	English, German	Doctoral degree
French	–	Professional degree	French	–	Professional degree
Portuguese (Brazil)	French	Professional degree	Serbian	Portuguese, French	Compulsory school degree
Spanish	French, Italian	Master's degree	Italian	French, Spanish, English	Doctoral degree
French	English	Master's degree	French	English, German, Italian	Master's degree

students a positive representation of themselves, contrasting with the deficient non-native speaker (Davies 2013). Raising students' awareness of their plurilingual identity was also believed to help them construct their "ideal selves" and increase motivation for additional language learning (Alastair 2017; Dörnyei 2007). Moreover, the concepts of language learners and language users enriched the theoretical references and discussions, as well as strategies to overcome language difficulties. Each topic was selected as a way to think about and question the general discourse of study abroad – with its possibly positive incentive but

also its limiting scope. As mentioned earlier, these concepts and frameworks were not presented in an academic way, with proper references and detailed explanations. They were tackled from a very pragmatic perspective and illustrated with experiences from students, myself, or other research participants.

Linked to the need for personal agency, another important epistemological idea underpinned the two meetings and the different discussions. Learning was globally conceived and presented as emerging from interactions but also as experiential. Thus, Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984, 41), which conceives learning as a process and knowledge as "created through the transformation of experience" and resulting "from the combination of grasping and transforming experience," was used implicitly and explicitly during the meetings (see *Figure 3.1* below). The objective was to make participants aware of their active role in learning and envisage it as a circular process, encompassing an initial experience, reflection, and a new conceptualization of the event before experimenting with it again.



**FIGURE 3.1** The Experiential Knowledge Circle (Kolb 1984).

The first meeting was designed to have a more practical, rather than theoretical focus: it involved getting to know each other, the importance of objectives, possible language difficulties and strategies to overcome them, and finally language identity – in other words, who am I and who do I become when I speak another language. Five students who had just returned from a year in England were also present, and they shared their experiences and answered participants' questions. The second meeting was centred around culture with several activities

targeting different interpretations of reality, stereotypes, intercultural competence with Bennett's DMIS, and culture shock. The objectives of these meetings were to familiarize participants with issues related to language, culture, and identity and to warn them of or allow them to anticipate possible difficulties. Although I was leading the different discussions and activities, participants played an essential role as their interventions and questions nourished the debate. At the end of the second meeting, I also introduced the online platform which they would be using and asked them to write their first post, restating their goals and objectives for their upcoming stay abroad.

#### *Online Platform: Diary and Forum*

Once in England, participants had access to an online platform specifically designed for the project by a high school student who was looking for experience in computer programming. The initial idea was to use an existing platform, but after a few weeks of exploration with experts, it appeared that none had the necessary interfaces or were easily/freely accessible for high school students at the time. Thus, the tailor-made platform was created with two main interfaces: a personal diary and a forum. Students knew that in their diary, I was the only one who had access, except for themselves, and that in the forum, they could share stories with their peer group. They were asked to write in either of the interfaces regularly to share their experiences, whether to describe, react to, or analyse a particular situation. The idea was to develop critical reflection upon their social, linguistic, and cultural experiences (Elola and Oskoz 2008; Stewart 2010; Lee 2010, 2012; Belnap et al. 2018; Eyckmans 2021). In addition, I occasionally sent them little tasks or questions to prompt their writing. These did not usually generate answers from all participants, but it did from a few at least. After a few weeks, I also replied to most of their posts as a way to take in their narratives or ask for more details, with my aim being to encourage them to continue writing. As Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli (2003, 591–2) stated, “in order to obtain reliable and valid data, diary studies must achieve a level of participant commitment and dedication rarely required in other types of research studies.” In the end, the quantity (from 3,000 to 9,000 words) and quality of the entries were suitable for the aim of the investigation. Moreover, periods in which entries became scarce or inexistent were considered meaningful in regard to students' different positionings.

Diaries present many advantages and are particularly useful when dealing with identity. As Rose (2020, 349) noted, diaries “enable the investigation of behaviours and thoughts surrounding events and experiences in their real-world and unprompted context.” As such, they give the researcher privileged and unobtrusive access to the subjects’ thoughts, uncovering what occupies their minds and how – provided the answer was not prompted by a specific question, which was only occasionally done in the present study. Interestingly, diaries allow agency to be transferred to participants (Rose 2020) and as such offer a unique opportunity for them to speak their mind. Another advantage presented by diaries is the near synchronicity between the lived experience and its account (Dörnyei 2007). Unlike interviews, which ask participants to recall experiences weeks or months later, diary entries can be written just after the event with a more precise recollection of it and more vivid emotions. Moreover, diaries fulfil a dual function as a research instrument on the one hand, but first and foremost as a tool for personal reflection on the other. In this research project, diaries were presented more as a personal tool for reflection, as well as a place to store memories, rather than as a research instrument. That being said, the impact of the researcher as well as the research context was not underestimated and was always carefully examined. Data coming from diary entries was thus considered as self-reflection, addressed to oneself but also to the researcher. Each participant’s diary was thoroughly analysed and cautiously positioned on this continuum. It is also important to note that when present, the “dialogue” between participants and the researcher was asynchronous. Consequently, entries were able to be reread, corrected, or modified before being posted and questions considered at length before giving a reply.

#### *Post-programme Questionnaire*

This second questionnaire was sent out after their return and was designed to assess their participation in the project and its different elements – the online platform and the preparation meetings. It was kept anonymous to ensure students answered as honestly as possible and was carried out before the interviews as a preparation process, making the participants think about different aspects before being questioned orally. A first set of questions targeted participants’ use of the website (to learn more about the general advantages and

disadvantages of the interfaces), their motivations for writing, and some of its perceived benefits. A second set of questions sought to evaluate the preparation meetings generally and revisited the different topics discussed to assess their relevance.

### *Interview*

The interviews were conducted in June 2020 after a period of two months in Switzerland following their emergency return at the end of March, the lock-down, and their learning that they would not be able to go back to England. To further prepare the students for the interview, I sent them a copy of all their posts and asked them to read them, thinking about how accurately they represented their stay and their global experience, and what could be missing or overrepresented. Personally, I also prepared each interview individually by reading their posts closely and several times. The interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes and were conducted via Skype and recorded. They were semi-structured as I had prepared a guide which directed the interview, but I remained free to pick up different elements mentioned by the students to reorganize the questions or delve into more specific aspects. The questions remained open-ended and general to allow students to frame their answers according to what was important for them. Once a question was asked, I let the student answer it freely, prompting them as little as possible. I also let the students talk about anything the question made them think of before redirecting them if necessary. As a result, the interviews sometimes have different foci with some aspects developed extensively by some participants and less, or not at all, by others.

Interviews are the most common method used in qualitative research and are particularly relevant when discussing individuals' experiences or exploring "self-reports of behaviours" (Rolland, Dewaele, and Costa 2020, 279). Although frequent, their specificities must be questioned and taken into consideration as they can greatly influence the data. First, "memories are reconstructions of the past, not simply retrieval" (Polkinghorne 2005, 143) and therefore, the time between the experience and the telling of it must be considered. For example, the present position and mood of participants can play a role in the narration. Looking back on an event, the focus will thus not be on an accurate account of the experience itself but more on the meaning the latter had – or has – for the interviewee. Then, the

synchronicity provided in the interview between the question and the answer also marks a clear difference to the diary as they are expected to give a rather spontaneous answer in interviews. This certainly has implications on the stories told. Moreover, although the interviews were conducted via Skype, there is still a kind of physical or visual proximity in the interaction which enhances the interviewer's influence. The stories told in interviews are often highly negotiated in the interaction in terms of what can be said and for how long. Linguistic and non-linguistic signs will encourage participants to linger and develop one subject or, on the contrary, shorten another and move to the next. The genre of the interview itself – which we are all familiar with through the media – unconsciously invites the interviewee to follow a set of rules in terms of form and content and to try to meet the researcher's expectations (De Fina 2009). As Block (2000, 758) noted, interviews need to be understood as social phenomena more than cognitive ones: interview data might be seen as "*representational* events or as *presentational* of the individuals speaking" more than as veridical descriptions. Nevertheless, if the interviewer asks general and open-ended questions, interviewees still have a considerable degree of freedom and their answers remain intrinsically personal.

### *Primary and Secondary Data*

Students' online diaries and interviews are the primary sources of data used in the analysis. These two types of data present narratives of quality and complement each other. As explained above, diaries provide proximity with the experiences and distance from the researcher, whereas interviews provide the opposite, distance from the experiences but proximity with the researcher. Put together, they offer a comprehensive view and understanding of each participant's global experience. The posts on the forum are only used sporadically, and only for one participant because of its relevance. In the analysis, these sparse posts will systematically be specified as coming from the forum, and understood as such, i.e., a note to the researcher but mainly and firstly a note to their peers. As for the questionnaires, a factual or short piece of information – such as participants' objectives or their previous experience abroad – may have been drawn from them when relevant, but this was not done systematically. Finally, the post-programme questionnaire was used to assess the support given to students and suggest future interventions.

### 3.1.3 Researcher's Role

As stated above, I had no previous acquaintance with any of the participants before the beginning of the study, none of them being former students, for example. I met them all for the first time during the introduction meetings and our relationships developed from there. At the time, I clearly positioned myself in many different ways. First, I mentioned my position as a researcher and a PhD student to give legitimacy to my project and their participation in it. Then, I also talked about my position as a high school English teacher to let them know that I was aware of their curriculum and that I could possibly help them with practical aspects related to school, such as their Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), for example. I also talked to them about my different stays abroad, including one as an au pair after high school in Philadelphia, a second while at university to the north of New York City, and a last one only a few years before in London, as a family experience. The aim was again to legitimize my position as their “advice giver” or “SA expert” and to allow connections through more personal experiences. Finally, I introduced myself as a mother to let them know that I was capable of empathy and could also take on a “caring role” if necessary. These different positionings were an attempt to offer different gateways to the relationships and indeed, they all developed differently throughout the year. These different relationships, with their different positionings, will be analysed and clearly stated before the data analysis of each participant. After the introduction meetings, we never met in person again; we communicated through the online platform, Whatsapp, or via email. The final interviews were also conducted with the help of the online software, Skype. The distinctive “distance” created by these devices certainly played a role in the different positions I was able to endorse and those I was assigned, and will be kept in mind.

## 3.2 Narratives and Narrative Analyses

As the different methods used are inscribed into a narrative approach, a brief presentation of what is meant by narratives and narrative inquiry follows. The relevance and assets of these methods in the present study are also explained in some detail.

### 3.2.1 Defining Narratives and Narrative Inquiry

The fundamental characteristic of narrative inquiry is the significant role played by **narratives** – or stories – in its field of research. However, the limits of the field and its different concepts and approaches are “notoriously hard to define” (Barkhuizen 2013, 2), and consequently, definitions of what narratives are vary greatly among researchers. For instance, narratives can be found in short conversations about a specific topic, event, or character, in a longer story focused on a specific aspect of one’s life, or in the narrative of a person’s whole life (Chase 2005). Whether “big” or “small”, the stories have their own value and can be used for specific purposes (Bamberg 2004; Freeman 2006; Watson 2007; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008). In their seminal work, Labov and Waletzky (1967) based their definition of narratives on structural properties: temporal sequencing, the presence of some narrative components (orientation, complication, resolution, and coda), and the idea of evaluation from the narrator to guide the interpretation. Although most scholars have recognized their work as launching narrative inquiry, many have criticized a limitation to canonical narratives (see, for example, Bamberg 1997) and the total absence of interactional context in their model (Schegloff 1997; Ochs and Capps 2001). As people tell stories as a way of “doing” something, such as entertaining, criticizing, complaining, etc., a lack of context deprives narratives of one of their central features. However, the multiplicity of possible contexts undeniably hinders a clear and well-defined definition of narratives (De Fina 2009).

As the structural properties of narratives are difficult to define, some scholars chose to focus on their functional properties instead. Telling or writing a story is a cognitive activity, a meaning-making activity which helps narrators understand their experiences and organize them into a coherent whole. Most researchers agree with Connelly and Clandinin (2012, 477) who wrote that:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful.

Temporality is central to narratives, and Kramp (2004, 10) noted that “[s]tories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect

us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future". The different time references – past, present, and future – parallel different dimensions – significance, value, and intention, with the past conveying *significance*, the present *value*, and the future *intention* (Carr 1986, cited in Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 9). These dimensions may help the narrator and the researcher understand the meanings of narratives and their purposes.

Although narratives are a cognitive activity in the sense that they are a way to make sense of an experience, they are also a *social* activity as the narrator always addresses a close or distant audience, with a particular intention (Barkhuizen 2013). As such, narratives capture the context as much as they capture the individual (Moen 2006). Similarly, Esin (2011, 94) noted that:

Narratives are seen as the vehicle through which we talk about our world, lives, and selves. Narratives do not simply express some independent, individual reality. Rather they help construct the reality within relationships between the narrator and their external world. Narratives are produced in social interactions between individuals; they are not privately created.

Thus, individuals are not free to create their own story but are always influenced by the interactional context and different types of narratives present and available in their environment and their culture, both in terms of form and content. Experience is not simply referred to in a narrative, it is constructed – intentionally, for a specific audience, but also unconsciously inspired by models and discourses. Along these lines and following a dialogic Bakhtinian perspective, Bruner (1987, 12–13) suggested that “mimesis between life so-called and narrative is a two-way affair [...] narrative imitates life, life imitates narratives.” Thus, the richness and complexity of narratives can be perceived holistically when conceived as a cognitive and social activity.

The great variety of narratives – and definitions of narratives – consequently leads to a high diversity in **narrative inquiry** research. First and foremost, narratives can be perceived through different lenses. Chase (2005, 656–57) defined five of them, which can be combined. First, researchers can understand narratives as “a distinct form of discourse”, with objects and events presented over a period of time and organized into a meaningful whole. Second, it can be viewed as “verbal

action” such as explaining, entertaining, complaining, and so on. Third, narratives can be understood as “enabled and constrained by [...] social resources and circumstances”. Fourth, stories are seen as “socially-situated interactive performances” where the role of the setting and the listener are taken into account. Finally, researchers can “view themselves as narrators” developing interpretations and re-writing participants’ narrations. All five lenses are interconnected, and emphasis can be put on one or the other – or several – depending on the researcher’s approach. These approaches are also multiple, but in any case, narrative inquiry should be about interpreting how narrators make sense of their experience and be more about understanding than explaining (Kramp 2004). As stated previously, narratives are rich and complex empirical data and should be analysed comprehensively. Pavlenko (2007) convincingly argued for researchers to develop specific theoretical frameworks which allow a coherent analysis of content, form, and context. Provided this fundamental aspect is respected, many different approaches are available.

### 3.2.2 Assets of Narrative Inquiry in the Present Study

The different features of narratives as a cognitive and social activity presented above clearly show that narratives are a unique way to learn about people’s identities, hence their relevance in the present study. As narratives are understood as a meaning-making activity – a way for students to give sense to their experiences and organize them into a meaningful whole – they offer an interesting path to students’ minds and an understanding of their experiences. Moen (2006, 63) underlined that a narrative approach is crucial for exploring “the different subjective positions from which we experience and interpret the world”. More precisely, narratives reflect students’ positionings and as such, give precious information on their projected identities. It is clearly also important to identify the positions taken by narrators to understand the interactions and the appropriated resources and/or discourses (Esin 2011). Students’ choices of topics and anecdotes, words and grammar, or length and structure are all signs of particular positions that need to be understood within the micro- (students’ social and cultural context), meso- (students’ interaction with the researcher), and macro- (references to social and cultural discourses, master narratives) contexts. A full analysis can thus propose an

extensive portrait of students’ identities as shown in *Table 3.3* below. It is, however, useful to remind ourselves of the “emergent, situated, and negotiated nature of all identity claims in discourse” and not to equate narratives to identities in a way that is too straightforward (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015, 3). Finally, narratives are a powerful tool in the data collection process; they are “transformative, as they shift the power relationship between researchers and participants, [...] making the object of the inquiry into the subject and granting the subject both agency and voice” (Pavlenko 2007, 180). Feeling empowered, students may develop different – and potentially more positive – perspectives on their experiences and consequently different subject positions.

**TABLE 3.3** The Multiple Levels to Consider When Doing Narrative Inquiry.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS					
MICRO-level	Impact of TIME	PAST		PRESENT	FUTURE
		DIARY	Lived experiences abroad	Telling and making choices	Growing into an imagined future (within the SA experience and beyond)
		INTERVIEW	Lived experiences abroad and through writing	Retelling and making new choices based on what they have become	Growing into an imagined future (beyond the SA experience)
		SIGNIFICANCE		VALUE	INTENTION
MESO-level	Impact of RESEARCHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative relationship between researcher and research subjects, importance of a balance of power, researcher needs to engage in participants’ lives, who are granted a voice and agency</li> <li>• Constant telling and retelling</li> <li>• Construction and reconstruction through inquiry</li> </ul>			
MACRO-level	Impact of DISCOURSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing among pre-existing narratives about SA, school, culture, family, etc.</li> <li>• Incorporation of a conceptual repertoire and a location, leading to the relevant discursive practice</li> </ul>			

When analysing narratives, stories need to be conceived as parts of a whole. In this way, narratives allow the analysis of individual details and complexities, rather than looking for predetermined categories (Esin 2011). As such, it permits a detailed exploration of each student’s experiences before a possible comparison of students. Rosenthal

(2018), for example, warned against the decontextualization of segments in content or thematic analysis. Similarly, Chase (2005, 663) stated that “rather than locating distinct themes *across* interviews, narrative researchers listen first to the voices *within* each narrative.” Thus, meaning must be found *within* the narrative, in the superposition of stories, voices, or subject positions. These superpositions may result in a great diversity of subject positions, ambiguity, or even contradictions, and that should not be seen as a problem.

Our particular versions of events and people as constructed through narrative function in several ways to bring order and coherence, if only temporarily, to what is otherwise a largely chaotic experience of the world. (Pomerantz and Kearny 2012, 224)

The coherence – or illusion of coherence – brought by a narrative is seen as a construction. Finding contradictions is therefore normal, even expected, and should not be hidden by the researcher but, on the contrary, highlighted and understood as highly relevant. It also leads to the result that narrative inquiry researchers focus more on individual lives and experiences, with their particularities, and less on generalizations about whole groups of people. Clandinin and Huber (2010, 14) underlined that:

The knowledge developed from narrative inquiries is textured by particularity and incompleteness; knowledge that leads less to generalizations and certainties and more toward wondering about and imagining alternative possibilities.

In the present study, students’ narratives are therefore viewed as a telling or re-telling of past experiences whose closure is known and co-constructed – by themselves and the researcher – into a coherent whole. The experience narrated is still relevant for itself but worth more as a token of the students’ identities and positionings.

Leaving aside the focus on identity, narrative inquiry allows for a wide choice of approaches, where narratives can be coherently displayed as the process and the product (Benson 2014). Polkinghorne (1995) distinguished two forms of narrative inquiry: “analysis of narratives”, which he defined as conventional content or thematic analysis, and “narrative analysis”, where the results of the analysis are presented as a story. Benson (2018) supplemented Polkinghorne’s distinction by

defining three main approaches based on (1) content and thematic analysis of narratives – where narratives are the source of data, (2) discourse analysis of narratives – where context is important and the narrative is understood within the context of interaction, and (3) narrative analysis – where the results are presented as a narrative as well. Benson's three approaches are particularly relevant here as they encompass the different steps taken in the present study. In order to conduct a full analysis covering content, form, and context, the data are analysed from different angles available within the broad field of narrative inquiry. Narratives are thus the common thread connecting all elements from the students' narration of their experience to the interpretation of it and to the final presentation of the results.

### 3.2.3 Narrative Analyses Centred on Positioning

To explore students' identities, *positioning* (Davis and Harré 1990) was applied throughout the analyses. Firstly, it gauged students' general positioning within the support programme. The use of their diary was examined in terms of frequency and length of posts, as well as the way they addressed the researcher, to measure students' implication in the project quantitatively and qualitatively. Secondly, positioning was used to measure the degree of attachment or detachment with different social groups and the English culture and language. It helped draw a general portrait of each participant based on the recurrence, the sequencing, and the quality of the different positionings. This portrait does not claim to present a comprehensive view of students' experiences abroad but reflects the image they wanted to project. Finally, the Positioning Analysis Framework (Bamberg 1997) was used to analyse an excerpt of each student's narrative. This last method of analysis is a more fine-grained reading of one extract and seeks to understand whether the way things were expressed and narrated corresponds to the general profile and what was being said. The analysis moved from the manifest to the latent meaning of the texts.



## 4 | Adolescents Abroad

### 4.1 Student Narratives of Their Study Abroad Experience

The following narratives are my re-writings of the nine participants' experiences. They are not presented following a strict logic, but they are grouped according to the main general focus of their narratives, which is highlighted in the choice of the extracts analysed. More precisely, the first four narratives – Manon, Melanie, Billie, and Chloé – focus more on their social experiences whereas the next two – Rose and Audrey – tend to centre more on their cultural experiences. Then, Albert describes his linguistic positionings in more length, and the last two – Lea and Lily – tend to be more global and present the impact of the SA experiences on themselves and their teenage identities and evolution.

#### 4.1.1 MANON

*General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher*

*Diary*

Manon wrote very regularly in her diary and her entries were generally long and detailed. As *Table 4.1* shows, there is no significant break

between the entries, either in time or quantity. Of all the students, Manon wrote the most in terms of number of words.

TABLE 4.1 Manon’s Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August		September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31		1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts	3		2		3	4	3	2		1	1	1	3		2	1	2	1	29
No of words	551		462		653	725	756	659		780	241	603	619		1100	504	794	560	9007

When Manon started writing, she clearly had in mind that I would be reading her texts, as she gave me information such as “Fanny is my twin sister, Lisa my younger sister...” and she once said that she was writing “emails”, not a diary, which clearly implies a recipient. She answered most of my group questions or incitements to write but she also frequently wrote voluntarily, explaining what was going on in her life. Her posts are personal as she often expressed her feelings – both positive and negative – and used her diary as a tool to reflect on her emotions, step back from her problems, and come up with ideas and strategies to solve them – a clear indication of the value of the research project for her. During the interview, Manon made the comment that her diary was more negative than positive, as she mainly wrote when she had difficulties or when she was feeling sad. She added that she felt like some happy moments were missing, and that she had given too much weight to more difficult ones, an opinion she then qualified saying that after a few months, she only wrote down the good memories, but it was important not to forget about the bad ones either. Throughout the year, I replied to her posts regularly – although not systematically – which she thanked me for twice, first in November and then again in February, where she added that my advice helped her. Overall, she said that she enjoyed writing, and she only occasionally forced herself to do so because it was important for her to carry through on the commitment she had made. Manon also had a second diary, her own, in which she described the different activities she did with her friends; however, she said that she kept the stories about language and her feelings for the study. All these elements show that Manon felt comfortable writing for my project and shared important and significant parts of her experience with me. Although the study influenced her choice of subjects to some degree, she felt free to discuss various elements from a very personal perspective.

*Interview*

In her interview, Manon also looked comfortable, as she had no difficulties answering my questions in great detail. She was happy to develop her answers and took time to do so as shown in *Table 4.2* below.

**TABLE 4.2** Manon’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 64.2 min 9’551 words 142 turns				
		Number of words	Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Manon	8’044	113	84,2
	Interviewer	1’507	21	15,8

Not only are Manon’s replies long but they are also very personal and centre on her emotions, paralleling her diary. Overall, although I mostly followed my interview guide, she sometimes introduced topics which were important for her, and we took time to explore them. Moreover, as the questions remained general, leading to many possible answers, Manon was able to make them her own, which she did. Hesitations were rare and all questions were taken seriously. Manon looked happy remembering her experience and talking about it. The way she sometimes looked up – disconnecting from the present and the interaction to relive some memories – also showed that she was relaxed and tried to give appropriate and precise answers.

*The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

*Social Positioning*

For Manon, **her peers** – i.e., the other Swiss students in the same programme – were central and indispensable from the very beginning of the experience as she “spotted them right away” and felt happy and relieved by their presence. It was almost “love at first sight”, and although she had not imagined staying with the other Swiss students beforehand, it became obvious when they met that “despite their differences, they would stick together because they spoke the same language” and because they were living a similar experience. The other Swiss students became Manon’s “new family” and thanks to them, the first month went by without any feelings of homesickness.<sup>2Mal</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In this Chapter 4, the notes refer to data extracts (in French), available on the publisher’s website.

Throughout the rest of her stay, whenever she was homesick, she felt grateful for their presence and their readiness to support and comfort her. She spent all of her time at school with them, as well as after school. They would also go out together at least once during the weekend and had a lot of fun together. There were 9 of them, 6 female and 3 male students, so there was always at least one of them willing to meet after school for coffee or go to London for a daytrip, for example. Manon positioned herself from the start as a “family girl”, very close to her parents and siblings, and each successive separation, first in September and then after each holiday, became increasingly difficult for her. To some extent, Manon’s strong feeling of belonging to her peer group acted as a substitute for her absent family. She mentioned it herself on several occasions. For example, on a birthday in November, she felt extremely sad not to be sharing it with her twin sister, but her friends saved the day for her and made it special. One friend in particular listened to her and comforted her, and the others’ presence had the same effect. Manon recounted a similar situation on Valentine’s Day, where they had decided to offer each other little presents. She really enjoyed that time chatting and laughing with her friends because in February, she often felt rather sad, away from her family. Moreover, the different registers and functions she attributes to her friends – such as a comforting presence, reliability, affection, and tenderness – appear to be similar to those attributed to her family to varying degrees.<sup>Ma2</sup>

Although she was surprised after the first month that she didn’t miss her family too much, busy as she was with discovering her new environment and enjoying her new independence, **Manon’s family** rapidly gained importance in her experience, leading to short periods of a day or two to longer ones of a week or more when she felt sad and homesick. This started during her first holidays, in October, when Manon’s mother went climbing with her siblings. Then her twin sister went to Portugal, which made her feel like she was “losing her even more”. Interestingly, this episode was correlated with her having to stay home because she had no more money and could not accompany her friends on their trips to London and Crawley. She realized that she “used” her friends to make up for the absence of her family and felt extremely sad and lonely for the first time.<sup>Ma3</sup>

Similar feelings governed the rest of Manon’s stay with more difficult periods after each new visit to or from her family. Going back to England after the Christmas holidays was very difficult as the

excitement linked to the surprise and discovery of her new environment was gone. Therefore, she “could not find an emotion to replace sadness”. It did not take too long to re-adapt to her life in England, but she often felt nostalgic. She found joy and comfort in anticipating and preparing her mother and sisters’ following visit in February. The visit was great. Manon really enjoyed seeing them and felt that this little trip “brought them even closer together”. Taking them to the airport was excruciating, and Manon cried at the airport and on the whole bus-ride home. After that, things became even harder for her as she had the feeling that now that her family had been part of her life in England, she missed them even more, as she expected them to still be part of her experience. She said that previously “she had two separate worlds and now they were all mixed up.” The following week was extremely hard, and Manon found it difficult to “stay positive”. She saw her twin sister again for a weekend at the end of February; she flew to France for a friend’s birthday party, and she spent the flight back crying, hurt by the separation and missing her sister deeply. For Manon, seeing her family three times between Christmas and March tended to make things harder as she missed them more and more. On the other hand, the period was also harder as the thrill of being independent in a new environment was gone and new stresses appeared, linked to mock exams, poor results, and the pressure to pass final exams.<sup>Ma4</sup>

Manon thus coped with the absence of her family by spending time with her Swiss friends, sharing happy and more difficult times. **Her host family** could have played a role in this, but Manon chose to keep them at a distance and not to confide in them. Overall, she felt welcome in this new family and recognized their efforts to integrate her. They were friendly and supportive, and she felt comfortable at home in their house. She developed a closer relationship with one of her host sisters who was a year older than her. For example, she went with her to visit the Harry Potter Museum, a birthday gift from her mother. She also had a friendly relationship with her host mother, with whom she had some nice conversations, but she never saw them as a substitute family. She spent most of her time at home in her room, except for meals, and never went into the living-room.<sup>Ma5</sup>

Another reason for her slight distance from her host family can be found in her inability to express herself fully in English, to express the complexity of her emotions and what she was going through. What was almost natural with her new Swiss friends in French was harder

in English with her host family. Manon thus decided to position herself not as a full member of the family, but as a guest who was there to learn English. While she blamed her lack of vocabulary for her inability to share some parts of her life with her host family, Manon also relished her moments with Sophie, her host sister, as well as those with her host mother. For her, they represented unique occasions to speak English and improve her language skills as she did not develop friendships with other English students.<sup>Ma6</sup>

Her relations with **local students** were extremely sporadic and remained mainly superficial. She tried to establish relationships with students sitting next to her in class, but she was never really successful. She partly blamed them for not wanting to meet new friends but also admitted that once she had a Swiss friend with her in class, she preferred to stay with them. She nevertheless managed to have lunch three or four times with one student from her maths class, but they never met outside school because she was too reserved – Manon as much as the local student – and they would not have felt comfortable. Towards the end of the stay, Manon was happy to have made a new English friend, not by herself but with her group of Swiss friends. The relationship was not able to develop, however, because the stay came to an end, but she had been looking forward to integrating this new person into their group as it would have been an incitement to speak English more frequently.<sup>Ma7</sup>

**To sum up**, Manon developed a real and strong bond with the other Swiss students, positioning herself primarily as a member of this peer group. Through this strong attachment she tried to balance her recurring and invasive homesickness. To some extent and with relative success, Manon used her new friendships to compensate for the absence of her family. When struggling with her need to see her family, their presence was highly reassuring. She kept her distance with her host family, enjoying only short moments during meals, but felt unable to share deeper emotions, nor was she willing to engage in more activities with them. A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding her relationships with local students, as she enjoyed the odd discussion with some classmates but never developed any stronger relationships.

### *Cultural Positioning*

Manon rarely talked about the English culture, except to justify some students' behaviour at the beginning of the year. She had not expected

the English students to be so distant with her or with the other students in the class and justified it as a cultural difference. Positioning herself as a Swiss student, she imagined that in Switzerland, students would have wanted to make new friends and moreover, would have helped anybody speaking a different language. But she accepted the situation, understanding the fact that “people needed more time to adapt” as a cultural phenomenon.<sup>Ma8</sup>

Speaking about school more specifically, she saw differences in the teaching methods and although she struggled with them at the beginning, especially in mathematics, she started to appreciate the “English methods” in some of her classes, especially in literature, where her teacher was “passionate” about the subject and very lively. Moreover, local students were very interested and invested in their classes, as they only had two or three subjects, which made the classroom a favourable environment for learning.<sup>Ma9</sup>

Despite these isolated elements, Manon did not mention or comment on any other cultural differences, probably due to the fact that she spent most of her time with her Swiss friends or in her room at home. Investigating the English culture was not a priority for her; discovering a new culture was not part of her initial objectives.

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Before her arrival in England, Manon felt stressed because she believed that her level of English was low, as her grades were below average, and she felt inferior compared to her representation of a typical participant in the bilingual programme who she believed should be more fluent. Upon arrival, however, she realised that she knew more than she thought and could understand and express herself better than expected. As she moved from being a *learner* of English in her Swiss high school to being a *user* of English in England, she was initially reassured to realise that she could do things in and with English.<sup>Ma10</sup>

As she arrived in her host family, she was also reassured by their positive comments on her English skills. More precisely, the family told her that they were expecting someone who could hardly say and understand anything and were thus positively surprised. As a result, Manon felt comfortable, or rather more comfortable speaking English with them than with any other people, a feeling that remained throughout her stay to some extent. However, she never managed to feel completely comfortable with them, as they did not become close, nor did

they share a great deal. Her host family were the people with whom she was forced to speak English on a daily basis, and on the one hand, she enjoyed it, as she saw it as an opportunity to learn and improve. Whenever she engaged in longer conversations with a family member, she felt pride and happiness because of her successful performance and also because she felt she was getting to know the family better. On the other hand, she only invested minimally in these relationships, due partially to the language barrier as mentioned earlier.<sup>Ma11</sup>

Her initial feeling of inferiority was, however, more difficult to overcome when she was with her Swiss friends. At some point during the first few months, a friend of hers suggested that they should speak English when together in order to practise more. Although she saw the experiment as a good idea – because she realised that spending all her time with her peers “was not very good for her English proficiency” – Manon was really “scared”. She perceived herself as the worst English speaker among her group of peers, with the worst accent which became “even worse” when under stress. Moreover, sometimes the others “laughed at her accent” and although they did it “nicely”, it made her feel sad and annoyed. This self-perception and positioning among her peer group remained until the end of the stay and even later. She even felt stressed thinking about her English classes back in Switzerland, imagining herself once again as the worst student in the classroom.<sup>Ma12</sup>

Her lack of self-confidence regarding her language skills was clearly felt when with her peers but it also spread to many other situations. In school, for example, she felt unable to really communicate with her English classmates, “especially to make jokes”. Moreover, asking or answering questions in the classroom were also highly stressful moments, which she tried to avoid as much as possible. Being unable to express herself fully or not understanding the question in front of everyone was perceived by Manon as shameful and therefore stressful.<sup>Ma13</sup>

Despite these specific moments, not all English-speaking situations were difficult for Manon, who felt more at ease speaking to a single person, for instance. She was not too worried either about making mistakes as long as she was understood. But the idea of not being understood never disappeared completely, and it made her “panic a bit.” With time, she improved and developed strategies to express herself differently when she lacked vocabulary or did not know how to finish a sentence. In retrospect, during the interview, Manon commented that her

difficulties in English were not as bad as the posts in her diary made it sound. She also managed to create some opportunities for herself to speak English, such as lunches with a classmate. These moments were nevertheless rare because although she was persuaded that they were helpful, they were still quite stressful, as the conversation had to be sustained for quite a long time.<sup>Ma14</sup>

Receiving positive feedback was very important for Manon, irrespective of whether it came from friends, teachers, or her host family. It made her happy and proud of her progress. However, it appeared that although she became a *user* of English in some situations, these were probably not frequent enough and she remained a *learner* of English in her mind, feeling therefore deficient. Although feedback was highly appreciated at the time, it was never sufficient to really persuade Manon of her proficiency. In other words, she never felt truly confident speaking English. She realised that she had improved, and occasionally felt proud, but the overall feeling was that it was not enough, that she should be and do better. At the end of her stay, Manon was still stressed about not being good enough at English, this time not in her English environment but back in Switzerland. More precisely, she feared possible conversations where she would be unable to translate a word to or from English, which would make her feel “ashamed” because she had spent six months in England and “did not even know that”. Given the particular situation linked to Covid-19 and the lockdown, she was also scared that she would forget what she had learned, fearing she had “done all of this” for nothing. She even sometimes had difficulty sleeping due to these worries, so she tried to watch English television series and think in English as much as possible.<sup>Ma15</sup>

**To sum up**, although Manon felt that her English had improved and was happy when people noticed it, she could never get rid of the feeling that she was inferior or lacking in her English skills. As a result, she avoided many situations which could have helped her improve, such as conversations with her host family or at school. Manon positioned herself several times as a shy person, and this may explain her recurrent lack of self-confidence and self-questioning regarding her language skills.

#### *Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of a Diary Entry*

In this entry, Manon presents herself, along with her group of peers, her Swiss family and friends in Switzerland and her host family (mainly

her host sister). It is her birthday, and she explains how she looked forward to it and what actually happened. Emotions are mixed, ranging from very happy to very sad moments.

1 **13 NOV** 20:32:24 *Excited*

2 *Today's my birthday! I had a great day. We went to eat at Bill's with the*  
 3 *other Swiss students. It's a tradition, whenever one of us has a b-day we go*  
 4 *there. It was so much fun, and I'm also off this afternoon, tomorrow, the day*  
 5 *after, and Monday. Lucky! We spent the whole afternoon at Bill's and Choi*  
 6 *had asked the server to put a candle on my dessert! I wasn't expecting that,*  
 7 *and I feel so lucky to have such good friends. They gave me little presents,*  
 8 *and then we went to play ping-pong. I went home alone, it was 5 p.m. and it*  
 9 *was pitch black. I had my music, the presents in my bag, and there were lots*  
 10 *of stars. I was feeling really happy.*

11 *I have to say I was very nervous about my birthday. It's really a big day*  
 12 *to me, and each year I enjoy every minute of this day. Plus, it's also my sister*  
 13 *Fanny's birthday. We always enjoy our b-day together, we plan it together,*  
 14 *we look at photos where we are together, and we enjoy being the two of us.*  
 15 *So this year, I was sad I wasn't with her. Yesterday I was sad all day, I don't*  
 16 *like talking about my feelings because as soon as I let out a negative feel-*  
 17 *ing I start crying. Even if it's not sadness, for example shame, anger, fear...*  
 18 *But yesterday, I finally opened up to Choi because I really couldn't keep it to*  
 19 *myself anymore. Obviously I cried, and she comforted me. She is truly a real*  
 20 *one, and I am so lucky to have her with me.*

21 *This morning I woke up with a smile on my face. I had already received*  
 22 *lost of birthday wishes, since there was a one-hour time difference with*  
 23 *Switzerland. It instantly put me in the mood and reminded me that even*  
 24 *though they're not here with me, my family and friends will always be there*  
 25 *for me! And that whether I'm alone or with people, my birthday is still my*  
 26 *birthday, meaning a day to have fun and do whatever makes me happy.*  
 27 *Then I started thinking and realized I have my own little family here, even if*  
 28 *it's not the same as my real one, the other Swiss students will always be there*  
 29 *for me, and thanks to them I honestly had such a great day.*

30 *Later I opened my presents over FaceTime with my real family, my mom*  
 31 *got me a tea advent calendar, an eyeshadow palette, and two tickets to the*  
 32 *Harry Potter museum!!!! I'm so happy. She wants me to go with my host*  
 33 *sister, Sophie. She already talked to my host mom and worked out the date*  
 34 *and everything. I'm really glad I have a mom who takes the time to do stuff*  
 35 *like that. I'm not super close with Sophie, we go to school together, say a*

36 quick hi at home or in the halls, but that's about it. So at first I was a lit-  
 37 tle bummed she already arranged everything with my host mom about it. I  
 38 would rather have gone with one of the Swiss students. But now I'm actually  
 39 happy about it. Sophie's the English girl I get along with the best, and this  
 40 will help us bond and I'll get to practice my English even more! Plus, she's  
 41 just as obsessed with HP as I am!

42 After calling everyone, I ended up alone and all the emotions that had  
 43 been hiding under the happiness just hit me all at once. I cried because  
 44 today I miss my family even more than usual. I realize sometimes I don't let  
 45 myself be sad, like I hide my own feelings from myself. Writing helps, it lets  
 46 me get it all out.

Aujourd'hui c'est mon anniversaire! J'ai passé une belle journée. On a été manger chez Bill's avec les Suisses. C'est la tradition, chaque fois que l'un de nous a son anniv on va là-bas. C'était trop sympa, en plus coup de bol, j'ai congelé cet après-midi, demain, après-demain et lundi. On a passé tout l'après-midi chez Bill's et Choi avait demandé à la serveuse de mettre une bougie sur mon dessert! Je m'y attendais vraiment pas et je trouve que j'ai tellement de chance d'avoir des amis comme ça. Ils m'ont offert des petits cadeaux et après on est allé faire du ping-pong. Je suis rentrée chez moi, seule, il était 5pm et il faisait nuit noire. J'avais ma musique, mes cadeaux dans mon sac et il y avait plein d'étoiles. J'étais vraiment super heureuse.

J'avoue que j'appréhendais vraiment mon anniversaire. Pour moi, c'est vraiment un jour important et je profite de chaque minute de ce jour chaque année. En plus c'est aussi l'anniversaire de ma sœur, Fanny. On se réjouit toujours ensemble de notre anniv, on le planifie ensemble, on regarde les photos où on est ensemble et on profite d'être les deux. Donc cette année j'étais triste de pas être avec elle. Hier, j'étais triste toute la journée, j'aime pas parler de mes émotions car à peine j'exprime un sentiment négatif je me mets à pleurer. Même si c'est pas de la tristesse, par exemple; la honte, la colère, la peur... Mais hier j'ai fini par en parler à Choi car je pouvais vraiment plus garder ça pour moi. Sans surprise j'ai pleuré et elle m'a consolé. Cette amie est vraiment une personne en or et j'ai tellement de chance de l'avoir à mes côtés.

Ce matin, je me suis réveillée avec le sourire. J'avais déjà reçu plein de messages d'anniversaire car il y a une heure de décalage avec la Suisse. Ça m'a direct mis dans l'ambiance et ça m'a rappelé que même s'ils ne sont pas avec moi ma famille et mes amis seront toujours là pour moi! Et que seule

*ou avec des gens mon anniversaire reste mon anniversaire, c'est à dire un jour où je m'amuse et où je fais tout ce qui me fait plaisir. Après, j'ai réfléchi et j'ai réalisé que j'ai ma propre petite famille ici, même si c'est pas comme ma vraie, les autres Suisses seront toujours là pour moi et grâce à eux j'ai vraiment passé une super journée.*

*Après j'ai ouvert mes cadeaux en face time avec ma vraie famille, ma maman m'a offert un calendrier de l'avant spécial thé, une palette de fards à paupières et deux places pour aller au musée Harry Potter !!!!! Je suis si contente. Elle veut que j'y aille avec ma sœur d'accueil, Sophie. Elle en a déjà parlé avec ma mère d'accueil et s'est arrangée avec elle pour la date. Je suis vraiment contente d'avoir une maman qui prend le temps de faire ça. Je suis pas super proche de Sophie, on va ensemble à l'école, on se parle vite fait quand on se croise à la maison ou à l'école mais ça s'arrête là. Donc au début, j'étais un peu déçue qu'elle en ait déjà parlé à ma mère d'accueil. J'aurais préféré aller avec un des Suisses. Mais pour finir je suis contente. Sophie est l'anglaise avec qui je m'entends le mieux et comme ça, ça va nous rapprocher et je vais encore plus parler anglais ! En plus elle est aussi fan d'HP que moi !*

*Après avoir appelé tout le monde, je me suis retrouvée seule et toutes les émotions que la joie avait cachées sont ressorties d'un coup. J'ai pleuré car ma famille me manque encore plus aujourd'hui que les autres jours. Je me rends compte que parfois je m'empêche d'être triste, je me cache mes propres sentiments. Écrire me fait du bien, ça me permet d'évacuer.*

### **LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY**

In the first paragraph, Manon describes how she surrounded herself with her Swiss friends in the UK and writes about how they celebrated her birthday together. They spent the afternoon together at a restaurant where they *traditionally* (1.3) go each time one of them has their birthday. They asked for a *candle* (1.6) for Manon's dessert and gave her little *presents* (1.7). Manon describes all these highly symbolic elements to show the strong ties that bind the members of her peer group and her own importance within this group. She feels *very lucky to have such good friends* (1.7), a statement she repeats a few lines later, talking about a specific friend who had comforted her the day before (1.20). Although the overall mood of the first paragraph is very positive, imbued with fun, *happiness* (1.10) and *stars shining in the night sky* on her way back home *alone* (1.8–10), the second is more ambivalent, with mixed emotions.

In the second paragraph, Manon explains that she has a twin sister and that on the day before her birthday she was sad to think she wouldn't be spending this special day with her this year. She describes how they usually look forward to that day *together* (1.13), how they plan it *together* (1.13), look at pictures of themselves *together* (1.14) and enjoy being the two of them (1.14). As she was extremely sad, she shared her feelings with one of her Swiss friends who comforted her. Here Manon moves from her group of friends as a whole to one in particular to show the multiple functions of her peer group: from having fun together to more personal and close individual relationships. She underlines that it is usually difficult for her to share negative feelings because she *starts crying* (1.17), but she had to because she was extremely sad, and she felt able to because she knew her friend would help her. Interestingly, this focus on her "best" friend – who is *by her side* (1.20) – comes just after her focus on her twin sister, her closest family member, with whom she usually spends this special day. The parallel between her peer group and her family is striking as they are permanently intertwined, and Manon makes it explicit in the next paragraph.

Manon says that on her birthday, she woke up with a *smile* (1.21) because she had already received many birthday wishes from her family and friends in Switzerland. It made her realise that although they were not physically present, her family and friends were there for her and always would be (1.24–25). Interestingly, she describes herself as *alone* (1.25) – as if being away from her family, nobody else mattered – but says that she will have fun nevertheless because it is her birthday. Then she mentions her peer group and compares them to *her own little family*, (1.27) but outlining that they are *not the same as her real one* (1.28). However, she uses the same phrase as above, saying that she knows *they will always be here for her* (1.28–29). The constant parallels drawn between her real family and her group of friends show how much she needs a substitute for her family and how she finds – or tries to find – some relief and comfort in her friends.

In the fourth paragraph, Manon starts by talking about her mother, the presents she gave her and how lucky she is to have a mother who takes time to organize them for her. In this part of the entry, Manon again positions herself strongly as a member of her family – a daughter more specifically – which contrasts with her positioning within her host family. More precisely, Manon's mother organized a visit to the Harry Potter Museum with her host sister, which is something that makes

her both happy – thanks to her mother – but also a bit disappointed at first – because of Sophie, her host sister. Initially, she would have preferred to go with a Swiss friend because, she says, she is *not super close to Sophie* (l.35). After a while though, she sees the positive side of the situation and thinks that Sophie is the English person she gets along with best, and this trip may bring them closer together. Interestingly, she also mentions the fact she will *get to practice her English even more* (l.40), which may be a sign that it is also a rather stressful element for her. The fact that she thinks about it and mentions it proves that it is indeed stressful for her, and her initial disappointment may have been linked to speaking English and its correlated stress.

At the end of her entry and at the end of her birthday, Manon *ended up alone* (l.42) and very sad. Being *alone* in the night in the first paragraph was a thrill, being *alone* or away from her family in the third paragraph has rapidly been replaced by being surrounded by a peer group. But here, being alone is endured against her will and deeply felt by Manon, because it contrasts with her day full of excitement, presents, phone-calls, and *happiness* (l.43). Now that she is by herself, she realises how much she misses her family and how much she sometimes pretends to be happy, *hiding her own feelings from herself* (l.45). She ends by saying that *writing helps, it helps her get it all out* (l.45), a way to regain some agency in her situation. She does not fully position herself as a victim but rather as someone who will find a way to overcome the situation. It is also, we could argue, a way to position herself within my support programme and to express some of its benefits. This will be developed in the second level below.

This entry is particularly interesting because Manon refers to and positions herself within her different social groups, those who were important for her during her stay. A birthday is traditionally a family celebration, therefore the importance of Manon's family in this entry is normal to a certain extent. However, what is extremely interesting is the extension of family bonds and feelings to her peer group, and the constant parallels she draws between them. She also clearly excludes her host family from these parallels, leaving them at a distance, giving them no importance. The role they played during that special day is not even mentioned, although they must have wished her a happy birthday and probably also gave her a small present (the host mother did, by the way, help organize the trip to the Harry Potter Museum). However, this is not part of Manon's narration of that day,

because it may not have been meaningful to her. Besides, although she positions herself as alone in the last paragraph, she was actually in their house, and they could potentially have been of some company.

*LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

Manon's entry comes from her online diary and is therefore only slightly interactive. Unlike other participants, Manon used her diary first and foremost as a real diary, i.e., as a tool to write down her feelings and experiences, and only occasionally as a way to communicate directly with me. However, she was completely aware of me reading and commenting on her texts and this undoubtedly influenced her writing. The constant balance and passing from weaknesses to strengths or ups to downs may be a consequence of my distant presence. Although Manon describes living through difficult times, she always presents a solution to her problems or a positive element to counterbalance a more negative one. This may well be Manon's way of functioning in life, but it may also be the way she wants to present herself to me in this entry, and in her diary more generally. She may want to show that she can cope and that she is an independent and mature person. She is not directly asking for advice, nor is she looking for compassion: she is presenting herself as facing difficulties and looking for her own personal solutions.

One of her solutions is writing, and this can be understood as an indirect reference to the support programme and to me, as she is, to some extent, writing for me and thanks to me. She therefore seems happy to take part in the study, looking at her experience with some distance and from different perspectives, which allows her to seek solutions when in difficulty. This reference could also be seen as a way to please and be nice with me. More generally, the quantity and quality of the entry show a desire to take my project seriously and to respect her commitment towards me. It also shows that she felt comfortable and safe writing in her diary – for me – as she was granted a voice: she felt that her experience mattered, and she did not hesitate to share difficult moments. During our final interview, Manon mentioned that as she mostly wrote in her diary when she felt sad, many happy moments were missing. This again supports her apparent desire to balance her experience and to look like a happy and strong person who had a great time and not only like someone who spent her year missing home.

In the interaction, Manon thus felt comfortable talking about positive and negative elements, but she made sure that a balance between them was kept.

*LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

I would argue that three main discourses permeate Manon's entry and her different narratives: family, friendship, and growing up. As discussed earlier, the traditional values of family are extremely important for Manon, and she strongly believes in them. She understands family as people who can be trusted and who can always be counted and relied on. Family links are very strong and almost unquestionable, unbreakable, or infallible. Love and affection are central to family; their presence is synonymous with comfort and understanding. Manon feels – or at least wants to show – that she is part of such an ideal family, and this defines her greatly. It may be worth mentioning that Manon's parents are divorced, and she is part of two blended families, thus her values of family go beyond the "traditional" family unit. Unlike other teenagers, though, she is not in conflict with her family and does not wish to be away from them. Her decision to go to England was a personal challenge, and she did it despite the necessary separation from her family and not because of it. As explained earlier, the separation from her family was a real challenge for her. Her narrative of family probably worked both as a help and support for her experience – giving her strength – and as a difficulty, making her feel the distance more deeply.

The narrative of friendship she refers to is similar to her family narrative in its idealised presentation: this is not so much to say that it is not based on reality but rather that it focuses on the positive sides, on what perfect relationships can be about. Just like family bonds, she presents friendship as positive and genuine relationships, never really acknowledging possible flaws. She inserts her personal friendships into this ideal narrative and although she admits that sometimes her friends are not enough to comfort her, the cause is not to be found in the relationships themselves but in the fact that they are just not her family. It is difficult to say if this idealised discourse is what she really believes in or whether she uses it to position herself positively in her narration. In any case, her expectations and needs are high – searching for ideal and perfect relationships – and it may be one reason why she sometimes feels that what she has is not enough.

As she is exploring new friendships in her SA environment, Manon wishes to identify with peers sharing the same values. Feeling unsettled by her new life away from home, she needs to rebuild a solid social group around herself to feel safe and receive support (Erikson 1968). Moreover, Manon may be struggling with the separation from her family, but she is still trying to do things right to show how she is becoming an independent and mature young woman with solid values. She shows respect and gratitude for her family, acknowledging what they give and have given her and at the same time, she tries to show that she can live on her own, respecting the values she received. Her constant references to her family may imply that she is not ready yet to be completely independent – she is only 17 so this is quite normal – but she is constructing her independence, discovering what life away from her siblings and her parents might be like, and her “coming of age” is done smoothly and with respect. Showing respect and trying to do things right are a common thread to the three master narratives presented here. Manon definitely inserts her entries, and the presentation of herself, into these positive discourses. It may be influenced by the context of interaction, as discussed earlier, but their omnipresence undoubtedly shows that they are part of Manon’s life and beliefs.

4.1.2 MELANIE

*General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher*  
*Diary*

As can be seen below, Melanie wrote regularly in her diary throughout the year without any period of break. Her entries were shorter in the beginning and gained length towards the end of the stay. Of all the students, Melanie is the one who wrote the most entries, with a total of 37 over the year.

Melanie rapidly acknowledged my presence in the diary, mentioning in November that she enjoyed writing and reading my comments. We

**TABLE 4.3** Melanie’s Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August	September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts		1	4	3	2	3	3	1	1		2	5	1	4	4	1	2	37
No of words		109	201	520	345	407	450	139	167		675	972	122	1448	380	190	698	6823

engaged in a sort of conversation as she almost systematically answered my questions, to her personally or to the group. On one occasion, she asked me for advice regarding her EPQ, then thanked me for my help. After I asked for their reaction and positioning on Bennett’s DMIS in February, she replied and specified that she was not sure that she did what I had asked but hoped it would help me, demonstrating her appreciation of my presence, her concern, and her respect for her engagement. In parallel, she also wrote unprompted texts where she described some of her experiences and feelings. I often commented on those texts, and in March, Melanie mentioned that she was very touched by one of my messages. She said in the post-programme questionnaire that she really appreciated being listened to and receiving feedback from someone who she knew would not judge her. This shows that she trusted me and could share personal experiences without fear; her personal and honest entries were an indication of this. After re-reading her diary, Melanie said in the interview that she found it personal and genuine and that it was hard reliving those strong emotions. A relationship of trust was thus established between us, and Melanie truly confided in me. She did not hesitate to ask for help when she felt she needed it, and she used me as a resource, again reflecting the nature of our relationship.

*Interview*

In her interview, Melanie was very lively and happy to discuss her experience. It is important to mention that she was the first to reply to the interview request, showing how eager she was to share it with me. As *Table 4.4* below illustrates, she did most of the talking, with some long and some shorter replies.

**TABLE 4.4** Melanie’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 72,3 minutes 9’069 words 174 turns		Number of words	Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Melanie	6’557	75	72,3
	Interviewer	2’512	29	27,7

Her answers in the interview reflected her diary entries as they were often personal, sharing different anecdotes and the associated emotions. She had very few hesitations and had an answer to all questions, although sometimes some had to be reformulated for

better understanding. A final element that needs to be mentioned is that Melanie's interview was the first, and I was consequently slightly stressed or worried that it would not go as planned. As a result, I may have talked a bit more than necessary, either to explain things for too long, to rephrase what Melanie had said or to frame the interview too strictly. Nevertheless, Melanie showed that she was comfortable and answered all the questions thoroughly.

### *The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

#### *Social Positioning*

Throughout her stay, Melanie enjoyed special relationships and precious moments with her **host family** as a whole, and each of its members individually. From the very beginning, she felt very "lucky" and very "happy" to be in such a considerate and kind-hearted family who was there for her and with whom she carried out many different activities, from small daily conversations and walks at the weekends to longer trips during the holidays. She was soon considered a full member of the family, as the father said that his own children's and her safety were the most important things for him, telling her not to hesitate to call him in case of a problem. As she felt she was given a full place within their family, she took it and felt very comfortable with them, calling them "angels".<sup>Me1</sup>

She developed a special relationship with each member of the family. Her host sister – who was approximately her age – was the person she mentioned first and repeatedly, as someone who "trusted" and "understood" her, and who she spent much time with, having a lot of fun. She discovered what it was like having a sister, "sharing clothes" and "being close". Shortly after Christmas however, Melanie criticized her for the first time, saying that her host sister "was always talking about herself and not really listening to her problems." From that point onwards, they seemed more distant, as Melanie did not mention her as often as before, but their relationship did not deteriorate.<sup>Me2</sup>

She also remained very close to her host parents throughout her stay, and particularly to her host mother with whom she enjoyed chatting about everything during walks or around dinner time. She particularly relished some "Friday evenings when the weather was bad", since her host mother did not go running and everybody else was out. On these occasions, they had dinner together, then tea, and Melanie found those moments "quite cool". Her host mother also felt engaged with Melanie's

school work as she accompanied her to the parents' evening to discuss her school report. Melanie was happy that both her mother and her host mother were proud of her when she received positive comments from her teachers. Again, the support and concern that her host parents showed towards Melanie allowed her to position herself as their host daughter, and she felt grateful to have them. The relationship with the host father was more distant in the sense that he worked abroad and was rarely present during the week but still, Melanie enjoyed his company when he was there, finding him very entertaining. Although he was frequently absent, he was present enough for Melanie to feel part of his family. Another sign that strengthened Melanie in her position as a full member of their family was their calling her "sweetheart" or "love", which she found both "sweet and comforting". Her host parents were thus central to Melanie's experience, and she was consequently very sad and disappointed not to receive much news and support from her host mother after her return to Switzerland – a situation she did not really understand.<sup>Me3</sup>

Melanie was not the only foreign student in her family, as they also hosted a Spanish student. At first, she found him annoying and a bit "filthy" – they had to share the bathroom – so she did not really appreciate him. After a while, however, they started talking more often and became closer; they spent hours in each other's rooms, lying on the bed and talking or teasing each other. Their relationship developed enough for them to keep calling each other after Melanie's departure. However, this specific relationship goes beyond "family" and may instead be linked to an international friendship.<sup>Me4</sup>

Melanie's friendships also played an important role in her experience as she developed a very close relationship with one particular **Swiss student**. At first, she met Laura and Bettina and they spent a lot of time together, either at Melanie's place or going out after school and during the weekends. She found them "adorable" and invested time and energy into the relationships, hoping that they would keep in touch after the experience abroad. But after a while, some tension appeared with Laura, and when she returned to England after Christmas, she explained that she did not appreciate her personality anymore. She wanted to make an effort to be nice to her because she realised that Laura would be alone otherwise, but it was clear for her at that point that their friendship had only developed because they were alone in the experience, without any other friends.<sup>Me5</sup>

Bettina however, became Melanie's best friend and she was her companion for everything taking place outside the family circle. They were neighbours and spent a lot of time together, going to the gym after school, "doing everything together, even buying bread". Bettina became so integrated into Melanie's life that she was worried about being separated from her during the Christmas holidays, thinking it would be "weird". They planned a lot of projects together and threw themselves into the SA experience together, seeking "adventure". They went to a big concert, on a trip to London with Bettina's mother, and were thinking about more trips after the year abroad. Melanie was really looking forward to all these projects and it made her very happy and excited. This relationship allowed her to discover her environment, dare to leave the family circle, and do things on her own – or rather on *their* own. In March, with the threat of the Coronavirus, Bettina had to leave England earlier than Melanie, and, at that time, she really wondered how she would cope without her, thinking that she would "really be all alone" then. She was very sad about Bettina's departure and after her own return to Switzerland, they did keep in touch and managed to see each other.<sup>Me6</sup>

For Melanie, her **English friends** – or rather her lack of English friends – caused much disappointment, concern, sadness, and even anger throughout the experience. The locals were important for Melanie and their impact was great, but it was mostly negative. More precisely, from the beginning to the end, Melanie and her Swiss friends fought to be accepted and to find their place among their schoolmates but had very little success. Only a week after her arrival, Melanie was already surprised and "disappointed" because the locals "did not really open up to the new ones", i.e., herself and her friends. Then, she tried to relieve her disappointment by providing an explanation for their behaviour. At first, English students were perceived as "boring, having nothing to say". Then, as she was still unable to join one of their groups, the judgement became harsher, specifically regarding girls, who "looked down on them, probably thinking that they – the rich Swiss foreigners – were here to steal their boyfriends." For Melanie, English students were "unfriendly, mean, not interested in having fun", an impression which came as a consequence of her being rejected from different groups of local students.<sup>Me7</sup>

This strong reaction was not only due to the local students' passive indifference, but also due to their active refusal to grant her a place within their community. Melanie's "difference" and her arrival were

noticed by the local students who watched her and her friends carefully, and talked about them. There was much gossip, and each time Melanie went out with her friends, everyone was aware of it and commented on it. Once, Melanie and her friends asked a boy if they organized parties where they could go to meet people, and his reply was that they did but “they were simply not invited.” His extremely mean answer was later repeated in a text message. As a reaction to this kind of behaviour, Melanie positioned the locals as “hypocritical” and without “proper education” and herself as more “mature”. Although the situation never improved permanently, Melanie did not always feel sad about it. At times, she clung to little promising moments or conversations, seeing them as glimpses of hope that the situation might improve. At other times, she managed to remain indifferent for a while, busy with other things which made her happy.<sup>Me8</sup>

However, the local students’ refusal to grant her a legitimate position among them – combined with her constant effort to belong and her repeated rejection – ultimately and systematically led to sadness and torment. In January, she thought she was starting to be friends with two male students and was happy about it because she felt lonely, being only with her Swiss friends all the time. She needed to see and talk to other people. But after a while, one of the boy’s ex-girlfriends stopped the relationship, out of “jealousy because Melanie and her friends were pretty”, according to Melanie. This led to the end of their budding friendship, even on social networks from which she was blocked. Melanie was very angry at the English girls and highly disappointed in the male students who would not stand up to them. Her intentions were simple and honest – having friends – but she kept being perceived as a threat or a freak. Generally speaking, it was very difficult for Melanie to see that her “difference” – her foreignness – was not perceived as something positive, but rather as a tool to exclude her and be mean to her.<sup>Me9</sup>

Her constant efforts to try to make friends started to pay off towards the end of her stay, as she met local students outside of school by chance, and they talked. As a result, a guy who “was not very nice to” Melanie in her economics class started to laugh with her, but not “talk, as it would have been too much to ask”; however, this was still perceived as being a positive accomplishment. Moreover, a few days before their leaving England, Melanie and her friends went out with three English students and although she thought that they “agreed to go out only because they knew they were going back home”, she was

happy, and they had a good time. They hugged to say goodbye and it was “comforting”, which showed how much she longed to be liked and accepted by the local students.<sup>Me10</sup>

**To sum up**, Melanie rapidly found her place within her host family and enjoyed their company and their kindness throughout her stay. She truly felt like a member of their family and was therefore highly disappointed after her departure, when the relationship started to slowly dissolve. To face her school environment, Melanie developed a strong friendship with the other Swiss students and one girl specifically who was staying with a host family nearby. They spent a lot of time together – in fact, all the time she was not with her host family – but it was not enough for Melanie, who also wished to develop relationships with the local students. This proved difficult as she was repeatedly ignored and rejected, sometimes quite harshly. Consequently, she became critical of English students, positioning herself as more mature, but still seeking new friendships, which never really developed. This forced exclusion caused her great despair and tarnished her experience.

### *Cultural Positioning*

Culturally, Melanie maintained her Swiss identity and remained quite critical of English people – English youth in particular – due to the rejection she had to endure. After recounted an anecdote where an English classmate told the whole school about her discussion with him, wondering if she was “flirting” with him, Melanie compared Swiss and English teenagers, underlining how “different” they were. Similar stories happened on a regular basis to Melanie and in her comparison of Swiss and English teenagers, the Swiss were perceived as better or more mature, and she remained judgmental of the English students’ behaviour. Their inclination to “gossip” was seen as ingrained in “the education they received”, and she noted that they – “three little Swiss girls – would not be able to change it.” Interestingly, Melanie decided to perceive her schoolmates’ behaviour as a “cultural thing”, even though she could also have chosen to see it as a reaction from a particular group of teenagers. More precisely, as the most salient difference causing her rejection was her foreign nationality, she prioritized this difference in her own explanation for their mean behaviour.<sup>Me11</sup>

On a more general level, Melanie did not perceive all people negatively. For example, she appreciated the way adults, even teachers, called her “lovely or my love”, which was very different from Switzerland and

strange at first, but it made them “adorable”. But other than that, she also tended to maintain a critical – and to some extent superior – look on her surroundings. For example, she decided to go to the gym as food was “not terrific”. She also noticed the difference of “wealth” between the two countries, with Switzerland as the reference, and a difference in education between her host family and her own. For Melanie, these differences enriched her as she positioned herself in a stage of *acceptation* according to Bennett’s DMIS (upon my request). *Acceptation* is the first of the *ethno-relative* stages – following the three *ethnocentric* ones – and implies that differences are not seen as negative anymore and enrich people, although they are not always understood. Choosing this stage was a way to position herself and her relationship to the English culture positively and it might have been true for some elements, but it was also refuted by other comments she made, particularly about English teenagers, towards whom she clearly retained a more defensive attitude.<sup>Me12</sup>

As for school in general, Melanie felt “stressed” regularly and repeated that classes were “hard” from the beginning until the end of her stay. For her, the English curriculum was more advanced than the Swiss one, and she constantly felt like she was lagging behind. Although she appreciated the fact that school finished early compared to Switzerland, which made “her life easy”, she still wished to return to her Swiss routine from time to time, because it was “nice actually, and simpler”. As the months passed, the level of stress increased until in March she once “exploded” on the phone with her mother. She felt like she could no longer keep up and was overwhelmed with homework and her EPQ. She felt that she was not receiving enough support from her supervisor and had no idea how she would meet the deadlines. Her feelings towards school were more about her fear of failure and not being good enough, and she never openly criticized the English system itself. She took it for granted and did not really question its methods or its relevance, i.e., its *cultural* differences. Therefore, her positioning within her school environment was more about her personal desire to succeed than a critical look at culture.<sup>Me13</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Melanie’s positioning regarding the English language varied greatly depending on the context and most importantly on her interlocutors. On the one hand, she could be a confident user with her host family

and on the other, she felt like a deficient learner in some classes, in front of her classmates specifically. First, when she was with her host family – who she got along with very well – English never seemed to be an issue, as she never raised it as a potential barrier in their relationship. In fact, she enjoyed discussions with her host mother and sister and felt very comfortable with them all. Her host mother was a French teacher, an element which certainly helped Melanie feel at ease and which was a real asset when she did not know a specific word.<sup>Me14</sup>

In the presence of the other Swiss students, Melanie first felt demeaned as their level of English was better than hers. At other times, she tried to use their language skills to improve her own. After a few months, she differentiated between her best friend, Bettina, with whom she became quite comfortable talking in English and her other friend, Laura, with whom it remained more difficult. More precisely, Laura would often correct Melanie or comment on what she was saying, and this resulted in her feeling that what she said was “lousy”. As she spent most of her time with Bettina during the second part of her stay, this feeling was not primordial in her experience.<sup>Me15</sup>

Her different positionings towards English paralleled her social positionings, and it is therefore not surprising that where she felt most uncomfortable and incapable of speaking satisfyingly was with her English schoolmates. Her economics class was the place where she felt the least comfortable because all the “popular and intimidating boys” were present, accompanied by all their girlfriends. This situation was really “overwhelming” for Melanie who avoided speaking as much as possible. On a few occasions, her teacher asked her for an answer, and she felt a “hot flush” which took a while to disappear. Moreover, her answer did not come right away or came wrong at first. As a result, most of the time, she preferred to remain silent in class because she did not dare speak, either because she was afraid of being judged for the way she spoke or of being misunderstood, or even not understood at all. She regretted this situation but was unable to act differently.<sup>Me16</sup>

The cause of her discomfort was really to be found in the other students as she was much more comfortable talking to the teachers. Whenever she had a question, she would ask her teachers, but only after class as she was too “embarrassed” to do it during class in front of the others. Once, she had some homework to do which she did not understand and seeing her teacher in the hall, she decided to ask her for a more detailed explanation. Her teacher told her she would be

happy to answer her questions and meet her in a classroom. When Melanie arrived, she realized that the classroom was full of older students, and she had to speak in front of them. She was so “embarrassed” that she only managed to say “the strict minimum”.<sup>Me17</sup>

Her positioning as a deficient language user or even as a learner was not limited to the classroom situation but was clearly linked to all interactions with English students, in and out of class. During her rare discussions with English students, Melanie felt that sometimes, they would look at her “in a strange way” thinking that what she was saying was “weird”, whereas she thought that it was correct. Moreover, after an episode when she and her friend were again rejected by the local students, I asked her if language played a role in the situation and her answer was twofold. Her first reaction was to say that it did not, as they did not really have an argument. But then, she added that were they to speak better English, they “would not have let themselves be pushed around and would have dealt with the situation directly with them.” Their “weakness” was clearly used against them as their forced passivity made them almost defenceless victims; as they were often unable to reply, the locals felt a certain impunity when talking to them.<sup>Me18</sup>

Nevertheless, these particularly distressing situations should not invalidate others, with her host family or in everyday little interactions, in which she mainly felt comfortable because she was safe. Once back home, she missed her English surroundings where she had constantly “learnt new words and phrases”. She really enjoyed the English-speaking environment generally and being surrounded by English was “great”. In hindsight, she realised how much she had progressed and how much she was constantly learning. Throughout the experience, she sometimes felt happy with her progress and positive about her future progress and, at others – usually also when she felt sad for some other reason – “frustrated” by her lack of progress. To conclude, Melanie’s positionings towards English clearly paralleled her social positionings, which also paralleled her feelings and moods.<sup>Me19</sup>

### *Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of an Interview Excerpt*

In the following extract from the interview, Melanie talks about her last day of school, where she learnt that she would have to go back home, and her discussion with an English student, a girl she did not really know who comforted her. This anecdote was in reply to a question about a memorable moment which happened at school.

1 **Me** At school, is there a moment you especially remember, something that  
2 stuck with you, good or bad?

3 **Mel** Yeah, the last day of school...

4 **Me** The last day for everyone or just your last day?

5 **Mel** No, the last day for everyone. But we didn't know yet that it was the  
6 last. Actually, there were a few... it was Tuesday morning. We had a meet-  
7 ing with the principal... no wait, it was Monday morning, we had a meet-  
8 ing with the principal... no, it was the Friday before that, we had a meeting  
9 with the principal. And already then, there were a bunch of girls who were  
10 gonna go back home. Out of the eight of us, only three were staying: Bettina,  
11 Charlotte, she's the one I had all my classes with, and me. The rest were leav-  
12 ing 'cause their parents wanted them back because of COVID. So yeah at  
13 that point everyone was about... was pretty much leaving. Then on Monday,  
14 they all left, and I remember on Tuesday we asked if Bettina could switch  
15 her math class to be with Charlotte and me, so she wouldn't be alone in  
16 her class. And at the end of class, she got a call saying she had to leave, her  
17 mom wanted her to come home. And that really felt... there was already this  
18 kind of weird vibe at school, I mean, not weird, but like, everyone kind of felt  
19 something was coming. So yeah, we were all kind of... pretty sad, I guess.

20 And I remember my teacher, she wasn't... my teacher, I mean my tutor,  
21 she wasn't there because she had caught COVID, so I know that I was just  
22 feeling really bad during tutorial and there was this girl who... I never really  
23 talked to her and like... not that I didn't like her, but I had some... yeah, I  
24 didn't like her much just by seeing her if you like, and, I remember at the end  
25 of the class, she came up to me and said... she asked if I was okay, and so I  
26 told her I wasn't okay, because I had to go home. And then she really... she  
27 just hugged me and comforted me. And then she... she... she reassured me,  
28 kinda, and I remember I was really touched because I knew she was not the  
29 type at all to do that and she wasn't... I mean basically, we'd never spoken  
30 and she came over to comfort me. This was a gesture that really stuck with  
31 me, I was touched that she came to me like that. It was super sweet of her,  
32 reaching out totally unprompted, not even knowing what was going on. She  
33 was so understanding, too. And she said, "Don't worry, you'll come back to  
34 visit us." So yeah.

35 **Me** That's a really sweet ending, where you see that you did matter to peo-  
36 ple there. That they're going to notice you're not around anymore. Was there  
37 anything, I don't know, with anyone, like your host family or your teachers,  
38 that bothered you about how they behaved or talked to you?

39 **Me** Well, I mean... they're pretty unfriendly, they don't really make an  
 40 effort to talk to us.

41 **Me** Do you mean the students, or everyone in general?

42 **Mel** No, mostly the students. Yeah, the students, because the adults...

Moi À l'école, il y a un moment dont vous vous souvenez particulièrement, positif ou négatif, quelque chose qui vous a marqué ?

Mel. Alors, le dernier jour d'école...

Moi Le dernier pour tout le monde ou le dernier juste pour vous ?

Mel. Non, le dernier pour tout le monde. Mais on n'était pas encore au courant que c'était le dernier. En fait, y a quelques... c'était le mardi matin. On a eu rendez-vous avec le directeur... non non, le lundi matin, on a eu un rendez-vous avec le directeur... non c'était le vendredi d'avant, on a eu rendez-vous avec le directeur. Et là, il y avait déjà plein de filles qui allaient rentrer, sur huit, y en avait trois qui restaient, dont Bettina, Charlotte, c'est la fille avec qui je suivais tous mes cours, et moi, qui restaient et toutes les autres elles rentraient parce que leurs parents ils voulaient qu'elles rentrent à cause du Corona virus. Et puis du coup, là, il y avait déjà tout le monde qui était à peu près... qui partait à peu près. Puis lundi ils sont tous partis et je sais que le mardi, on a demandé si Bettina elle pouvait être transférée dans notre classe de maths avec Charlotte et moi, pour pas qu'elle soit toute seule dans sa classe de maths. Et à la fin du cours, elle a reçu un appel comme quoi elle devait rentrer, sa mère elle voulait qu'elle rentre. Et là, du coup, ça a mis assez... déjà dans l'école y avait un froid, enfin pas un froid mais tout le monde se doutait qu'il allait se passer quelque chose. Et puis, du coup, on était assez... assez tristes si on veut.

Et je sais que y avait ma prof de cours elle était pas... ma prof enfin mon tuteur, elle était pas là parce qu'elle avait eu le coronavirus justement et du coup, moi je sais que moi j'étais vraiment mal pendant le tutorial et y a une fille que je... avec qui j'ai pas réellement parlé et que... pas que j'appréciais pas mais j'avais un peu des... ouais je l'appréciais pas trop mais juste en la voyant si on veut et je sais que à la fin du cours elle est venue vers moi et elle m'a dit... elle m'a demandé si ça allait et du coup et je lui ai dit que ça allait pas parce que je devais rentrer. Et là, elle m'a vraiment... elle m'a prise dans ses bras et elle m'a réconfortée. Et puis elle m'a, elle m'a... rassurée un peu si on veut, et je sais que ce moment ça m'a vraiment touchée parce que je sais qu'elle était pas du tout comme ça et qu'elle était pas... enfin en soi on s'était jamais parlé et elle est venue vers moi pour me réconforter. Et je sais que ce

*moment, il m'a vraiment marquée et ça m'a touchée qu'elle fasse ça et qu'elle vienne comme ça vers moi. J'ai trouvé ça super adorable de sa part, de venir comme ça sans rien, alors qu'elle savait pas ce qui se passait. Pis elle était hyper compréhensive du coup. Et pis elle m'a dit 'mais t'en fais pas, tu reviendras nous voir.' Et puis voilà.*

*Moi C'est un beau moment de fin où vous voyez que vous comptez quand même pour les gens là-bas. Ils vont s'apercevoir que vous n'êtes plus là. Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose que vous avez trouvé, je sais pas chez n'importe qui, votre famille ou les profs, que vous avez trouvé dérangeant dans leur manière de faire, de se comporter ou de vous parler ?*

*Mel. Bah du coup... Ils sont quand même assez inamicaux, ils sont pas très entreprenants pour discuter avec nous.*

*Moi Vous parlez des élèves ou vous parlez de tout le monde ?*

*Mel. Non, plus des élèves quand même. Oui des élèves parce que les adultes...*

#### *LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY*

In the telling of this anecdote, Melanie talks about her peers, the other Swiss students, the school headteacher, her tutor, and an English student. As she contextualises the event, she positions herself within her peers, saying that they [she uses the general pronoun *you* to mean *we* (1.6–8)] had an appointment with the headteacher. This appointment was about the Coronavirus pandemic and their individual situations. Here, Melanie explains that out of the eight Swiss girls, five had already decided to go home, a decision made by their parents. She says that almost *everyone* (1.13) was leaving as if her world was composed of these eight girls only. The day after they left, Melanie and Charlotte – one of the three Swiss students left – asked if Bettina – the third Swiss student – could join their maths class as she was *alone* (1.15) in hers, underlining again how little the other English students counted in their “world”. Not long after, Bettina received a phone call from her mother who told her to come home. At this point in her narration, Melanie integrates the place they were at, *school* (1.18), and says that there was a weird vibe (1.18) before correcting herself to mention that the people, *everyone* (1.18) at school was worried about the situation as well. Interestingly, school, the place, comes before the people who inhabit it – i.e., the English students – showing again her detachment from any specific individual in her

school. Her mentioning school comes as a second layer of sadness surrounding her first and central circle comprising her fellow Swiss students. She then finishes her general contextualization by using *we* (1.19) again, explaining how *sad* (1.18) they were, referring back to her Swiss friends. To some extent, the sadness comes from their experience in England coming to an end, but it is materialized through the separation of the peer group.

The anecdote Melanie wants to share happened after her tutorial, a short class with a group of students and a tutor taking place every day or every other day. As her tutor was absent, sick with the Coronavirus, one English girl came to talk to her and comfort her. To narrate this specific event, Melanie switches to the *I* (1.21) pronoun to show distance from the other Swiss girls, who she mentioned just before but who were not there, and to now focus on her own feelings and her own place within the school. As she introduces the English girl, she hesitates and seems not to know exactly how to express what she thinks or thought of her. She first says that she had not really spoken to her before (1.22–23), but *she did not like her, she had some...* (1.23), *well..., she didn't like her much, but just by seeing her* (1.24). Here she admits, quite reluctantly in a way, that she was prejudiced against this girl because of her physical appearance or the way she behaved in school. But this girl came to her and asked her what was wrong, and Melanie says that that moment really *touched* (1.28+31) her and *stuck with her* (1.30) on her. The second verb is a reference to my original question, but she repeats twice how *touched* she was to specify in what way this moment *left a strong impression* on her. First, she explains how touched she was by saying that *she knew the girl was not the type at all to do that and that she was not...* (1.28–29); it is difficult to understand what Melanie means when she says *like that* but she seems to mean “nice,” that the girl was not usually nice (with her or in general). Therefore, this sign of empathy from the girl was a surprise for Melanie and she really appreciated it, she felt *reassured* (1.27). It is hard to say if she was reassured about her going home or about her “importance” for this girl and in this school more generally; probably both. The adjectives she uses next to qualify her are all very positive as she found her *super sweet* (1.31) and *so understanding* (1.33). Again, this was unexpected for Melanie as it contradicted her initial opinion of her. She says that the girl was *thus so understanding* (1.33) as if to express her surprise or astonishment. To conclude her anecdote, she uses direct speech and quotes her to give

more legitimacy to the whole story, to strengthen the girl's empathy towards herself, and also to reinforce her own position as someone who deserved attention and empathy. The girl told her *not to worry, that she would come back to see them* (l.33–34), and Melanie finishes the narrative of her anecdote there, as if quoting these words sufficed to convey all she wanted. For Melanie, these words certainly meant a lot, as she repeatedly suffered from her non-integration, and that is why she chose them to illustrate and conclude a memorable moment at school. They come as the climax of her anecdote. Obviously, she does not pick up again on the fact that she was wrong about this girl, who was nice actually, and which could have been a kind of “moral” to the story.

The question that followed in the interview was about a habit or an attitude that she found disturbing, whether in her family, her teachers, or anybody else. Melanie's answer came quite rapidly, and she said *well, then... they are pretty unfriendly, they do not really make an effort to talk to us* (l.39–40). First, the choice of pronoun is significant as the question did not focus on a specific group of people so *they* does not replace a pre-defined subject. In Melanie's mind, however, it seemed obvious that this question would be about “them”, the English students, and therefore she didn't have to give any more details. Indeed, she had already made a similar complaint before and as it was probably something that really bothered her, she had to repeat it here. The question was meant to address more specific behaviour of possibly different people, but she saw it as an opportunity to repeat how unfriendly the English students were to her. When asked, she clearly specified that she meant the English students and not the *adults* (l.42). Her prompt answer is particularly interesting because it is in direct contradiction to what she had just said before in her anecdote. Thus, it shows how strong her general opinion was; although she has just spent a few minutes telling an anecdote which could have qualified her strong judgment, she ignores it completely and comes back, in the blink of an eye, to her general representation, her deeply held belief that English students are fundamentally unfriendly. The discrepancy between her anecdote and her representation is striking but she cannot see it. As a result, we are tempted to believe that without realising it, she may have been prejudiced against all English students – undoubtedly because some of them behaved in an unpleasant way – and that this representation may have prevented her from developing other relationships. It is clearly impossible to establish who is to blame for Melanie's

non-integration – and nor is that the objective here – but the way she tells her story, the prejudice she expresses about the girl, and her refusal to qualify her judgement, show that she may also have had her share of responsibility in the situation.

*LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

This extract is taken from the interview, and her anecdote comes as a reply to my question about a moment at school which she particularly remembers. Just before, we had discussed her activities at the weekend where she talked about happy moments with her host family and her Swiss friends, which may have directed her into thinking of a positive memory for the next question. In any case, Melanie had no difficulty answering my question and she knew exactly what to talk about. I did not have to intervene during the anecdote or ask for more information as she explained the facts with sufficient detail and without interruption from the beginning until the end. Melanie structured her story freely and decided herself on what elements to add or omit. The length of the anecdote, as well as its very personal nature, show that she felt comfortable talking to me and that I had gained her trust; the way she confides in me with very intimate references to her feelings is a token of her honesty. The quality and quantity of her reply here corresponds to those of her diary and the rest of the interview.

That being said, although she positioned me as her confidante, an external, objective and benevolent interlocutor, she still undoubtedly wanted to project a positive image of herself, and may therefore have chosen – deliberately or not – to present some facts in a certain way while omitting others. My position, as a kind of “study abroad expert” also probably directed her narration to some extent, having in mind some concepts we discussed together, linked to language, culture, and identity. However, I tend to think that my influence was only minimal in this example.

*LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

With this extract, the focus is on Melanie’s relationship with the English students, and it is therefore imbued with paradoxical ideas of attraction and rejection and the need to belong. In her diary entries and her interview, Melanie makes numerous references to her desire to integrate and be accepted by the local students, and her incapacity to do so. Integration is a key element to study abroad – and

moreover, to life in general for teenagers – and although teenagers may believe it to be automatic and guaranteed as a right, it is not always so. Melanie believed that she deserved a place among the local students and although she was rejected a few times, she kept feeling attracted to them. To some extent, by refusing her admission into their group, the English students enhanced her desire to belong. This extract is a good example of her craving for integration or at least for recognition – the fact that Melanie chose this anecdote as a memorable moment at school and her repetition of how touched and pleased she was of the English girl's attention, care, and empathy are clear signs of it.

As mentioned above, integration is a key element to study abroad and as such, it was raised and discussed during the introduction meetings. Melanie's positioning towards her "failed" integration can therefore also be read as a response to SA general discourse of integration. More precisely, SA students cannot expect to be naturally and automatically integrated within the local students' communities; they must work for it, which Melanie shows she has. To some extent, her recurring positioning as powerless in front of the local students – having to accept their friendly or unpleasant behaviour – is a way of showing that she tried and wanted to be integrated and that her failure to do so was not her fault. Almost paradoxically, her focus on her "failure to integrate" is also a way to position herself positively, placing the responsibility on the others and putting her personal efforts forward. The fact that, in the end, this girl was nice with her may also be a way of underlining that her efforts may actually have paid off.

#### 4.1.3 BILLIE

##### *General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher*

##### *Diary*

Billie's participation in the project was relatively regular and systematic until the end of November and then became much more sporadic (see *Table 4.5* below). Her silence in December and January is clearly linked to her emotional involvement in her own experiences. As will be developed below, during that time Billie got involved in her first real romantic relationship and had to deal with conflicting situations. While she was dealing with her teenage life – with its many ups and

downs – she did not take time to write in her diary for the research project. After a few messages from my side asking for news, Billie finally replied in early February, where she wrote five long entries explaining her situation. In these entries, Billie confided in me and talked about very personal details.

TABLE 4.5 Billie’s Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August		September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31		1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts	1		2		3		1	2					5				2		17
No of words	84		169		359		176	208					1586				1842		4425

There is a clear difference between the first entries, which are shorter and more factual, and the last ones, which describe different aspects in length, indicating the importance Billie ascribed to them. Unlike other participants, Billie did not use her diary as a tool for reflection or as an outlet for her sadness and anger. She wrote because she wanted to keep a record of her experiences, and she later admitted that she regretted not having written more regularly or about more specific moments. She was obviously aware that I would read her texts, and the project gave her a real incentive to write. The topics she discussed in her early posts – her family, the English language, local students, etc. – looked to be chosen to match what she believed to be my expectations. However, Billie did also write about some more personal experiences or opinions. In her later posts, the topics developed were clearly centred on her and her preoccupations at the time.

Interview

During the interview, Billie did most of the talking and developed her answers at length. She was clearly happy to share her experiences with me and was very much at ease, showing no sign of discomfort. Billie’s stories were often very personal, and she mostly talked about her feelings or her impressions of people and situations. At one point, she mentioned an incident with a friend of hers. As I asked if she could tell me more about it, she first said that she preferred not to but then changed her mind one minute later. As she developed the incident with very personal details, I had no doubt that she really trusted me and felt free to discuss many things in front of me.

TABLE 4.6 Billie’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 90 min 14'516 words 150 turns	Number of words			Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Billie	12'472			
	Interviewer	2'044		27,2	14

*The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

*Social Positioning*

Billie’s whole stay is defined – almost exclusively – by her different relationships to her **Swiss friends**. As there were nine of them in the same school, Billie admitted that she found in them, and their differences, everything she needed to face each specific situation. She had two girlfriends with whom she would talk about her personal problems, one who was in her economics class and who “listened carefully” and another who was older and “more experienced” and who gave her “good advice”. She also liked to talk to one of the male students who gave her “analyses of her current problematic situations” and who comforted her when necessary. There was also another one, with whom she spoke less and who was “very sensitive”. The third girl was more reserved and not always with them but she was a friend nevertheless. Then, the fourth girl was very “funny and comfortable with people” but Billie did not talk to her much about her “sad phases” because she was not very “empathetic”. This was not a problem, however, since Billie had other friends for that. The last girl in the group was her closest friend at first but then less because Billie felt she saw “judgment in her eyes”. She would still tell her about her problems, but only “later, once she had been able to step back from the situation a little.” Finally, the last Swiss student became her boyfriend for a time, and she was very comfortable with him – both being “generally rarely embarrassed”. This lasted while they were going out together but also afterwards, as they remained quite close. Billie’s detailed description of her friends shows how important they were for her and how much she invested in these relationships.<sup>Bii</sup>

Concretely, her everyday life and routines were shared with the other Swiss students. In the morning, she walked to school and met one or two friends on the way, a ritual to start the day she really appreciated. Then in school, except for her maths class where she was “all

alone”, she had at least one friend with her and even the whole group of Swiss students in German. They would all meet during the 20-minute break and then join each other again for the lunch break. Billie had a similar routine after school; sometimes she would go to the library to study, alone or with friends, or to a café. On Fridays, they sometimes went to a restaurant or went out with the other girls, or Billie would go to her boyfriend’s. Billie admitted that it was “practical” being with her boyfriend, “because she sort of knew who she had to go out with”. There was therefore no risk of her being left alone. During the weekends and the holidays, Billie mostly joined her Swiss friends as well. They split up into smaller groups to go shopping in London, for example. On Sundays, Billie’s friends often stayed at home with their host families but she did not like staying home. She did sometimes have to stay at home and study, but she also went to cafés with a friend – supposedly to study but more to talk. Billie clearly counted on her group of friends and felt satisfied with the different positions offered to her within that group. Her developing a romantic relationship with one of them certainly encouraged her almost exclusive affiliation to that group and gave her fewer incentives to look for other relationships elsewhere.<sup>B12</sup>

Her strong emotional involvement with her boyfriend but also with her friends led to some difficulties, which spiced up her stay but also probably contributed to her almost exclusive investment in her group of Swiss friends. In December, Billie and her girlfriends went to a concert and having drunk too much she offended one of her friends. As a result, that friend did not talk to her for a few weeks, which left Billie feeling very sad and guilty. “Luckily, she had her other friends and her boyfriend to comfort her.” Then, in January, her boyfriend broke up with her which also impacted her life and made her feel sad and a bit lost as well for a time. As they shared the same group of friends, Billie and her boyfriend kept seeing each other every day and they had no other option but to get along. They had previously planned a trip together to York, Manchester, and Liverpool during their holidays in February, and despite having broken up, they decided to go anyway.<sup>B13</sup>

Billie stayed in close contact with her Swiss friends from home and these contacts also kept her busy emotionally. Before leaving Switzerland, Billie belonged to a group of girlfriends, with whom she went out to parties. She said that that group represented “their identity” and they were all about “make up, gossip, and boys” – “which she

sometimes found superficial” – one of the reasons being that she had never had a real boyfriend. Once in England, her friendship with these girls started to erode and then fully break apart. Two of these girls came to see her for a weekend in October and at the end she was “tired of taking pictures for Instagram”. They still had fun though. However, after a few months, the group dissolved completely, and she stopped calling them. Billie explained that one night, two of her friends in Switzerland called her when she was with her friends in England, and they started quarrelling with her, which she did not really understand. Among these girls was Billie’s oldest friend, and she was sad that such a long friendship could come to an end like that. In hindsight, Billie realised that their separation was probably inevitable as they had grown up and had taken different paths. The distance between them simply accelerated it to some extent. However, Billie described these changes in her friendships as being the most rewarding aspect of her experience abroad, again demonstrating the central position she gave to these relationships.<sup>Bi4</sup>

Back home after her stay, Billie continued to see her new friends all the time. Their relationships had evolved as she was not seeing the male students anymore, apart from her boyfriend, as they were back together. The nine of them had more or less split into a group of girls and a group of boys, a situation that had already developed in England towards the end. Anticipating her third year in Renens, Billie was slightly apprehensive about how their relationships would evolve when meeting and mixing with new people. She knew it would be different but hoped that there would be “no drama” and that they would not move too much away from each other. In England, Billie felt very confident because she did not “care about the way people looked at her”; she knew no one, and she belonged to a group of friends who could not “let her go for no reason since they kind of had to stay together”. This specific situation turned out to be both positive and negative for Billie. More precisely, although she felt happy and thrived in that group, it also prevented her from exploring the outside world. As she said, “she did not even have the time to think if she wanted to integrate because she was just enjoying herself so much with her Swiss friends.” In retrospect, Billie seems to regret this a little.<sup>Bi5</sup>

However, Billie did try to develop relationships with **local students** from time to time. In October, she reported that it was still “hard to talk to British classmates” but she felt that it was “getting better”.

During her holidays in October, she went to York to visit a friend she had met on the internet two years before and she was very excited because their discussions were “natural”. She realised that at school, she was much less comfortable talking to the students, probably due to the cultural difference or the fact that she did not know what to say. After her initial disillusionment, and also while being busy enjoying her experience with her Swiss friends, Billie did not invest much energy in trying to meet local students. She did however have occasional discussions with two English girls specifically. One of them was in her maths class, but she was not seated right next to her. She particularly remembered the moment when they talked for the first time: they were at the cafeteria where they randomly looked at each other and smiled, and then started talking. After that, they sometimes walked to their class together or spent the 20-minute break together on Fridays. Billie thought about inviting her to a party at her house, but never did. On one occasion, Billie also talked to a girl in her English literature class about her having broken up with her boyfriend, but that relationship did not develop any further either as she had to leave shortly afterwards.<sup>Bi6</sup>

Other than the girl in her maths class, the other local students Billie mentioned were always linked to her group of friends somehow. For instance, Billie liked the students in her German class because in that class, all the Swiss students were present and had a good time. Together with her friends, Billie felt empowered and confident and the other students in the class were less intimidating. She thought that although the English students were better at German than her because they all had a personal connexion to the language, they would not judge her, and she felt confident talking with them. But as she was with her own friends, the door was never completely open for a friendship to develop. Just before her departure, Billie met a Latvian girl who tutored one of her classmates in maths. “Because she was also an international student” and there was “no one else from her country”, they rapidly became friends, and she even saw her on the morning before her departure. Billie’s stay was not long enough and filled with too many Swiss friends for her to develop local – or international – friendships but had she stayed a few months longer, she would certainly have built different relationships. In retrospect, Billie regretted not having joined clubs or other activities to try and integrate more and to have (more) English friends. She had only a vague memory of

the discussions we had during our introductory meetings, but remembered that we had talked about the different stages of integration and thought that it was not applicable to her situation at all, since she “never felt integrated”.<sup>Bi7</sup>

Just as Billie did not invest much time and energy into meeting local students, her investment in her **host family** was quite low as well. Billie did not feel very welcome when she first arrived. At the airport, nobody was there to greet her, and she had to call to arrange for someone to come and get her. Once in her new home, the host mother was not even there, and she had to wait for her. In retrospect, she confessed that it gave her a bad first impression which she never completely got over. However, her initial impression was not completely negative, as she described her room quite positively as a place where “she felt very good”, and once she had hung some of her pictures on the wall, it felt “just like home”, although it was “very basic” and quite dark.<sup>Bi8</sup>

More generally, Billie was relatively positive about her host family – a mother and her two daughters – at first. She felt grateful to have been allowed to organize a Halloween party with her friends at her house. She liked them even though she did not spend much time with them. What she appreciated most was her freedom, as she went out a lot with her friends and had no strict rules to follow. She lived right next to the train station, a situation she particularly enjoyed as, if she was going to London, for example, she could come home late without anyone worrying. To some extent, Billie appreciated the living conditions offered by her host family more than the people themselves. Billie did have regular discussions with one of the daughters, who was fifteen, as they usually had dinner together. She also had some discussions with the mother, with whom she “talked from time to time in the kitchen”. It happened every two weeks or so for about 20 minutes; they “told each other things”, but Billie did not feel that there was really a connection between them. She was a “student staying with her and that was it”. Whether with the daughter or the mother, Billie’s links were not meant to last, and they did not.<sup>Bi9</sup>

Although Billie wrote very early on that she felt at home in her room, many other elements – which appeared later – showed that she was not always comfortable with her host family. Thinking about some activities spent with her host family, Billie only remembers one time when she “carved a pumpkin with her host sister” and another time when

they played checkers. The fact that they only played once, “whereas that was an activity they could have done many times”, sounded like a regret or a reproach from Billie. She did not understand either why her host mother never ate with them. When Billie was going through difficult times, she regretted not having more support at home, although she had shared her troubles with her host sister and received “good advice” in exchange. More generally, Billie always felt like an outsider, a stranger in their house. She never understood how the family functioned and often felt uncomfortable. She felt that “there were things [she] never knew about them”. For example, the younger daughter who was twelve, did not like to go to school and refused to leave her bed in the morning; as the mother was consequently often late to work, they quarrelled regularly about that. In those moments, Billie felt awkward leaving her room. Sharing one bathroom between four girls was also an issue for Billie, who “felt that she was not in her own home”, and she was embarrassed to ask who was in there and when they would be finished. Her discomfort and negative perception of their attitude lasted until her departure. When she left to go home, the family had to help the students go to the airport. Billie had many suitcases, and she did not understand why the mother would not simply take her car but chose instead to take the train with all the heavy suitcases to carry up the stairs. Initially her host mother had even asked her if she would mind going to the airport on her own.<sup>Bio</sup>

Billie does not place the blame for their lack of contact only on her host family. She recognizes that she was not invested in their relationship either and that it was not able to develop without her. The younger daughter may have tried to talk to her at first but then not anymore “having realised that Billie did not want to get involved so much”. Her host mother may have tried to get her involved in some activities and discussions, but Billie still felt that some things were left unsaid and that she was not welcome “in her private space”. Concerning her own lifestyle, she was out most of the time anyway as “she did not like staying home”, and when she was home, she spent all her time in her room, leaving very little space to build a relationship. To some extent, Billie was happy to have met students returning from England before her departure – during our introduction meetings – because they had talked about host families and warned her. More precisely, they said that some do not host students because they want to get involved in their life and experience but may have more

down-to-earth motivations such as money. Consequently, she felt that she left Switzerland with fewer expectations towards her host family, and she was more prepared to accept her situation, whatever it would be. Billie was able to relativize their importance; she even said that sometimes all she needed was a roof over her head and food, which indicates that her own motivations were very pragmatic as well. In any case, she was glad to have envisaged the possibility of a less ideal family beforehand.<sup>Bii1</sup>

The importance of her **own family** in her experience is also relatively minor and only appeared when Billie was feeling sad or as an image of what Switzerland represented for her when she had to go back or leave again. Billie was not looking forward to going back to Switzerland for the holidays because it meant going back to some problems, such as her parents not always getting along. But then, her return to England after Christmas was hard, as coming back meant saying goodbye to her sister, for example. She only started feeling better when she had re-adapted to her host family, and she never mentioned her own family again, except to rejoice over the freedom she had in England, away from her parents. As for those outside her group of Swiss friends, Billie did not give them much space during her experience abroad, and the physical distance between them certainly helped Billie leave them in the background. Billie's experience was thus mainly centred on her peers for better and for worse.<sup>Bii2</sup>

### *Cultural Positioning*

Billie's almost exclusive investment in her peers is inevitably reflected in her cultural positioning. She noticed some cultural differences – defined as such by Billie or simply described as an experience – but she always remained mainly self-centred. Moreover, her reflections on the topic often remained quite superficial as she lacked close contact with the locals to develop a more complex understanding of them. Some factual elements were positive and experienced as an advantage, such as the proximity to a big city like London with all it had to offer, or the very cheap price of food at the cafeteria. Others sounded more as if she was questioning the locals' behaviour. Once, she was in a shop with another Swiss friend – “who talked quite loudly, like herself” – and they said that a sweater was expensive. There, a friend of hers from York told her that “in England, they don't talk about money like that” but she wondered if it was simply because they were too

loud. Concerning the English students at her school, Billie admitted that her representation of them was still a “cliché”: all of them wearing sweatpants and all the girls wearing a lot of make-up. The lack of close relationships with the locals prevented her from deconstructing these stereotypes. Thus, she was shocked about the sweatpants, and she could not understand why they all wore them. As for the girls, she tried not to associate make-up with bitchy behaviour. She fought her negative prejudices by noting that girls seemed more supportive of each other than in Switzerland, and everyone was thus freer to express themselves the way they wanted. Another thing that startled her among local girls was an alleged proximity to their parents. More precisely, on several occasions, she heard local girls talking about their mothers’ opinion and taking it into consideration, and Billie thought that it was more present there than in Switzerland. It is interesting to see the type of “cultural” elements she noticed as they were all very closely linked to her own preoccupations.<sup>Bi13</sup>

Billie was also confronted with cultural differences in her host family, and she never adapted to them nor understood them completely. It was, for example, very cold in her room. When she slept, “her ears were very cold”, and she found it hard taking her pyjamas off and getting dressed in the morning. There was a small electric heater in her room at first, but “apparently she used it too much”, and because it cost too much money, the mother took it away. Moreover, there was not always enough hot water and that was a problem for Billie, who felt that her hygiene was not good enough. Washing her clothes was also an issue, and she bought more clothes in order to have to wash them less often. Concerning food, Billie thought that the mother “could not cook very well”. She often served precooked meals heated in the microwave or steamed vegetables. Billie was vegetarian and she wondered if it was more difficult for her to cook without meat or fish but, on the other hand, she noted that the daughters did not often eat meat or fish either. The food was very simple, and she did not understand why her host mother never put any dressing in the salad, for example. All these aspects are indubitably linked to socio-cultural differences, and Billie naturally experienced them negatively as they presented a substantial discomfort for her. The question here is whether a deeper interest in the family’s lifestyle – provided she was granted access to it – could have made Billie’s experiences of those differences less problematic.<sup>Bi14</sup>

Concerning school, Billie's experience was relatively positive but her investment in it was again limited or rather mostly focused on socialization. Upon her arrival, she rapidly commented on the fact that although the lessons were not easy, she had less work to do than in Switzerland. She also appreciated the teachers' availability for the students and the many possibilities of tutoring in all subjects. She took advantage of some of them in maths herself. Generally, she considered the teachers to be supportive and nice with the students. On the other hand, Billie was surprised by the students' behaviour. Used to the Swiss classroom atmosphere where everyone knows each other and everyone talks to each other – apparently during classes as well – the English students were very quiet, focused, and in class to learn and study. Ironically, she appreciated this quiet atmosphere, not because it was good environment for learning, but a more comfortable environment for talking with her friends. In fact, in her economics class, she sat with a Swiss friend, and they made the most of their time together to discuss their life and problems. As they spoke French, nobody knew what they were talking about – “and who knows, maybe they were talking about economics”. As nobody seemed to care, they were free to talk, and Billie appreciated it. Had Billie “been prevented from talking, [she] would not have liked it”; another demonstration of her perception of school as a social environment.<sup>Bii5</sup>

Billie's opinion on the English education system is therefore often linked to her ability to be socially entertained. In her maths class, for example, she was really “bored” because she was “alone”, i.e., the only Swiss student. Technically, she could only talk with the two English students sitting next to her, but in fact she did not, because they did not understand maths any more than she did. As nobody could explain anything to each other, and the teacher did not help, they remained quiet. In her English literature class, she was also alone at first and it was “very boring” because the other students were so good, and she had not read the novel they were working on. There was a girl sitting next to her “but she had a friend already”, so Billie could not talk much with her. Luckily, her boyfriend joined her class after a while, which made the situation “a lot better”, and she would “at least not be bored anymore.” This is not to say that Billie did not get involved in her schoolwork at all because she found economics “interesting compared to her class in Switzerland”, and she liked her

literature class, even though “everyone wondered what they [she and her boyfriend] were doing there”. But overall, Billie’s main interest in school was social – a place to interact with her peers – and to some extent, it prevented her from perceiving it as a culturally different environment or system.<sup>Bii6</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Billie is one of the rare participants who wrote entire entries in English at the beginning and at the end of her stay. Her choice of language is very interesting and highly relevant as it is related to the content and reveals her state of mind at the time she was writing. Billie’s first three posts in September and October are in English and indicate her initial desire to make the most of the experience and use the English language. Her first post is about her bad surprises upon her arrival and the next two are mainly about an experience Billie and her Swiss friends tried, which consisted of only speaking English when they were together for a whole week. Her next entries are then in French and mostly focused on her adventures with her Swiss friends and her personal problems. In April, having returned to Switzerland, Billie wrote two entries and one of them was about her last days in England and was written in English. Again, this is quite interesting as Billie probably remembered these moments and switched to English to reconnect with the experience through language. Although her final days are full of the last moments she spent with her Swiss friends, her use of English shows that she was very aware of and sensitive to her English surroundings and that she enjoyed it.

Coming back to the group’s challenge to speak only in English, Billie said that it was hard to keep up and that after a few days they started speaking French in small groups again. However, they still spoke English when they were all together. The idea of the challenge shows the shared motivation of the group to invest in their language practice. However, it only lasted a week and was never re-introduced. Through this experience, Billie realised that speaking English in class was positive as it allowed the local students to understand their discussions and therefore mingle with them. Unfortunately, it did not lead her and her friends to do it more regularly. On the contrary, Billie was often happy not to be understood and left alone to some extent. In her German class, for example, Billie said that she enjoyed speaking French, because all the Swiss were together, and it gave them a strong

sense of unity and identity. This group actually gave Billie confidence as she also said that speaking English in that context was not a problem. With her friends, they were so numerous that they would set the mood of the class and there was no room for anyone else to become intimidating or upset her sense of comfort. Within such a big group of peers, they felt like legitimate users of English.<sup>Bi17</sup>

Billie's ease and confidence in speaking English was not equal in all her classes. On the contrary, in her English literature and economics classes, Billie felt intimidated and did not feel comfortable participating in the discussions. In the English class, students generally discussed the plays or novels they were reading together in a kind of "mini debate." Billie was really impressed by the level of the discussions and found the students really smart and "passionate" about literature. In comparison, she found her own ideas less interesting and was not inclined to share them. In addition, she was scared to express her ideas using the wrong words and expressions because the others were so good. She also admitted that the girls, in particular, in her English class were very impressive not only due to their intelligence but also to the fact that they all looked very fashionable and popular. In economics, things were slightly better, and she sometimes managed to give an answer but she much preferred asking her teacher questions when she was on her own. In that class, Billie felt intimidated not so much because of the students' intelligence (although there were still two brilliant students), but because the class was mainly composed of male students – 21 in a class of 25. Consequently, she felt "a bit more judged" and was scared to "give a long definition, for example". As for many other participants, Billie lost confidence in her linguistic skills whenever she was around popular students; the pressure of being negatively judged diminished her self-confidence as an English user. This, however, was not the case when she was surrounded by her group of peers, who gave her strength and confidence and allowed her a positive positioning.<sup>Bi18</sup>

#### *Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of an Interview Excerpt*

In this excerpt, Billie divided her stay into different parts. Having been asked to do so, she first hesitated and asked for more precisions as to how she had to divide it. As the question was really about a personal division, based on criteria chosen by herself only, she then described her experience based on her different emotional states.

**Me** That's really up to you... What do you think is important? What moments, for you, kind of break things up into different phases?

**Billie** I think yeah, there was the beginning where everything was just going up, like only good stuff was happening and I was just really happy and excited, so it was like this (she makes a rising motion with her hand) and it got to a certain point. That point was probably when we went to the concert. And it was just us girls, the Swiss girls, I already told you about that, and then something happened with one of my friends, and it made me really sad. That's when it kind of started to go down, and I started not being... I started having more moments of sadness. Then there was Christmas break... and during that, no sadness, Christmas break was more like a little pause away from everything. And then after, I came back. Things were better with my friend, so that was good. And then my boyfriend broke up with me. So that was also, I think for about a month, like maybe a whole month... actually probably until we went on that trip together, I was just... not sad all the time, but it was always in the back of my mind, like I kept thinking about it and it made me sad. It was harder, for example, when I was at home, to not feel sad, when I was at home on my own, not feeling sad was just really hard, but I was going out a lot, so that helped. And then, I think there was the trip. That was also kind of like another pause. It was, like, either... Everything went super well during that trip, it was like... I don't know, we all kind of reconnected, but also... yeah. And after that? Well, after the trip, there wasn't much time left. I think it was like a month maybe, and that was just a little... it was kind of neutral. I don't think there was any... Actually, I think it was more positive, I think that period was more positive than negative, I was happier during that time, even though I still wasn't over my boyfriend leaving me, plus we kind of got back together, but not really. So I was kind of sad that it wasn't really working out. But there were still some positive things happening. Like, I got closer... I became friends with people who didn't speak French, there was this one girl from Latvia, I think, and an English girl too, and a few others, I mean we weren't super close or anything, but still more than before, so that gave me a bit more hope. And yeah, I guess that's how it was until March. And then we had to come back. So yeah.

Moi: Ça, c'est à vous de voir comment... Qu'est ce qui, pour vous, est important et qui séparerait... C'est égal, c'est selon vous, qu'est-ce qui marqueraient un peu des phases [dans votre expérience] ?

Billie: Je pense que ouais, il y a le début où c'était que une montée de choses bien et où j'étais juste heureuse et contente, donc ça allait comme ça (elle montre avec sa main qui monte de plus en plus haut) et c'est arrivé jusqu'à un point. Le point, ce serait quand on est allé en concert. Et puis on était que entre les filles, les filles suisses, je l'avais raconté, et pis, il s'est passé quelque chose avec une de mes amies et que ça m'a rendue très triste. Et que là, ça a commencé plus à descendre et j'ai commencé à plus être... à avoir des moments de tristesse. Et y a eu les vacances de Noël... dans ce moment, pas de tristesse, les vacances de Noël, c'était plus une parenthèse. Et puis après, je suis revenue. Ça allait mieux avec mon amie. Donc voilà. Et après mon copain m'a quittée. Donc là, c'était aussi, je pense bien pendant un mois, un mois... en fait jusqu'à ce qu'on parte en vacances ensemble. Je pense là, j'étais juste... pas tout le temps triste, mais il y avait toujours ça en moi où je pensais à ça et pis j'étais triste. C'était plus difficile, par exemple, quand j'étais chez moi de pas être triste, quand j'étais toute seule chez moi de pas être triste, mais bon, ça va je sortais assez beaucoup. Et après, je pense y a eu le voyage. Ou là aussi, c'était un peu une parenthèse. C'était, c'était soit... Tout, tout, tout s'est très bien passé pendant ce voyage, c'était un peu... Je ne sais pas, on se retrouvait mais c'était... c'était ouais. Et après? De toute façon, après le voyage, c'était pas très long, Je pense ça a duré un mois ce qui s'est passé après, là c'était juste un peu... C'était assez neutre. Je pense il se passait rien de... Non je pense c'était plus positif, je pense que c'était plus positif que négatif là, ce temps-là, j'étais plus heureuse, mais j'avais toujours le fait que mon copain, m'a quitté pis en plus on s'était un peu remis ensemble, mais pas vraiment. Donc, j'étais un peu triste que ça se passe pas vraiment, mais que il y avait quand même plusieurs choses positives. Par exemple, j'étais devenue plus pote... J'ai noué plus de liens amical... amicaux avec des personnes qui parlaient pas français, donc, une fille qui venait de Lettonie, je crois, et une fille anglaise aussi, pis plusieurs autres personnes, bon très vite fait, mais un peu plus déjà donc ça me donnait un peu plus d'espoir. Et bah voilà, jusqu'en mars, je pense, c'était comme ça, et on a dû revenir. Et voilà.

#### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

Billie's division is thus based on how she felt during her stay and is really centred on her own emotions. At the beginning of her stay, she says that it was *only good stuff happenings* (l.4), more and more until it got to a certain point (l.6). As she spoke, she showed physically, with her

hand going higher, that positive things were added on top of each other, building a pleasant surrounding for her experience. Consequently, Billie was *happy and excited* (1.4–5) at first, two very general but positive adjectives. She does not describe these *good stuff* but her use of the pronoun *we* (1.6) in the following sentence may imply that these good things happened within her group of Swiss friends, such as friendships becoming stronger and the start of a romantic relationship. In fact, she first says *we* without feeling the need to define who she is talking about. She then becomes more precise as she refers to the first negative incident and mentions that it was just them girls (1.7) before realising that she needed to be even more precise and referred to the *Swiss girls* (1.7). This gradual clarification shows that her Swiss friends are her first frame of reference and that naturally she does not need to specify their presence or importance. In any case, the question focused on what marked stages in her experience, and Billie thus describes the first incident which broke the succession of positive events. More precisely, in December, she went to a concert with her Swiss girlfriends where an incident happened with one of them, which left Billie feeling *very sad* (1.9). From that point onwards, things started to *go down* with recurrent *moments of sadness* (1.9–10). The incident is not described, and Billie chooses again a very general – but unambiguous – feeling, *sadness*.

The Christmas holidays followed shortly after that incident, and Billie describes them as a *pause* (1.11), a time away from her SA experience. Interestingly, during that time, Billie felt *no sadness* (1.11), she was out of her study abroad environment and therefore had other pre-occupations and occupations which helped her gain distance from her “English” problems. Once back, things had settled down with her friend but then her boyfriend broke up with her, which again left her feeling *sad* (1.17–18) for about a month. The repetition of the word *sad* tends to emphasize the feeling and certainly shows how prevalent it was for her during that time. That second sad phase is followed by another happy *pause* (1.20), a moment different from her global experience. This time, Billie does not go to Switzerland but travels to different cities with her ex-boyfriend who, outside of their usual social environment, becomes her boyfriend again for a time, and Billie’s problems disappear for a while. After that trip, Billie first says that it was quite *neutral* and then corrects herself to say that it was *more positive* (1.24–25). Her hesitation is interesting because it marks a change

in her frame of reference. Billie stops thinking only about her positioning within her group of Swiss friends and broadens her experience to other positionings. In fact, she was still *sad* (1.27) about her boyfriend not really being her boyfriend anymore, but at the same time, she says that some *positive things* (1.28) happened. Here, unlike at the beginning, she describes these positive things as her getting closer to *people who did not speak French* (1.29–30), like a girl from Latvia – *she thinks* (1.30) – an English girl and several other people. These relationships were very new and only evolving but it gave her *a bit more hope* (1.32). Billie's choice of word is very interesting because she never complained about her lack of local friends and on the contrary expressed her satisfaction with her group of peers on many occasions during her stay. But with this word, Billie implies a potential different future, a desired change, new relationships which could have developed. To some extent, we can infer that having experienced many things with her Swiss peers and discovered each of them more deeply, she was then ready to move beyond that group and started to feel the need to widen her social networks. But then she *had to come back* (1.33).

This excerpt is particularly interesting insofar as it brings to light the central and almost exclusive importance given to her group of peers and her personal relationships with some of them. Billie was so immersed into that group that they became the frame of reference for her experience and that all the important emotions she felt during her stay were related to them. They shaped her experience in an almost exclusive manner. The outside world only appears at the end of her stay and seems to have played no predominant role before that. Her different positionings within her group of Swiss friends were clearly fundamental to Billie's experience and probably prevented the development of others.

#### *LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

In her interaction with me, Billie was eager to give a correct answer in the sense that she made sure she understood the question – asking for clarification – before replying. As she had told me about her different experiences with her Swiss friends before, Billie mentions some of them only briefly or refers to one of her previous texts or stories. As was noted above, she felt extremely comfortable in the interaction and had no trouble referring to very personal emotions or anecdotes. To some extent, the impact I may have had as an SA expert seems quite limited

here as Billie does not select typical SA criteria to define her experience but chooses instead to focus on very personal elements. Her mentioning new possible relationships with local students may be read as Billie's attempt to meet some of my expectations, a sudden realisation of the context of interaction and the need to get out of a more limited, almost self-centred frame of reference. But at the same time, it certainly corresponds to her evolution in the experience as well. It is also worth mentioning that Billie did not have many expectations when she decided to take part in the project. She agreed to it because she met a girl at a party, who happened to be the friend of a friend, who convinced her to do it too. Her initial motivations and general interest in the project were thus not about increasing her understanding of the SA experience. Similarly, the benefits of the project described by Billie are centred on social aspects, meeting former students and peers. She did not therefore see me as a "scientific resource" but as a person genuinely interested in her experience, which I was indeed.

### *LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

This excerpt is not easily analysed in relation to dominant discourses, probably because it is mainly self-centred, and also because Billie is not describing a critical incident in detail but rather making an approximate division of her stay. In doing so, Billie is not trying to allude – consciously or not – to global discourses and values or adjust her stories to fit them but is describing personal emotions. To some extent, it could be argued that she is more or less hermetic to the outside world, and she keeps a strong focus on herself and the peers she identifies with. This characteristic is particularly present among teenagers and is typical of their evolution, particularly when they are facing physical and emotional changes (Erikson 1968). Billie's narration is framed by teenage references and interests. She discusses friendships and romantic relationships in a somewhat dramatic way in the sense that she focuses on her reactions, often intense, to different incidents. We may infer that these different types of relationships are understood as fundamental, but they are not described at enough length here to do so. Unlike other participants who portrayed friendships with ideal and genuine values such as trust and honesty, Billie never describes her relationships from that angle. Her almost constant self-positioning as the central character, who the other elements are related to, seems to put everything else into the background.

#### 4.1.4 CHLOE

##### *General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher*

##### *Diary*

Chloé was really motivated to complete her diary at the beginning as she wrote once a week during the first month. Then, she managed to write twice in October but after that, she did not post anything until Christmas. After the holidays, she wrote a lengthy entry in January, taking stock of her experience until then, and then disappeared again until her return to Switzerland. Among all the participants, Chloé is the one who wrote the least, both in terms of numbers of entries and words.

**TABLE 4.7** Chloé's Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	Total
	19-31	1-15 16-30	1-15 16-31	1-15 16-30	1-15 16-31	1-15 16-31	1-15 16-28	1-15 16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts	1	4	1 2			1			1		10
No of words	55	743	237 510			650			246		2441

The absence of posts over several months may look problematic but this absence is, on the contrary, highly significant in Chloé's experience. In fact, when commenting on her diary in her interview, she said that "her experience did not bring her incredible things that she could not have lived in Switzerland" and added that she did not write about specific events because "she did not experience anything out of the ordinary":

*It's true that I didn't really talk about specific events, maybe because I didn't... I mean, for me, this experience, I didn't really do any incredible stuff that I couldn't really have done in Switzerland, you know... Yeah, nothing really incredible, I think that sums it up. (Interview)*

*C'est vrai que j'ai pas trop parlé d'événements particuliers, peut-être parce que j'ai pas... enfin ça pour moi, cette expérience ça m'a pas non plus apporté des trucs incroyables que j'aurais pas trop pu vivre en Suisse, si je puis dire... ouais, y a pas eu des trucs vraiment incroyables, c'est ça en fait je pense. (Interview)*

Her early posts were not addressed to me in particular, and as such resembled an actual diary, in which she explained her everyday

activities, her impressions, and her future plans. The entry written in January is slightly different as it takes a global view of her experience and evaluates different elements, such as her English skills, her host family, and her social life. However, these formats are a sign of Chloé’s desire to respect the instructions given as part of the project and show that she never forgot who she was writing for. She remained quite distant as she never asked me any questions or for advice, nor did she reply directly to a question or comment I might have made to her.

*Interview*

Chloé’s interview is characterized by a relatively high number of turns, showing her difficulty in developing an answer on her own. More precisely, Chloé was often very vague or hesitant and I therefore needed to ask for more details or precisions, which were not necessarily provided as a result.

**TABLE 4.8** Chloé’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 64 min 9'710 words 274 turns	Number of words		Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Chloé	7'239	52	74,5
	Interviewer	2'471	18	25,5

Her sentences often remained incomplete, suggesting a possible conclusion without really giving it. Her difficulty in explaining, for example, her relationships or different activities in detail may come from the fact that Chloé did not really invest in these relationships or activities and that she therefore had very little to say about them. The questions related to school seem to have been the easiest for her to answer as they are comparatively longer than the others and their content is richer, with fewer hesitations. The lack of rich content does not seem to result from a lack of interest or motivation as Chloé did not give the impression that she was not willing to help me with the project. She never showed any sign of annoyance, and she even thanked me for setting it up for them, occasionally mentioning several of its benefits. Finally, Chloé’s shy personality undeniably played a role in her numerous hesitations during the interview and also impacted her experience abroad more generally.

### *The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

#### *Social Positioning*

Throughout her stay, Chloé had great difficulties in positioning herself fully or firmly within any social group, with the exception maybe of her **host family**. Chloé felt welcome from the beginning and found the family very nice and friendly. Chloé could bake whenever she wanted, and the family would cook a vegetarian dish just for her, which she really appreciated. Globally, she found her host family environment “reassuring”, making her everyday life easier. They provided her with stability and comfort, and she was grateful for their kindness which to some extent made her feel a part of a “real family”.<sup>Ch1</sup>

The family was a blended family, with a mother and her daughter, who was a few years older than Chloé, and a father and his daughter, who was 12. Chloé was closest to the mother, who was “really adorable” and with whom she “spent a lot of moments talking”. She liked the father as well, who reminded her a bit of her own father, as they both enjoyed running. He was a magazine editor and had some interesting stories to tell about people he had met, events he had attended, or places he had visited. Her relationships with her host sisters were not very strong as they were not the same age. Unless Chloé was in the same room with one of the girls, she would not go and talk to them spontaneously. She was a bit closer to the younger sister though, with whom she played or talked on different occasions, moments which she defined as “awesome”. As regards the older sister, she would sometimes come across her on her way to school or back and they would exchange a few words.<sup>Ch2</sup>

Once, the family went to Southend-on-Sea for a weekend, as the host father was running a marathon there. Chloé felt grateful to be part of the trip, as it gave her the opportunity to discover new places in England. Other than that, Chloé did not recount other special activities. Their relations were mainly constructed around everyday encounters, during meals, for example. However, although the family ate meals together, Chloé admitted that she did not really take advantage of those moments, often remaining quiet. She was even lost in her thoughts sometimes, not really listening, wondering if they were “talking about her without her being aware of it”. What Chloé needed most in her host family was a reassuring environment; strong interactions were not as essential. The comfort of her room, on the other

hand, was an essential element, and she spent time and money decorating it to her taste. A few weeks after her arrival, she prepared a “wish list” with the things she wanted to buy for her room, and she was looking forward to decorating it. Once tidied and decorated, she felt very good in it.<sup>Ch3</sup>

For Chloé, her host family replaced her real family to some extent, or at least brought her the comfort and stability she needed, making her feel “at home”. Being part of a family was really important for Chloé as it minimized the changes from home where “she still lives in a family environment”. Discovering how another family lived was also enriching. At the end, she felt really grateful for their constant support, and although they did not develop a strong and deep relationship, she hoped she could go back and see them again, which would allow for proper goodbyes.<sup>Ch4</sup>

Given the importance for Chloé of a reassuring family environment, leaving her **own family** for a year was a challenge and generated some stress and fear. Although she didn’t miss them as much as she had feared, she was nevertheless very happy to go back for Christmas to see them all, and she also spent a few days in London in February with her older sister. Being home for the Christmas holidays made her realise even more how important all her family was for her. At first, she was scared that once home, she would not want to go back to England at the end of the holidays but finally, it all went quite well.<sup>Ch5</sup>

Although her host family provided Chloé with a safe environment, claiming other positions outside the house proved to be quite challenging. After a month, Chloé complained that although she was happy at home, she wished she would go out more. She did not leave the house much except for school and had difficulties making friends with local students. In fact, until the end, Chloé did not develop strong links either with locals or with Swiss students, with whom she “had very good contacts” but no close relationships. Unlike all the other participants, Chloé did not experience the same immediate connection with the other **Swiss students**. Her first meeting with the other Swiss girls at her school was described very factually without the usual excitement linked to a promising future experience together. It took two months for Chloé to first go and have a coffee with them after school and then to extend the coffee to a dinner and a movie with two German students as well. Chloé really appreciated these two moments which meant she “didn’t have to go straight home” after school and

“just stay in her room”. Whenever she shared special moments with her peers, Chloé was grateful, but there were not many of them. Another occasion she enjoyed was the flight back to England after Christmas, which she went on with her peers, a precious occasion to share their experiences as well. However, it would be wrong to believe that Chloé did not have regular interactions with her peers. They saw each other at school, usually had lunch together, and would also occasionally have coffee or spend an evening together. One girl lived nearby to Chloé, and they would usually walk about 20 minutes to school together. Nevertheless, she never succeeded in creating a strong connection with the group or any girl in particular. Once back in Switzerland, she came across one of the female students by chance but other than that she did not meet them again. Chloé did send them messages from time to time and would be happy if they organized something in the near future.<sup>Ch6</sup>

As Chloé did not spend much time with the other Swiss students, she had to do things by herself and soon decided to join a gym. She went there alone and after some time, she talked to some local people there. At school, it was difficult for Chloé to meet local students. Being “quite shy”, she complained that “they would be in groups and would not take the first step.” At the gym however, she found it slightly easier. She met people randomly and exchanged a few words. After a while, she started meeting the same person regularly and “each time they would see each other, they would talk.” The relationships never evolved outside of the gym, but Chloé enjoyed these brief moments. Globally and probably due to her shy nature, Chloé did not develop any strong relationships with anyone, except maybe her host mother. In her final interview, she confirmed this by saying that her experience had not been exceptional in the sense that she had not done things that she would not have been able to do in Switzerland. On the other hand, she also qualified her poor social life, adding that towards the end of the experience, it had become better, and she enjoyed herself more as well.<sup>Ch7</sup>

### *Cultural Positioning*

School was certainly central to Chloé’s experience. When asked to divide her stay into different stages, Chloé kept school as her reference and focused on the impact of school and homework on her life, admitting that she concentrated mostly on that. From the start, Chloé

found her classes quite hard, due to the language difference on the one hand and the difference of level or methods on the other. Noting that English students could choose the subjects they wanted to follow, she deduced that they were more competent since they chose those that they were more comfortable with.<sup>Ch8</sup>

The amount of homework was a recurrent worry for Chloé, and she often complained about the time she needed to complete it and the mental load that came with it. She was happy to have a week off at the end of October because “although the school timetable was much better than in Switzerland, it was still rather tiring”. But again, the disadvantage of that week off was that her teachers gave them a lot of homework. But Chloé also recognized that she had more free time than in Switzerland to do her homework, which was an advantage. Despite these criticisms, Chloé really invested in her schoolwork, and she was thrilled when she learnt that her EPQ supervisor would be her English literature teacher, a teacher she thought was “excellent”. As a result, she felt like devoting quite some time to her EPQ but was afraid that it would be difficult, again because of the amount of work she had in general.<sup>Ch9</sup>

Although she invested much of her time in and for school doing her homework, Chloé became rather jaded about her different topics and complained regularly, almost paradoxically. Comparing her situation to the Swiss high school curriculum, she missed the many different subjects taught in Switzerland. The lack of diversity she had to endure in England resulted in her being bored or tired of some of her classes. This inevitably had a greater impact as there were fewer classes to make up for it. She complained particularly about one of her English teachers, her German teachers and one of her economics teachers. She “disliked” one of her English teachers, whom she found really boring. In German, she often found the classes “long” and the level very low, and didn’t feel that she learned much, although she admitted that she “had never really liked German”. Mathematics was ok, not really because of the teachers but because she coped best with the subject, which she “had always found easy”. Her final subject, economics, was also described slightly more positively, as it “never annoyed [her] to have to go”, unlike German or one of her English classes. However, Chloé still criticized one of her teachers who was not always able to deal with classes of older students.<sup>Ch10</sup>

In fact, another major point of criticism Chloé had regarding her school in England was that the school was not for high school students

only but was also for younger children. Compared to Switzerland where the schools are separated, being back with young children of 11 or 12 was “strange” for Chloé. Although they obviously had no classes together, she “would pass them in the hallways” and she had the unpleasant feeling of being back in her former school. For her, it also influenced the teachers, some of whom she did not feel were competent to teach students of her age. In her opinion, there should have been “more of a distinction” between the teachers. As a result, she felt as if some teachers “treated them like babies”, “as if they knew nothing and had to be told everything”. To conclude, although Chloé positioned herself first and foremost as a student, she remained very critical of her school environment, and she did not thrive in it. The local high school culture was not really perceived as an entity of its own – with its own logical structure – and understood as such, but constantly compared to what she knew in Switzerland. Moreover, she had strong and mostly negative opinions.<sup>Ch1</sup>

Culturally, and outside of school, Chloé was surprised by different elements, mainly present in her family or their house, again highlighting Chloé’s points of interest or main environment. First, she realised that she needed to be careful not to gain weight as food was cheaper than in Switzerland, so she signed up at the gym. At home, with her host family, she was surprised to see the family eating desserts every night, which she found quite excessive. As for the cliché of the English drinking tea, she noticed that “they did drink tea very often.” Concerning the house, she observed that it was generally cleaner in Switzerland and the temperature inside the house much colder in England. “Even the shower and water pressure were different.” In her descriptions, the differences seem to imply a kind of superiority of the Swiss way, but “it did not prevent her from enjoying her stay in England”.<sup>Ch12</sup>

That being said, Chloé did experience moments when she could not enjoy her English life fully and seemed to miss her Swiss routine. After her Christmas holidays in Switzerland, for example, she suffered from insomnia, waking up between three and five in the morning “for no apparent reason”. Consequently, she felt “exhausted” at the end of the day with no motivation to work. At the end of her stay, she also felt very happy to be back home; being back with her family was “really, really cool”. Although she mentioned, in passing, that “of course, she would have preferred to be able to stay in England”, she also repeatedly mentioned that her life in Switzerland was good, and she was happy to be back home.<sup>Ch13</sup>

To conclude, Chloé's experiences of cultural difference are anecdotal. As she spent most of her time in her room – by herself – she remained excluded from English cultural life, except at school. Even there, her understanding of the local culture was that of a spectator rather than that of an actor. Her lack of real interactions with the English students prevented her from truly experiencing English schooling from within.

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Upon her arrival, Chloé faced some difficulties speaking and understanding English in her everyday interactions. Nevertheless, her very first meeting with her host parents went well, and she could talk “without too many difficulties” although, “with stress, her vocabulary was reduced”. What was more difficult for Chloé was the first family dinner with their daughters where she was “quite embarrassed” by her accent and her lack of vocabulary and did not dare talk. At school, she found it difficult to follow some of her teachers who spoke very fast, and she hoped that it would improve with time. After the first shock, two weeks after her arrival, Chloé did not notice any big change or progress in her English skills. She noted nevertheless that some teachers were more careful and talked more slowly sometimes if they did not forget about it. She also had the opportunity to talk with her host sisters individually, so she felt less embarrassed to speak during dinner conversations. However, she preferred to be alone with a person in order to have a real discussion. It was “easier”, and she was “less scared to make mistakes”.<sup>Ch14</sup>

As the weeks passed, Chloé noticed some progress and was happy about it. At the end of October, she went to see a movie and she understood most of it, which was very positive for her. In January, she felt a clear difference in her language skills from the beginning; if she concentrated in classes, she could understand everything. She also observed that when talking French with her Swiss friends, some words would only come to her in English, a phenomenon she found “quite disconcerting”. She still struggled with the accent which she could only get right if she concentrated. At the end of her stay, she felt happy with her progress but was sorry to have missed out on the last few months, which would have been “really beneficial” to improve her English.<sup>Ch15</sup>

The way Chloé talked about the progress in her language skills sometimes gave the impression that she believed improvement would just

happen to her and she just had to wait. However, she still managed to seize some occasions which were safe enough to develop her speaking skills. Unsurprisingly, the situation in which she was most comfortable speaking English was with her host family and her host mother in particular. As they were “aware of her situation” and treated her kindly, she felt safe and comfortable talking to them and that was where she made the biggest improvements. At school, two German girls and an Italian girl sometimes joined their group of peers, and Chloé felt that it was easier to speak English with them. She knew that they were in the same situation, all of them “not being born English”, and that they would “help each other to improve”. Thus, in general, Chloé particularly appreciated safe situations, with either friendly people or people in a similar position.<sup>Ch16</sup>

In more risky situations, Chloé kept a more passive attitude. Although she did not speak without being addressed, she admitted that she thought it was nice when her teachers, for example, gave her an opportunity to speak. In her English class, they would sometimes read aloud, and she liked the exercise as she saw it as beneficial for her pronunciation. She also appreciated it when her economics teacher asked her an easy question so that she could try to participate. However, these occasions were very rare, and teachers usually left her alone as she never raised her hand proactively. She admitted that she preferred to remain quiet and not participate because “you could easily not be understood”. She would have felt embarrassed if her question or opinion could not be conveyed. She therefore preferred not to ask or answer a question in front of the whole class but to talk to teachers individually.<sup>Ch17</sup>

As for many other participants, the embarrassment or danger that Chloé felt and that prevented her from participating came from the local students at school. She recalled a situation in which local students laughed at an Italian girl and her strong accent, and she was shocked at their disrespectful behaviour. She did not suffer from similar criticism or mockery but at the same time, she admitted that she did not really express herself, so she therefore avoided it. In any case, Chloé clearly expressed her discomfort in speaking English in front of the local students, as she did not want to make a bad impression. Fortunately, she felt safe enough with her host parents or sometimes with strangers at the gym to be able to talk from time to time.<sup>Ch18</sup>

*Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of an Interview Excerpt*

This excerpt is taken from the very end of the interview and was introduced by the last pre-defined question, which aimed at targeting a possible lack in her experience in terms of external or institutional support. Chloé took this opportunity to discuss the feeling of loneliness she sometimes experienced.

1 **Me** Did you ever feel, at any point—before you left, when you got there,  
2 during your stay, or when you came back—that something was missing, like  
3 you were kind of left on your own?

4 **Chloé** Yeah, well, maybe at some points... I did feel more alone, actually. I  
5 mean... yeah, maybe especially at the beginning of the year, because it was  
6 hard to fit in. It's true that at first, it was kind of tough, like... I'd tell myself  
7 yeah, maybe... I mean, what would've happened if I'd done this or that dif-  
8 ferently, so... I didn't regret doing the program or anything, but yeah, some-  
9 times I often wondered, like... yeah, I mean... Sometimes I'd be a little... Most  
10 of the time I was happy to be there, but it's true that other times there were  
11 moments where... where... Yeah, I'd wonder what... what could I have done  
12 different, differently, or like that.

13 **Me** You mean in terms of the experience itself, of being over there, or even  
14 just the fact that you went in the first place?

15 **Chloé** Uh... yeah, sometimes I wondered, like... Yeah, obviously I would  
16 ask myself, I would wonder what if I hadn't gone, what would have hap-  
17 pened, or if I'd done things differently... It's true that there were times when  
18 I'd ask myself stuff like that, but it also wasn't like... I didn't have a real prob-  
19 lem.

20 **Me** When you say “done things differently,” what do you think you  
21 could've done differently?

22 **Chloé** I'm not really sure, maybe just... like, if I'd acted a little differently,  
23 or something...

24 **Me** During the exchange? With the others?

25 **Chloé** Yeah, more with the others, see how... see how that might've  
26 changed things. But yeah, honestly no... in the end, I'm still happy with it.

27 **Me** So you don't regret going?

28 **Chloé** No, no.

29 **Me** What was your reason for going in the first place? Why did you tell  
30 yourself: “I'm going to do this”?

31 **Chloé** I mean, I don't know, honestly it was really for the experience, liv-  
 32 ing in another country, improving my English, discovering something new...  
 33 Yeah, 'cause I've only ever lived in Switzerland, so just seeing what it's like  
 34 in another country. And also, yeah, living with a family, I thought that was  
 35 a super cool experience. Like, obviously you know what things are like with  
 36 your own family, but you don't really know how others act with each other,  
 37 so yeah, that's something I really liked.

38 **Me** Had your sisters already done something like this before?

39 **Chloé** Yeah actually, my older sister did basically the same thing last year.  
 40 So yeah, plus my parents also encouraged me, so... It immediately made me  
 41 want to do it, especially since I was like, okay, I have the opportunity to do  
 42 this, so why not just go for it?

Moi Est-ce que vous avez l'impression qu'à un moment donné, que ce soit avant de partir, quand vous êtes arrivée, pendant le séjour ou à votre retour, il y a eu un moment où vous avez l'impression qu'il manquait quelque chose, que vous étiez un peu laissée à vous-même ?

Chloé Ouais ben peut être à des moments, c'est vrai que je me sentais plus seule en fait. Enfin... ouais justement peut-être au début de l'année, vu que c'était compliqué de s'intégrer. Bah c'est vrai qu'au début, c'était un peu plus compliqué genre... Bah je me disais ouais peut-être... enfin qu'est-ce qu'il se serait passé si j'avais pas fait ça ou comme ça, enfin... J'ai pas regretté d'y avoir participé, mais c'est vrai que des fois je me suis souvent demandé... ouais enfin... c'est vrai que des fois j'étais un peu... La plupart du temps j'étais contente d'avoir ça mais c'est vrai que des fois, il y avait un peu des moments de... de... Ouais je me suis dit qu'est-ce que... ouais qu'est-ce que j'aurais pu faire de différent, différemment ou comme ça.

Moi Par rapport à votre expérience, par rapport au fait d'être là-bas ou par rapport au fait de venir carrément ?

Chloé Eh... Ben c'est vrai que des fois je me suis demandé ouais enfin... c'est vrai que forcément je me posais des questions, je me disais ouais si j'étais pas venue, qu'est-ce qui se serait passé ou alors si j'avais fait les choses différemment... c'est vrai qu'y a des moments comme ça, je me posais des questions, mais c'est vrai que c'était pas... j'avais pas un réel problème.

Moi Quand vous dites faire les choses différemment, vous auriez pu, imaginé, faire quoi différemment ?

Chloé Je sais pas trop, mais peut-être, je sais pas, si je m'étais comportée différemment, comme ça...

Moi Pendant l'expérience ? Avec les autres ?

Chloé Ouais ben plus avec les autres, voir comment... voir comment ça aurait pu changer mais c'est vrai que non... au final, je suis contente quand même.

Moi Donc, vous ne regrettez pas d'être partie ?

Chloé Non non.

Moi C'était quoi votre motivation à la base pour partir ? Pourquoi vous vous êtes dit : ah je vais faire ça ?

Chloé Ben je sais pas, honnêtement c'était vraiment pour l'expérience, le fait de vivre dans un autre pays, de pouvoir justement améliorer l'anglais, découvrir... Ben ouais, justement parce que j'ai que vécu en Suisse du coup juste voir comment c'est dans un autre pays. Et pis ouais surtout vivre chez une famille, ça, j'ai trouvé vraiment vraiment bien pour voir. Parce que forcément une famille t'en as une, mais tu sais pas comment les autres se comportent entre eux et pis ouais non là j'ai vraiment été contente de ça.

Moi Vos sœurs avaient déjà fait ce genre d'expérience ?

Chloé Ben justement en fait, ma grande sœur, elle avait fait l'année passée le même truc en gros. Et du coup ouais... bah c'est vrai qu'après aussi mes parents m'ont beaucoup encouragée à le faire du coup... ça m'a tout de suite donné envie de faire, surtout que je me disais que je pouvais le faire, du coup, pourquoi pas le faire...

### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

In this excerpt, Chloé rarely mentions people other than herself. If she does, at the beginning, it is only to talk about *the others* (l.27) in general, but the main focus remains on herself. Towards the end, she mentions her *family* (l.36) and then at the very end, her *older sister* (l.39) and her *parents* (l.40). This is relevant because the original question was indeed focused on some external support she may have lacked. However, Chloé did not understand the question in that way and concentrated on the last words of the question and the moments she was *left on her own* (l.3). Thus, she explains that she sometimes felt *more alone* (l.4), but she does not blame anybody for it except herself. She mentions how hard it was to fit in (l.5–6) as an external factor, but she seems to accept it as a fact that she has to contend with, again without blaming anyone else. Her loneliness led her to an intense and repeated questioning of herself and her situation. As she tries to describe her scrutiny, she oscillates between regrets and resilience. More precisely,

she seems to want to say that she regretted being there because she hesitates and stops in mid-sentence on several occasions: *it was kind of tough, like..., I'd tell myself, yeah maybe..., I often wondered... yeah, I mean..., sometimes I'd be a little...* (1.6–9). In between her hesitations, or interruptions, she uses negative forms to express what she does not mean – in a way, to defend herself to some extent – as in *I didn't regret doing the program* (1.8) or *most of the time, I was happy to have that* (1.9) but it does sound, on the contrary, that what she actually felt like saying, was in fact the opposite. Her sentences are confused; she says that *sometimes*, she *often wondered...* (1.9) or she fails to find a word to describe the way she felt: *Sometimes she'd be a little...* (1.9), and *there were some moments of... of...* (1.9–10). Finally, she says that she wondered *what she could have done differently* (1.11–12), questioning her own behaviour.

As I ask her what she means by *doing things differently*, her answer is again very vague. She says that *obviously* (1.15) she questioned herself, a sign that her loneliness was real. So, she wondered what would have happened *had she not gone* (1.16) or *had she done things differently* (1.17). And again, she repeats that she questioned herself from time to time but stops again in mid-sentence and concludes that *she had no real problem* (1.18–19). In an attempt to get more information, I ask for more details and she adds that she wondered how things would have been if she had behaved differently *with the others* (1.25), but then she is unable to develop her statement and states again that *in the end, she is still happy with it* (1.26). The presence of the *anyway* combined with her numerous hesitations makes her conclusion rather unconvincing. Although my following question “So you don’t regret going away?” is biased – using a negative form makes a positive answer more difficult – it reflects Chloé’s intended message and was probably unconsciously formulated like that in order to reassure her or confirm that her intended message had come through. Nonetheless, as Chloé says herself on several occasions, regrets have been part of her experience to some extent, a fact which is also confirmed by many other elements as well.

As Chloé’s account challenged my understanding of what an SA experience should be about, I wondered about her motivation to study abroad and asked her. At first, she mentions widely shared motivations in SA discourses and general elements such as *for the experience, to live in a different country* and *to improve her English* (1.31–32). Then, her next answer becomes more personal – and probably moves from

motivation to SA to benefit of SA to a certain extent – as she says that she wanted to live with a family (l.34) to discover how other families live. This “motivation” is interesting and shows the importance that “family” and “family life” has for Chloé. In fact, Chloé’s desire to find another family may show that, to some extent, she was not completely ready for the experience. The resurgence of the family environment – an element which was central to Chloé’s experience but also to her life more generally – made me wonder about the role her family played in her departure. The following question and Chloé’s answer shed a new light on her experience as a whole and a different understanding. As a matter of fact, Chloé’s older sister took part in a similar programme the year before and her parents *greatly encouraged* (l.40) her to do it as well. As a daughter and a sister who was offered a great opportunity, Chloé *wanted to do it immediately, because she could, so why not...?* (l.41–42) Again, Chloé’s words and message are ambiguous and seem to mean the contrary. Although she says that she was convinced *right away*, she then adds that she was able to do it and had no good reason to refuse. This means that she did not do it *for* a reason but because there was no reason *against* it. In the end, she tried to make the best out of it but maybe what she truly wanted was to fulfil her family’s expectations.

#### *LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

As was the case in most of the interview, Chloé was very hesitant and often remained vague in this excerpt. The possible reasons for her hesitations are numerous and some are explained elsewhere. Another important reason may be my presence. As an “SA expert” or someone who tried to prepare her for the experience, Chloé may have felt uncomfortable telling me about what she perceived as the more negative and lonely sides of her stay. Actually, as will be discussed below, Chloé would probably have felt uncomfortable discussing these aspects of her experience with most people. That being said, it could also be argued that the fact she mentioned these elements in the first place is proof of her honesty and her trust in the project. Moreover, as the original question did not address this issue, the fact that she chose to discuss it – or at least mention it – is a sign that it was important to her, or at least that it was an important part of her experience and that she wanted to share it. Her way of presenting her loneliness – insinuating it first, minimizing it next – shows her own reflection on this issue and again, her sharing it in this context proves her interest and trust in the research project.

Chloé's shy personality may have led to hesitations and played a role in her inability to develop some issues, and I would argue that my presence did not hinder her narration but on the contrary, offered her a safe and unique place to discuss them and put them into words. Just before these questions, Chloé was asked if she thought that her experience would have been different had she not taken part in the project. Her answer was really interesting and revealing of the value she gave to the project. More precisely, she said that the experience would not have been different, but the way she *felt it may have been*. For Chloé, the initial preparation and discussions combined with the continuing support were not sufficient to make her act in a different way, but they made her think and reflect on some events in a different way.

*Me Overall, do you feel that your experience would have been different if you hadn't taken part in this program?*

*Chloé Honestly I don't know. I think the way I felt about the experience might have been different, but I wouldn't... The experience wouldn't have been different.*

*Moi Globalement, vous avez l'impression que votre expérience aurait été différente si vous n'aviez pas participé à ce programme ?*

*Chloé Je sais pas honnêtement. Je pense que la manière dont je ressens peut-être l'expérience est différente, mais j'aurais pas... l'expérience aurait pas été différente.*

Through her comment, it can be understood that Chloé may have used her participation in the research project as a tool for reflection. It may have helped her analyse her experience from a different perspective and sharing it with me was part of the process.

### *LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

One of Chloé's main messages is that she has no regrets, she is happy with her experience, and she would do it again. Although her intended message is not always straightforward and can often be called into question through her insinuations and contradictions, Chloé seems to hide inexorably behind her positive attitude as a way to protect herself, improve her self-image, or present herself in a more likeable position. In our Western societies, the ideology of meritocracy is certainly prevalent (Littler 2017) and may have imbued Chloé's narrative. Within

this ideology, each one of us is responsible for our actions and everyone can succeed, provided we make the necessary effort and act accordingly. Chloé expected no help from others, and she felt that she had to deal with the situation herself. In her stories, she never mentions what the others could have done to improve her situation, for example, and above all, she never complains.

If these general discourses of individualism clearly imbue Chloé’s narration, another important discourse permeates her story: the importance of a successful and broad education, including the value of language learning. This discourse has undoubtedly also been part of her close family environment. As the opportunity of a year abroad was offered to her, she had to accept it, whether she truly wanted to or not. Had she decided not to go, it would probably not have been a problem, but the social and family pressure – consciously or unconsciously present – undoubtedly played a role in her decision. Her older sister had a similar experience, her parents strongly encouraged her, she knew how privileged she was to have such an opportunity, was she in a position to refuse? Again, the social discourses of success and the added value given to studying abroad are reflected in the narration of her experience. Chloé thought that she was expected to fit the model of a well-rounded and successful student, or maybe she wanted to fit the model but did not realise how hard it would be for her. In retrospect, she focuses on what the experience taught her, and this is, in any case, extremely positive.

4.1.5 ROSE

*General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher Diary*

Rose did not use her diary extensively. Although she initially wanted to write as often as possible to record her memories of the stay, she completely put it aside for almost three months between November and January.

TABLE 4.9 Rose’s Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August	September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts		3	1		1	1						1	1	1	1	2		12
No of words		483	161		137	160						195	195	175	228	365		2099

In hindsight, Rose mentioned that her diary was broadly representative of her stay, and she was happy to have it as a memory. Although this may be true, a very important aspect of her experience – her host family – is completely absent from it, which suggests that Rose was very selective in her choice of topics and preferred not to talk about negative elements. Whether this was due to my presence or to a general discourse Rose had constructed – for herself and a larger social representation of herself – is impossible to know. In any case, Rose's diary is very factual, describing activities but remaining very general when it came to what she felt or how the different events unfolded. Moreover, each time she mentioned something which was unpleasant or disturbing she ended up finding an advantage or another positive element to compensate. In her interview, Rose suggested that I should have given them questionnaires on a regular basis because sometimes she did not know what to write about. This may explain her tendency to remain succinct as if she were not sure that what she was saying was relevant. Had she been given precise questions, she may have felt reassured and more confident in her replies, and it would probably have helped her develop them. On the other hand, although Rose answered almost systematically whenever I asked questions – to her personally or to the group – these texts were rarely developed at length. As Rose's posts were mainly focused on school and interactions with local students – or the lack thereof – it may be assumed that she understood these two topics as being of interest to the research project and positioned herself primarily in the latter.

### *Interview*

Rose's interview is in line with her diary in the sense that she would usually begin by answering my questions very superficially. In order to get more details, I had to ask for them, which is visible in the large number of turns and the low average number of words per turn. Rose's tendency to focus on the positive aspects of things is also present in her replies. She did mention some of the drawbacks of her experience, but she did not complain extensively, and they were rarely raised directly but rather alluded to, for me to dig deeper. Nevertheless, the shortness of her answers should not be read as a sign of Rose's disinterest in the discussion because she never appeared bored or annoyed; it may have been due to her reserved personality.

TABLE 4.10 Rose’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 78 min 10’678 words 332 turns	Number of words			Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Rose	7’325		44	68,5
	Interviewer	3’353		20	31,5

*The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

*Social Positioning*

Like almost all participants, Rose developed a strong and central relationship with the other **Swiss students** from the beginning. Brought together by the foreign context and the need to belong to a group of peers, friendships between them formed naturally and very rapidly. As soon as they met, they started “doing activities together and they got along very well”. Rose’s integration within the school and with local students took quite some time, and she was happy to have her peers for company. There were six of them: four female and two male students. Together, they took part in a camp – “similar to a Scout camp” – during the October holidays. Rose also organized a trip to Liverpool and Manchester with two of them in February. And at about the same time, she decided to work as a volunteer in a local café with a Swiss girlfriend. Rose’s peers remained present until the end, and their relationship continued after their return. Nevertheless, they tried, together, to create opportunities for themselves to meet and mingle with local people and students. They would eat lunch with English students as often as possible; they participated in the camp and volunteered at the café to meet local people. Even the trip was an opportunity to discover another part of the country, its culture, and its people. Thus, Rose presents her group of peers as an asset or the basis to develop further – more local – friendships, even though at first she was surprised and disappointed to be with many other Swiss students and very few locals in one of her classes. Finally, Rose also found support with her Swiss friends when she faced difficult situations. For example, things were not always easy with her host family and Rose could talk about it with one of her friends, but also with her friend’s host parents where she spent quite some time.<sup>Roi</sup>

Thus, integration with the **local students** is something Rose and her peers had sought since the beginning and throughout their whole

stay. In fact, “being more open, being outgoing, speaking to many people” was Rose’s first objective before her departure. As for many, however, meeting local students proved to be one of the most challenging things to achieve. In October, Rose wrote that communicating with the English students at school was very difficult; she found them “cold and distant” but hoped that it would change soon. Observing their behaviour, Rose noticed that they did not “hang out in or around school after class” and that it was hard to make contact with them. Moreover, many of them lived quite far away and as the public transport system was not well-developed, things were even more difficult. Rose also described her difficulties through the local students’ lack of motivation or incentive to meet her and her peers. In fact, as Rose’s stay was limited to a year, they may not have wanted to invest in those relationships. Moreover, local students had already built their social networks, often “with friends they had known since childhood” and they did not share Rose’s need to develop new relationships. In hindsight, she would have appreciated some kind of institutional help with her integration. The arrival of the Swiss students – a first in that school that year – had not been announced and people were not aware of their presence. Thus, it led to uncomfortable situations where Rose would have to say, in the middle of the year, that she came from Switzerland and was met with surprise or disbelief. It did take Rose time to feel integrated or “to find her place” there and as a result, coming back to England after the Christmas holidays was very difficult.<sup>R02</sup>

Even though Rose encountered some difficulties trying to make contact with local students, she kept being active in her desire to integrate, and she engaged in different activities to meet more people. As discussed earlier, she participated in a camp in October, “a good way to meet young people from her county”. Unfortunately, as these people were not necessarily from her school, they only saw each other sporadically afterwards – and often by chance – and did not really stay in touch. Other than that, she signed up at the local sports centre, where many people went after school because it was right next to it, which was another opportunity to spend time with locals. In January, the school offered different clubs, and Rose participated in “as many clubs as possible in order to speak to as many people as possible”. Rose enjoyed those moments because she shared them with only a few people, and everyone could participate and express their opinion. It was also an opportunity to speak to people from her class whom she had never spoken to

before. In February, she felt that she was more integrated at school and had more contact with local students. She concluded that English students “had become more open” as if they had changed, which was what had allowed her integration to begin. Nonetheless, Rose “noticed that she was not doing much outside of school” and she wanted “to experience something new”. Consequently, she decided to volunteer with one of her friends at a local café. They started to meet young people there who were working with them but as the pandemic struck, Rose had to go home and “never saw them again”. Once back in Switzerland, Rose kept little contact with the local students, the logical consequence of her relationships, which had not had time to develop. Rose got in touch with her friends to tell them she had had to leave and then she occasionally sent them a message on social media when they crossed her mind. What she missed and remembered most was linked to her English environment, often “talking to new and unknown people”, more than specific relationships with specific people.<sup>R03</sup>

Rose’s position within her **host family** did not allow the creation of long-lasting relationships either. Upon her arrival, and as an answer to one of my questions, Rose wrote about her room in her diary; although she disliked some of its elements, such as the pink carpet and the wallpaper in a floral motif, she still pictured it rather positively and thought she would get used to it. After that, she made no more references to her host family or her house despite one or two specific questions I asked. It was only in the interview that Rose explained the situation to me. First, Rose lived far away from the school, but most importantly from the other Swiss students and felt somehow excluded as a result. Not only was she living far away from the others – without public transport – but her host parents refused to drive her to or from her friends’ houses “in the evening because it was too far”. Thus, Rose had to walk all the time, to go to school, to her friends and pretty much everywhere she wanted to go, which she found “upsetting at first”. When Rose was going to a party with her friends, she had to leave much earlier than the others, because they had an 11pm curfew and “she had to walk for 50 minutes”. The curfew was another issue linked to her host mother, who worked for the organization in charge of host families, as the lead coordinator. Therefore, she decided on some rules which she imposed on all the students, and she was too strict according to Rose and her friends. Although they were living in a small and quiet town, they were not allowed to go out, which created tensions. Combined

with the distance and the fact that Rose had no host brother or sister, her situation at home was far from ideal. She had to get used to it, and she thought she would but “it got worse after a while”. Rose felt “very lonely”, and it was hard for her.<sup>R04</sup>

When she was at her host parents’, she would spend some time with them, usually for dinner or to watch TV in the evening. Rose did not enjoy these moments particularly and did not retain any specific memories of them. Their conversations were limited to the events of their days and sometimes they did not really know what to talk about. As for other activities they did together, Rose mentioned walking the dogs from time to time but nothing more. It is not surprising that Rose’s return to England after Christmas was difficult. In fact, Rose’s parents had asked for a new host family – concerned that her current family and location were preventing Rose from enjoying her experience completely – but no other family was available, which is why it did not work out. Again, Rose was resilient and simply accepted the situation as it was, trying to make the best of it. After her return to Switzerland, Rose even sent her host family an email once, but they never answered, marking a definite end to their relationship. She confessed that she was not expecting more from them and was not “surprised” about their silence, but she did try to keep in touch nevertheless. Her laughter when she told this anecdote may indicate her disbelief as much as her detachment but could also indicate yet another disappointment. Rose’s positive attitude made her build her experience without or despite that negative element. If at first, she did suffer from it – almost locked in that house with nothing to do – after some time, she managed to create a life for herself outside the house and she spent most of her time elsewhere. She talked about it with her Swiss friends and with her own family who always supported her, and she forced herself to go out, even if she had to walk for ages. These strategies helped her face the situation and feel better.<sup>R05</sup>

To summarize, Rose’s only stable support in England were her peers and their importance was crucial for her well-being. Her own family clearly offered her some support as well, but from a distance. Being a very resilient adolescent, Rose remained positive and chose to position herself positively in her experience, to seek local relationships and to enjoy the best of it. On the other hand, as she was relatively silent about the negative sides of her stay in her diary, one may wonder at the real extent of her difficulties and loneliness.

### *Cultural Positioning*

Culturally speaking, Rose mainly and logically discussed differences she noticed in school, where she spent most of her time. Soon after her arrival, she wrote about what struck her in her new school system, namely the limited number of classes English students had to take and the amount of free time they had. She was happy to have quite a few “study periods” which allowed her to do her homework at school and gave her time at home to do other things. Starting later and finishing earlier was also pleasant for Rose who concluded that the “English school system was based on less work”. At the same time, she imagined that only taking four subjects could quickly become “repetitive” and also force students to choose their future orientation very early on. Compared to Switzerland where high school remains general and allows complete reorientation at university, Rose perceived the English system as more closed as well as selective in the sense that students had to work really hard to get into some of the universities. This point was also raised during the interview where Rose mentioned it as something that shocked her and her peers. English students worked extremely hard to get the best possible grades, and Rose could not totally comprehend it, as in Switzerland, “many students tend to do the minimum required”, since all universities were open to all as long as they passed. On the one hand, she found the general attitude stimulating but on the other, she felt that local students “were working only to add lines to their CV and for their future but not because they enjoyed it”.<sup>Ro6</sup>

School was also a place to discover the local culture more generally. Rose truly enjoyed a “typical English Christmas” which took place before the Christmas holidays. There were also funny plays which were put on by the younger kids at the school, and assemblies where English Christmas songs were performed. These celebrations were prepared by the different houses of the school, another very British tradition. In fact, Rose’s school was divided into five houses – “just like the *Harry Potter* saga” – named after local windmills. Each house met in assemblies from time to time, and its “leader would present what they were going to do or what they could do to win points”. Rose liked those meetings “because she found them quite special.” It created a kind of competition because each house was supposed to win the most possible points during the semester. Rose’s house had won in December, and she was happy although she did not feel that she had contributed

much to the victory, but “still, it was a nice feeling for her”. The houses helped create a sense of belonging and of community, which is certainly what Rose appreciated about it. Moreover, she felt no negative pressure surrounding the concept, only a “motivation to participate a bit more in class or do an extra activity to win a point”. The general atmosphere in school was thus rather positive, and Rose enjoyed its cultural differences.<sup>Ro7</sup>

Outside of school, Rose only commented occasionally on her cultural discoveries, whether positive or negative. First and very factually, Rose was surprised by the lack of public transport, which she had thought would be as developed as in Switzerland. Then, when she went to visit Liverpool and Manchester, she found the people to be “very open towards foreigners”, or at least towards the tourist she was. From the perspective of a resident, it can be recalled that she was nonetheless disappointed by the locals’ coldness at one point. Next, observing the English interact, she noted that they “generally refused to say what was wrong directly”. According to Rose, the English’s way of communicating was not very “efficient”: “They beat about the bush instead of honestly telling the other person what is wrong.” Their will to be polite was perceived as “frustrating” by Rose, who was more used to open discussions leading to “a compromise, a solution”. In the end, Rose qualified her judgment by saying that if she noted that difference, it was not to say that it was wrong. In fact, Rose particularly remembered our discussions about cultural differences and tried on many occasions to “avoid keeping a Swiss perspective and to understand the English point of view”. Regarding politics, for example, she did not want “to give her opinion, to contradict them” because the local situation was different from that in Switzerland and she thought it would be unfair to judge people, not knowing what it was like to be in their place. Food and studies were also topics she did not feel comfortable criticizing. Thus, Rose was touched and stimulated by the issue of intercultural sensitivity and took it with her to experience her year abroad. Her cultural awareness may not have prevented her from spontaneously judging behaviours or things, but it may have prevented her from voicing them or accepting them blindly.<sup>Ro8</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Rose was quite serene in regard to the English language, and she never saw it as a real issue impacting her experience in a negative way. Rose

arrived in England with past experiences of English use in a study abroad context – although from short stays – and she was therefore reasonably confident in her language skills. She was able to communicate with people straight away and had an “extensive vocabulary”, which meant she did not experience any major difficulties. Having spent a month in an international school in England when she was 14, she had learnt a lot, and this experience did help her. In school nevertheless, Rose still had to get used to specific vocabulary and formal writing, for instance. In maths and physics, Rose thought that not a lot of language was necessary to understand the topic, which made it easier. Nevertheless, she expanded her scientific vocabulary and noted that, after her stay, she had forgotten almost all the specific terms in French and was more used to the English ones. However, the English literature class proved to be challenging for Rose at first, because she did not have an extended knowledge of all the necessary concepts, “such as metaphors”, and it was very difficult for her to answer the questions; it was thus not a problem of language per se but of prior content knowledge. Writing essays in English was also difficult because Rose was not used to the exercise, and she had to learn the rules. But her teachers “helped her a lot to write good essays” and she acquired the tools and the skills, which she successfully used in her EPQ in the end. Using English in class, whether to complete an exercise or answer or ask a question, was thus not an issue for Rose. Classes were small, teachers had time for each of them, and students did not judge them. Rose felt that they “always showed understanding” and were rather impressed by her (language) skills. They never made her think that “a question was stupid or looked at her badly”.<sup>R09</sup>

Rose still experienced a few small difficulties if, “sometimes, she used an American word, for example”, or if she had the right word but said it with a “strong accent”. In these situations, people would not understand her, and it could be “discouraging at times”. But overall, Rose had the feeling that they were trying to understand what she wanted to say. Another interesting difficulty Rose mentioned was not linked to the comprehension of her message but more to the transmission of her “personality”. When she was outside of school and she had longer discussions with locals, it became more difficult because there was no given topic for discussion. Thus, she had to present herself more globally and this was more complicated. At first, it was frustrating if local students did not understand her or if they misunderstood her and

“tagged her with a wrong impression”. But what may have been a frustration at first motivated Rose to open up more, express herself more, and try to show who she really was despite the language barrier.<sup>Ro10</sup>

*Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of a Diary Entry and an Interview Excerpt*

The following two extracts focus on cultural difference and intercultural sensitivity. The first comes from Rose’s diary and was written in February, whereas the second is an interview excerpt. They are analysed together because they complement each other and allow a more comprehensive understanding of Rose’s ambiguous positioning.

**Extract 1: Diary**

20 FEB, 09:33:12: Perplexed

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ENGLAND AND SWITZERLAND:  
To me, the first major difference is that in England, people generally don’t say what’s wrong outright. I think this is due to the fact they are very polite, and also very standoffish. Several times, I saw that communication between two English people who are unhappy about something is not very effective. So they beat around the bush a lot, instead of honestly telling the other person what is wrong. I find this a little frustrating because in Switzerland, we are more used to discussing problems openly until we find a compromise, a solution. English people, in my opinion, are a little passive in these situations, and they absolutely don’t want the other person to think there is an issue, because they might seem less polite.

I’ve talked about this with some other people who are not English (or Swiss), and who noticed the same thing. I do not mean this is not a good way of dealing with things, it’s just different from ours :)

**Extract 2: Interview**

**Me** Was there something in particular that you found yourself thinking about again later on, at some point during your time there, thinking “oh yeah...”?

**Rose** Above all, sometimes I’d tell myself that I should let go of my Swiss perspective, and that I should just stay neutral about the situation and not act like too “Swiss,” with that typical Swiss attitude or opinion about things and just be neutral, or try and see it more from the English side.

**Me** Was there a specific situation where you really felt that? Where you were like “yeah, okay...”

27 **Rose** Yeah, like with politics, for example, where people there had a lot of  
 28 opinions, and I think as a foreigner I didn't really want to give my opin-  
 29 ion because it wasn't... I didn't wanna argue with anyone or anything like  
 30 that, so I just stayed like... I would try not to judge them too much, and I feel  
 31 like that's something that's different compared to Switzerland, so you can't  
 32 really... you can't really say anything, and also about the fact that they work  
 33 a lot, or about what they eat, I mean lots of things like that.

34 **Me** OK, so that helped you tell yourself "I should look at things with a dif-  
 35 ferent perspective"? Did you find yourself thinking that consciously at cer-  
 36 tain times?

37 **Rose** Yeah, in certain situations I'd just think... Uh, it's not ideal to just be  
 38 close-minded and think like a Swiss.

### Extrait 1: Journal

20 FEV, 09:33:12: Perplexe

DIFFÉRENCE CULTURELLE ENTRE L'ANGLETERRE ET LA SUISSE :

Pour moi, la première différence majeure est qu'en Angleterre, les gens ne veulent généralement pas dire ce qui ne va pas directement. Je pense que cela vient du fait qu'ils sont très polis et très distants aussi. Plusieurs fois, j'ai vu que la communication entre deux Anglais, qui ont quelque chose qui ne leur plait pas, n'est pas très efficace. Alors ils tournent beaucoup autour du pot, au lieu de dire honnêtement à la personne ce qui ne va pas. Je trouve cela un peu frustrant car en Suisse, on est plus habitué à discuter du problème ouvertement, jusqu'à ce que l'on trouve un compromis, une solution. Les Anglais sont, à mon avis, un peu passifs face à ce genre de choses et ils ne veulent surtout pas que l'autre personne pense qu'il y a un problème, car ils paraîtront peut-être moins polis ?

J'en ai discuté avec des autres personnes qui ne sont pas anglaises (ni suisses) et qui ont remarqué cela aussi. Je ne veux pas dire que ce n'est pas une bonne façon de faire les choses, elle est juste différente de la nôtre :) )

### Extrait 2: Interview

Moi Est-ce qu'il y a quelque chose en particulier auquel vous avez repensé par la suite, à un moment donné dans votre expérience, en vous disant ah oui...?

Rose Ah ben surtout, des fois, je me suis dit qu'il fallait pas garder la perspective d'un Suisse, mais de juste être neutre par rapport à la situation et ne pas trop rester Suisse entre guillemets, avec l'attitude d'un Suisse ou genre

*l'avis d'un Suisse sur certaines situations et de juste être neutre, ou alors d'essayer de comprendre l'Anglais.*

Moi Dans une situation particulière, vous vous souvenez d'un moment donné où vous vous êtes dit, ah ouais...

Rose Par exemple, par rapport à la politique où les gens ils avaient quand même beaucoup d'avis, et je pense en tant qu'étranger, enfin en tant qu'étrangère, moi j'avais pas trop envie de donner mon avis parce que c'était pas... enfin je voulais pas contredire quelqu'un ou comme ça, du coup, je gardais juste un... j'essayais de pas trop les juger et je pense que c'est différent par rapport à la Suisse, du coup ben on peut pas trop... On peut pas trop dire quelque chose et pis aussi par rapport au fait qu'ils travaillent beaucoup ou par rapport à ce qu'ils mangent, enfin plein de trucs comme ça.

Moi OK, donc ça vous a été utile, pour vous dire bon, ok, je regarde ça avec un œil différent. Vous avez consciemment pensé à ça à certains moments ?

Rose Oui, quand même dans certaines situations, je me suis juste dit que... euh c'était pas idéal de juste être fermée d'esprit et de penser comme un Suisse.

#### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

As an answer to one of the questions I sent to all participants, Rose wrote an entry about cultural differences. She chose “perplexed” as the general emotion to qualify her entry, which shows her ambivalence from the start, mentioning that she does not really know what to think about some cultural elements she is about to describe. Rose then explains the *first major difference* (1.4) she noticed in England which is that people *generally* do not want to say what is wrong *outright* (1.5). Rose thinks that it comes from the *fact* that they *are very polite* and *standoffish* (1.5–6). Different elements, such as the use of the present tense, words like *generally* and *fact* tend to raise her observation to the level of a fact, a truth. As it refers to a widely spread stereotype about the politeness of the English people, Rose may have unconsciously projected it onto some situations; in any case, she accepts the politeness of the English as a fact. Moreover, although she says she observed such behaviour several times, she does not describe one specific situation and chooses to remain distant, sounding less convincing as a result. What Rose observed from discussions where there was a disagreement is that *people beat around the bush*, were not *honest* nor *effective* (1.7–8); she even perceived them as *passive* (1.11). Her choice of words

clearly shows her negative judgement of the situations, which she experienced as *frustrating* (l.9). In Switzerland, on the contrary, people *openly* discuss problems looking for a *solution*, a *compromise* (l.10–11). Again, her choice of words, all positively connotated, and her focus on the end result, a *solution* found, leaves no doubt to her preference. On the other hand, Rose still seeks to understand, to make sense of these types of behaviour, are the English afraid to *seem less polite*? (l.13) But she is not sufficiently equipped and has not been immersed for long enough in their culture to understand its subtleties and accept it. Again, the English are so *polite* that they don't want their interlocutor to think that there is a problem (l.12). Rose's cultural bias is blatant here as she analyses their interactions through her Swiss lens and cannot move beyond to conceive that sharing the same cultural codes, the English would understand each other's message, intention, or tone. To conclude her post, she wants to give credit to her observations, saying that she discussed them with other people, neither *English nor Swiss* (l.14–15), and that they had noticed the same. But again, her vague reference to *some* (l.14) people, with no precise reference, tends to give her claims less credibility. In her conclusion, Rose also wants to qualify her judgement and writes that she does not want to say that *their way is not a good way*; it is just different from ours (l.15–16). It shows that intellectually she is aware of cultural differences and that these differences should not be ranked from best to worst but accepted as equal. Practically, however, this ideal perception is hard to truly embody, and it takes time. For Rose, it is still "us" vs "them" and the belief in the superiority of her own culture is still evident in her narration.

In the second extract, Rose positions herself towards the support programme and selects elements which were relevant for her. There, she mentions intercultural sensitivity as she became aware of *the importance of letting go of her Swiss perspective* (l.21–22) on things. Thus, she tried not to *quote unquote, stay Swiss*, with a Swiss *attitude and opinion* (l.23). Almost paradoxically, Rose suggests to rather stay *neutral* (l.22+24) – a position Swiss people are very familiar with – before adding that trying to understand the other's perspective was also a valid option. Concretely, when English people were discussing politics, for example, she refrained from giving her opinion or *arguing with them* (l.29) because she thought that being a *foreigner* (l.28), an outsider, she could not put herself in their place and should not *judge* them, so *she tried not to* (l.30). Merely mentioning politics however – and the fact

that she had to refrain from contradicting them – implies that she strongly disagreed with the general opinion she heard. The same can be said about the *hard-working students* and the *food they eat* (l.32–33), which she refers to later and which she could not comprehend. Again, she distances herself from the locals, it is “them” against “I” or “us” and she makes it clear that she does not want to be associated with *them* or their point of view. Her acceptance of their difference is thus purely rational or intellectual, but it is not integrated. Rose realised that it was not *ideal to be close-minded and think like a Swiss* (l.37–38) and was grateful to have become aware of those social and natural mechanisms. However, in order to assimilate these ideas and change perspective, a certain degree of integration is necessary as well as a certain amount of intercultural experience, both of which Rose lacked. Nonetheless, the awareness of a potential problem is the first and indispensable step towards change, and Rose has willingly taken this step.

#### *LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

Looking first at Rose’s post, it was, as mentioned earlier, written in response to one of my questions. Thus, it is addressed to me specifically although Rose makes no direct reference to me, such as greetings or allusion to my asking the question. The fact that she took time to think about a relevant answer and write it down is a sign of her involvement in the project and of her desire to respect her engagement. Moreover, Rose’s attempt to integrate elements we had discussed in the introduction meetings also demonstrates her interest in the project and probably her desire to make a good impression on me. In fact, her using a smiley ☺ at the end may be read as a nod to our discussions and a sign that she did remember them. Finally, her positioning in the “us vs them” opposition may also result from my question concerning cultural differences, which clearly opposed the two cultures. Therefore, it was difficult for Rose to move beyond this confrontation. My presence in this post is thus multiple and cannot be ignored. The same can be said about the interview excerpt since I led the discussion, directed Rose towards certain reflections, and probably influenced her in the sense that, again, she may have wanted to make a good impression or please me. Then, on the other hand, Rose selected a few elements of the research project among many to form her answer and what she remembered and took out of it is hers and hers only. More generally, Rose showed few hesitations in her answers,

which may be a token of her honesty in the sense that she did not have to make things up.

### *LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

In these two texts, Rose clearly refers to values of tolerance and open-mindedness, a widely spread left-wing discourse. She truly seeks to aim for these ideals and embody them as she shares her thoughts about cultural differences. She says she preferred not to judge others – although, in reality, her judgement is easily perceived – and says she sought to understand them – when she seemed quite happy about her own way of doing things. Despite Rose's ambiguity in the matter, she is sensitive to the issue and believes in its value and legitimacy. This discourse is understood as right and unquestionable and leads her narration. It is also implied that I, her interlocutor, believe in it and defend it. To some extent, it may be argued that I initiated that type of discourse and encouraged her to consider it. Furthermore, the existing gap between her discourse and her behaviour is relevant and shows how difficult it is to apply an ideal, specifically when it is disembodied or imposed from outside. Discourses, once appropriated, are powerful in the sense that they influence people's behaviours and talk (Foucault 1977, 1980). The desire to fit to a discourse of tolerance transformed Rose's perception of the reality around her, it gave her a different lens through which to look at it. In this case, it seems premature to say that it transformed the reality completely since Rose was left perplexed and wondered about the pertinence of those different types of behaviour, but it nevertheless did change her perception and her representations slightly, as it prevented her from openly contradicting the English.

#### 4.1.6 AUDREY

##### *General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher Diary*

Audrey wrote regularly in her diary during the first part of her stay. Then, her posts became sparser between January and March. Once back home, she found time to write some longer posts again. This scheme follows Audrey's division and perception of her own experience. More precisely, she defined the months before Christmas as an adaptation period, a time when she discovered her new environment and reacted to it – among other ways through writing. This discovery phase was

followed by a period when she enjoyed the experience more fully and thought less about her diary. Audrey's posts are a mix of events or emotions that she narrates freely and answers some of my questions or reactions. Her wanting to respect her commitment towards the research is apparent as she excused herself on different occasions, for example, if she felt she were "late" to write or reply. Audrey's posts can be very descriptive and factual sometimes, or more personal and focused on emotions on other occasions, but still with some modesty and discretion. In any case, she covers a large array of topics from school and language to friendships and family, which can be interpreted as a sign that she was thinking of giving a comprehensive portrait of her experience, but still focused on elements we had discussed together.

**TABLE 4.11** Audrey's Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August		September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April		May		Total
	19-31		1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	1-31		
No of posts	1		1	2	1		2		1	1			1				1	1			12
No of words	41		54	352	110		598		338	195			407				650	494			3239

Audrey did not have another diary and was not used to this kind of writing, but she appreciated the almost therapeutic function of writing. She often wrote about her Swiss family, mentioning, for example, how much she missed them and how excited she was to go home for Christmas. During the interview, she gave a more nuanced explanation for these moments and their importance as she was globally happy to be away from her family. Finally, once back home during lockdown, Audrey systematically asked how I was doing, which not only showed her consideration for the project, but also for myself as a person.

### *Interview*

Audrey looked happy and comfortable during the interview, and she had no trouble developing her answers. As was reflected in her diary, she gave precise and insightful replies and managed to develop facts, opinions, and emotions without difficulty, but with modesty. She usually took great care in giving relevant answers focused precisely on what she was asked. As a result, she rarely digressed to discuss other elements and the interview was among the shortest. The length of the

interview is not due to Audrey’s not having things to say – because the content of her answers is rich – but to her discreet, rigorous, and concise nature. If my presence certainly guided the serious and analytical quality of her answers, she also felt confident enough to share personal experiences.

**TABLE 4.12** Audrey’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 49 min 7’558 words 168 turns	Number of words			Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Audrey	5’678		67,6	75
	Interviewer	1’880		22,4	25

*The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

*Social Positioning*

Like most participants, Audrey gave her peers, the other **Swiss students**, a central position in her experience. However, unlike other participants, it was not “love at first sight” and her friendships took some time to develop. In fact, she felt alone and did not talk to anyone during the first weeks, but at the same time, she did not suffer much from it as she generally likes solitude. She did not write in her diary during that time, as if her experience had not really started yet. Then, she regularly commented on some tensions she had with another Swiss girl, Leane. Their strong and different personalities, mixed with some “tiredness, homesickness, or sadness” were seen as the main reasons behind those quarrels. But after a few months, Audrey and Leane became “really, really, really good friends” and spent a lot of time together, during and after class.<sup>Au1</sup>

There were six Swiss students in Audrey’s school, three female and three male participants. They often stuck together in school, during lunch break, for example. They would bring some food from home and eat together as they “all had the same habits”. After school, Audrey mainly stayed with the two other girls, Leane and Lee-Lou. They often went to a café or to the gym when classes were over. Otherwise, Audrey would go home and spend some time alone “drawing, reading, or playing the flute”, and she also appreciated these moments for herself. During the weekends and holidays, Audrey and her Swiss friends planned different activities such as a Milky Chance concert and several

nights out where they went to the movies. In February, Audrey had originally thought that she would go home but as it was too expensive, she spent time with her Swiss friends: she went to Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds with Leane. Audrey's relationships with her peers became stronger over time, specifically with Leane, and lasted after their stay ended. The three girls were still in close contact once back in Switzerland, and they planned to return to England together, as they had left some of their stuff there.<sup>Au2</sup>

Audrey also developed some relationships with other Swiss girls who were in different schools. In December, the local organization in charge of finding host families for students arranged a trip to Blackpool. She took part in that outing and enjoyed it very much. There, she met other students and was happy to share her own experiences and hear about the others', some of them less positive than hers. More importantly though, Audrey also met peers during the introduction meetings of the support programme, and she kept in touch with some, and with one female participant more particularly. She saw Lea back in Blackpool and had a common friend with Lily, but Audrey exchanged more regular messages with Billie. She particularly appreciated these contacts and found it "reassuring," to see that everyone was having similar experiences.<sup>Au3</sup>

Her peers also helped Audrey meet **local students** in her classes. The six of them rapidly got close to a group of English girls from their German class. They were twelve in that class, half of them Swiss, which created a privileged context – a small group with a common interest – to get to know each other. As they saw each other "very often" and "spent a lot of time, all of them together" in class, they almost naturally became close. With Leane, they also met a "very friendly" English student in their physics class. Just like their "German friends," their initial connexion was centred around language as he spoke French, Spanish, and English. Audrey found his linguistic skills very useful at the beginning, to explain "some words or statements of an exercise or theory she did not understand". Their relationship developed from there and lasted until the end of the year. These friendships were not limited to school time as they also went to different parties together, one of them on Halloween, for example. Audrey and her peers did not have a lot of English friends but "two or three of them were really nice and often invited them to spend time together". After her return to Switzerland, Audrey stated

that she was still in touch with the ones she was closest to “from time to time”, but not with the others.<sup>Au4</sup>

Audrey’s experience with the local students was not exclusively positive and she, like others, had to put up with different or annoying behaviours. Upon her arrival in her new school, everyone knew about the presence of a group of Swiss students and Audrey felt that they were all staring at them. Some local students would also come to them and ask them “which language they spoke, Swedish?” – a situation she found “unbearable” at first. Then, in her “form” class, many students were prejudiced against them, more specifically “a group of five guys who would turn around and laugh at them”, and Audrey understandably did not feel comfortable there. Finally, Audrey had some difficulty understanding “the girls in her school”, who were too focused on their clothes or who would spend hours taking selfies during parties or just sitting and doing nothing. And more importantly, Audrey, who did not wear the same kind of clothes as the local girls, felt “looked at funny”, like an “alien”. Audrey did not really have to deal with the local students actively rejecting her, but in some situations they made her feel uncomfortable enough so as to avoid real interactions.<sup>Au5</sup>

Audrey had a pleasant relationship with her **host family**, and they played an important part in her stay, although they did not see each other a lot. Audrey ended up having two host families because her major one was on holiday when she first arrived, so she stayed with another family for the first two weeks or so. But although Audrey described them as very nice in the interview, she did not mention the first one in her diary at all. Her second – and main – host mother was Catherine, an old lady who “went to bed early” and “cooked extremely well”, both of which were highly appreciated by Audrey. She enjoyed her quiet evenings by herself and felt lucky to be able to enjoy Catherine’s “delicious vegetable curry” or “excellent chips”, which she particularly remembered. Catherine had a companion, but he lived and worked in a different city and only came for the weekends. Consequently, Audrey did not see him very often, but she found him very nice as well.<sup>Au6</sup>

Audrey felt welcome in her host family who provided her with a safe and comfortable environment. After ten days in her new room, she felt quite comfortable there, not completely “at home” yet but hoping she would soon. She enjoyed spending time with Catherine who was very thoughtful; besides the excellent meals, every morning when she went down to have her breakfast, warm toast was waiting for her

on the table. On her birthday, Catherine made a lot of little “Happy Birthday” banners, which she hung around the house, and she gave her a necklace with a pendant. She also invited her to a restaurant where they had a very pleasant chat; this was a very good memory for Audrey. From that point onwards, they started talking more; they talked about many different things, such as their families, Switzerland, and where they wanted to travel to. Although they did not see each other a lot due to their different timetables, they still managed to develop a strong and caring relationship, which lasted even after Audrey’s return to Switzerland. They kept talking and sending pictures to each other once or twice a week.<sup>Au7</sup>

As with all her relationships, Audrey did not only see or talk about the positive sides of her host mother. She had a very critical eye and sometimes described some of her qualities in a negative way, with their drawbacks. Her cooking talent was thus accompanied by a tendency to serve large quantities and to throw away what was not eaten, a habit Audrey did not like, and which made her finish what was on her plate. Catherine’s concern for Audrey was sometimes perceived as exaggerated or not adapted to her age, but rather for a “14-year-old girl”. When Audrey wanted to go out, Catherine would occasionally say that it was too late or would say “OK, you can go and come home when you want” but later send her a message at 10pm asking where she was and telling her to come home right away. These situations were difficult for Audrey to accept. She also felt that Catherine idealised her or predicted a brilliant future for her, but mainly in terms of job and salary. Audrey did not see herself having this kind of life; she had different dreams and these moments probably made her realise that they did not share the same values. She experienced a similar feeling with some of Catherine’s friends, who were often invited to the house. Once, she talked about Switzerland with one of them who had been to Nyon and who was “shocked to see so many black people smoking in the parks”, a statement Audrey found difficult to accept. Again, these more negative experiences did not impact their friendly relationship, but Audrey maintained her point of view on things – as a sort of barrier to some extent – and therefore remained somewhat critical and judgemental of the aspects she could not identify with. In retrospect, she was glad to have come home during lockdown as she “could not have endured the situation, all alone; with her host family but alone nevertheless”.<sup>Au8</sup>

Thus, Audrey was relieved to come back home to **her own family** at the end of the stay, and she kept in close contact with them throughout the year. She needed the frequent calls, but she was at the same time happy to be away from them for a time. During the first holidays, Audrey went to Bristol to see her father's uncle and aunt and she appreciated seeing them and being able to finally communicate with them properly as they only spoke English. Audrey thus enjoyed that trip as it allowed her to get closer to her family in general but also – thanks to her new English skills – to position herself differently towards those family members. Apart from that trip, Audrey did not really mention her family during the first two months or so. At the same time, her references to them – and her friends in Switzerland as a matter of fact – became more frequent in late November and December, when she could not wait to go home for Christmas. She experienced her first real feeling of homesickness in November on a close friend's birthday, and she missed her family and friends more and more after that. She also regularly complained that she was feeling sick and tired during that period. On the day of her departure, she felt "extremely impatient and excited" but a little apprehensive to return to her Swiss life. She had prepared her presents and was looking forward to surprising her sister and one of her best friends at their Christmas concert.<sup>Aug</sup>

Audrey's Christmas holidays went smoothly. She spent the first week in France at her grandmother's and then her cousins' house with her family, and she was a bit disappointed to spend so much time abroad as "it prevented her from seeing some of her friends". But she was able to see the most important ones during the second week. Her time in England away from her family and friends made her appreciate spending time with them all even more. Being home was positive but at the same time, it was harder to go back afterwards – to a place she already knew, without "the surprise of the unknown". She felt a greater sadness in leaving her parents, particularly her dad, who took her to the airport. On the other hand, and almost paradoxically, she defined her return to England as pleasant, i.e., an opportunity to distance herself from complex and sometimes agitated relationships within her family. But her ambiguous positioning towards her family continued as by February she was already ready to go back home. This project did not work out because the flights were too expensive, but her parents visited her the following weekend. Audrey was happy to not have to wait until Easter to see them again, "as was her stock of chocolate".

In the end, she left in March and was relieved to be home, despite the stressful situation, which caused her insomnia. Being close to her family was logically what she needed at the time.<sup>Au10</sup>

To sum up, Audrey took an apparent ambiguous position towards her family – happy to be away but needing to be close or, needing to be away but happy to be close – which is certainly typical of teenage years (Greischel, Noack, and Neyer 2018). As for her other social circles, she benefitted from a safe and friendly host family environment and over time developed strong relationships with the other Swiss girls. Together, they met some local students who all shared an interest in foreign languages.

### *Cultural Positioning*

Audrey's first half of her stay was perceived as a "big adaptation time" to "local mentalities, a time to see how things worked and to get to know her host family". She faced a culture shock, in the sense that some differences were not experienced positively, whether in relation to the weather, the language, the school system, or people's opinions or behaviour. In fact, Audrey was quite sensitive to the weather conditions as she regularly commented on the presence or absence of rain, for example. In combination with some tiredness linked to adaptation, it seemed to have had consequences on her health as she got ill repeatedly, something she was not used to back home. Getting up to go to school in the morning was hard. She had to walk for 35–40 minutes to get to her high school, and she took time getting used to that as well. However, after a while and in retrospect, she enjoyed these moments with her "headphones, walking along a canal" and "watching the ducklings". Thus, after Christmas, Audrey had adapted to her new environment, and things got easier for her; she no longer really complained about being ill or tired.<sup>Au11</sup>

School was not a very positive experience for Audrey. She did not understand the "psychology/atmosphere of the school", which she perceived as a "very elitist system", and she had great difficulty in putting up with it. Concretely, students would "receive chocolate when they gave a correct answer"; they each had "a number of points which increased or decreased according to their achievements"; teachers wrote down the "good" and "bad" students on a board; during the assemblies, two students got "bags of candy for their work". The first time she took part in one of those assemblies was a shock for Audrey,

and it left a permanent – negative – impression on her. She “hated” the way some students were publicly praised and given those bags of candy. Interestingly, she felt different from the others, as she “had the impression that she was the only one thinking that way” and wondered if her point of view was “too far-fetched”. In any case, her bad impression of the school system remained and resulted in her not enjoying school and her classes other than to see her friends. Apart from the elitist philosophy of the school, it was also surrounded with barriers which would only open at certain times, and Audrey really disliked that as well. She found it “fun to discover, but not for any longer”.<sup>Au12</sup>

Audrey did therefore not enjoy her classes and was also very critical of them, especially of mathematics and physics. She had always loved maths and was really “disappointed” to see that the class was not advanced enough. It was “totally different from her class in Switzerland”, and as she loved the way it was taught back home, it was more difficult for her to adapt to the English system. “Although it was her favourite subject, she had some difficulties just attending the class.” Even the length of the classes became problematic as “she preferred it when it was a bit shorter”. Once home, the fact that they did not cover all the topics they would have covered had she been in Switzerland caused her stress as she knew she would have a lot to catch up on. The other subjects did not inspire her much either; her English literature class was hard at first as they studied William Blake, a poet who was “not always very comprehensible” for Audrey. After that, it became a bit “more pleasant and interesting” because the novels changed. In German, the “teacher was really nice”, which therefore was OK. Generally, Audrey did what she was asked and got good results, but her experience of discovering a new school system was not a fulfilling one.<sup>Au13</sup>

As we saw earlier with her reaction towards the high school girls, her host mother’s friend and the English school system, Audrey always maintained a strong cultural identity and position, i.e., a strong belief in her own values, who like her own family, guided her and gave her balance. In preparation for Christmas, Audrey was happy to bake biscuits for her host families with her friend Leane, an activity she had always done with her mother and sister in Switzerland. “Continuing the tradition in England” was important for her and made Audrey feel good. She also always kept Swiss chocolate in her room and the idea of running out was unsettling. Coming back to Switzerland – with the

exception maybe of the prices of things in Switzerland which came as a “small shock” – Audrey did not experience any adaptation problem; on the contrary, she said she was “even more adapted than before, really at ease everywhere”.<sup>Au14</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

When Audrey arrived in England, she felt quite lost, and she did not really understand what was happening around her. At the end of the first month, she felt that she had a lot of homework which required “a lot of time and energy”; for example, she took her three hours to write only a few sentences of her essay. Her teachers seemed unaware of her difficulties and sometimes got angry, which she did not understand. In her English class, reading William Blake proved to be a difficult task as well. She would come home exhausted after school. However, her initial feeling of being lost – linguistically speaking, at least – rapidly lessened. At the end of November, she felt that her language was becoming “more and more fluent”, which allowed her to have “more detailed and interesting discussions”. Perceiving herself as “rather shy”, she challenged herself and was proud of her progress. Concerning her school workload, Audrey considered it to be perfectly reasonable, and she did not really understand why she was the only one among her Swiss friends to have that impression. She also felt less tired at the end of a school day. In early December, she had to do a 10-minute presentation in literature and although she was “very stressed”, it went “better than expected”. Little by little, the everyday experiences of language use added up, giving Audrey more confidence in her skills. Visiting some distant family members in October, she was happy to be able to communicate with them properly in English; they went to see a Shakespeare play, and although she did not really understand “the fuss about it”, she was able to follow quite well. Globally, Audrey felt that her English improved greatly, and even more so in her comprehension skills. Back home, she watched the *Lord of the Rings* with her father and being able to understand Gandalf was for her the greatest achievement and proof that she could understand almost anything. After her stay, she could also understand most lyrics – “a very pleasant feeling” – and writing essays became “a piece of cake”.<sup>Au15</sup>

Although Audrey felt that she made a lot of progress and that she became an efficient user of English, there were still some situations in which she did not feel that her participation was welcome or that

she was competent enough as a language user. These situations were mainly linked to interactions with English students. In her “form” class, she felt judged by a group of local boys because of the “French accent she still had”. Consequently, she would always sit next to a Swiss student, so that “in case anything happened, they could talk to each other.” Speaking in front of the class was very difficult for Audrey in this specific situation. More generally, when she – and her Swiss friends – were among a group of local students, they could not really “enter the discussion”. The relationships that she established with local students were rarely based on English only. For instance, she met a student who also spoke French and Spanish, and they got along very well together by the end of the stay, but most of their interactions took place in French.<sup>Au16</sup>

Nevertheless, Audrey managed to position herself positively in regard to her various and rich linguistic skills. In her German class, for example, she could put her multilingual skills forward which the local students in that class appreciated. As a result, they took care of her and her friends and helped them to integrate. When travelling around England, her accent would betray her foreign origin, which raised people’s curiosity and they would ask her questions. Thanks to her accent, she thus met many different people with whom she exchanged brief or longer conversations, and she found that very nice and fun. During her train journey to Bristol to see her family, she sat with an older couple who were also going to Bristol. When they heard that she was a foreigner, they “took her under their wings” and explained to her what to do as the trains were delayed because of flooding. They talked for quite a while and Audrey really appreciated these moments and encounters while travelling. In fact, Audrey felt that her stay abroad really helped her be less shy. Speaking to strangers was something that she never did before but that now had become normal and much easier. Overcoming the difficulty of meeting unknown people in a foreign language made Audrey realise how easy it was to do so in French and gave her the confidence she previously lacked.<sup>Au17</sup>

### *Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of an Interview Excerpt*

In this excerpt, Audrey describes types of behaviour which she found “particular, surprising or disturbing” (1.2) from certain people in England during her experience. She talks about three different anecdotes that seem to have affected her.

1 **Me** Was there a behavior that you found a little... I mean, from the other  
 2 students, or the teachers, or your host family, anyone really, did you feel like  
 3 someone acted in a peculiar, surprising, or disturbing way?

4 **Audrey** Lots of times! ((laughs)) No, I mean mostly with the girls in our  
 5 school... They spent their time talking about "what dress are you going to  
 6 buy for my party," stuff like that... Yeah... Or also, for example, during par-  
 7 ties they would actually spend half an hour sitting on a couch taking sel-  
 8 fies, and then they actually just stayed on the couch doing nothing. So  
 9 yeah... I still don't understand, by the way, but whatever... yeah, that was a  
 10 little peculiar. And most of all, whenever you dressed differently from them,  
 11 I mean there really was just one outfit that everyone would wear. Yeah, I  
 12 mean... I really don't feel that style, so whenever you dressed a little differ-  
 13 ently, you would get kinda weird looks, like "who's that alien"... like yeah.

14 Anyway, there was also this thing with my host mom's friends, she'd  
 15 invite them over a lot, so I got to talk with them. I remember feeling kinda... I  
 16 thought it was peculiar, because there was this one friend in particular who  
 17 had been to Switzerland before, like she just went to Nyon and she remem-  
 18 bered... the first thing she said to me was, "I was shocked to see so many Black  
 19 people smoking in the parks"... So like, yeah. And I was all, "Wait, what?"  
 20 Then they had a whole discussion about how it's much more... apparently  
 21 Black people smoke much more than White people... Anyway, that was  
 22 weird... Yeah, Yeah... That kinda stuck with me in a bad way.

23 But then, also... I'm not sure if I mentioned this, but my parents came to  
 24 visit me for a weekend in Chester. So we were like, "let's eat out, let's go have  
 25 dinner in a nice restaurant." We had a reservation for 8 p.m., and I had expe-  
 26 rienced it before but totally forgot, basically by 7:30 everyone is in the stre-  
 27 ets just completely drunk... And the outfits were particular... especially the  
 28 women ((laughs)). So yeah...

Moi Est-ce qu'il y a un comportement que vous avez trouvé un peu... de  
 la part des autres élèves, des profs, de votre famille ou n'importe en fait, que  
 vous avez trouvé un peu particulier, surprenant ou dérangeant ?

Audrey Y en avait beaucoup! ((rires)) Non, juste par rapport aux filles  
qu'il y avait dans notre école, surtout... les grandes discussions c'était quelle  
 robe tu vas acheter pour ma soirée, machin... Ouais... Ou alors que, par  
 exemple, pendant des soirées, elles passaient vraiment une demi-heure sur  
 des canapés à se prendre en photo et ensuite, elles étaient vraiment sur le  
 canapé à ne rien faire. Enfin voilà... Je ne comprends toujours pas, d'ailleurs,

*mais voilà... ouais ça c'était un peu particulier. Pis surtout, dès qu'on s'habillait différemment d'elles, il y avait vraiment un seul type d'habit que tout le monde portait. Ouais... enfin... je me sens vraiment pas dans ce type de style, du coup dès qu'on s'habillait un peu différemment, on se faisait un peu regarder de travers, à dire c'est qui cette extraterrestre... voilà.*

*Sinon, après, il y avait aussi un niveau des amies de ma famille d'accueil, elle en invitait souvent, du coup, je pouvais parler avec elles. Je me souviens que ça m'avait un peu... Je trouvais ça assez particulier parce qu'il y avait une de ses amies en particulier qui était déjà venue en Suisse, donc juste à Nyon et elle se souvient... la première chose qu'elle m'a dite, c'est «j'ai été choquée de voir autant de Noirs en train de fumer dans les parcs».. ouais voilà... du coup j'étais là «quoi?»... Après elles ont eu toute une discussion sur le fait que c'était beaucoup plus... apparemment beaucoup plus les Noirs qui fumaient que les Blancs... Bref ça, c'était particulier... ouais, ouais... ça m'est un peu resté en travers de la gorge.*

*Et puis sinon, par contre, aussi... je sais pas si je l'avais expliqué mais mes parents sont venus pendant un week-end à Chester. Et du coup, on s'était dit Bah, on va aller manger, on va aller manger le soir dans un bon restaurant. On avait réservé pour 8 heures et moi, je l'avais déjà vécu mais je l'avais oublié, mais en gros parce qu'à 7 heures et demie tout le monde est dans la rue, totalement ivre quoi... avec des tenues particulières aussi... surtout pour les femmes ((rires)). Mais voilà...*

#### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

Audrey's first spontaneous answer is interesting as she notes that *there were lots of time when she found behaviours peculiar..., surprising or disturbing* (1.3–4). Although she laughs just after her first answer, she is still giving a serious and honest reply as she develops it with three different anecdotes. The first one is focused on school and more particularly on *the girls in her school* (1.4–5). Audrey gives a very schematic and stereotypical portrait of all of them – making a clear generalization – as being interested only or mainly in clothes and parties, since they spent their time talking about that (1.5). Her finishing the sentence with stuff like that... yeah... 1.6) highlights her idea of their superficiality. For Audrey, they are showing off but have nothing interesting to talk about. Audrey then wants to justify her opinion with some examples; she therefore talks about their behaviour during parties, where they would *really* spend half an hour on a couch taking selfies (1.7–8).

Their “superficiality” is highlighted again as they focused only on their image, their appearance, and there is nothing underneath. And in fact, when they stopped taking pictures, they would *actually* stay on the couch doing nothing (l.8), proving Audrey’s point: that they are empty and uninteresting, just like dolls to some extent. Using *actually* (l.7–8) twice implies that although it may seem exaggerated or unreal, Audrey is not inventing it but only reporting the facts. Audrey then concludes her sentences with “so yeah... but whatever... Yeah, I mean...” (l.8+9+11) as if to imply a judgement that she does not want to voice directly. She went on to say that *she still does not understand their behaviour now* (l.9), and she describes them as *particular* (l.10), an adjective I used in the initial question and which remains quite neutral in terms of positive or negative judgement. After this first description of the girls in her school, Audrey adds that *most of all* (l.10), they were very judgmental if you dressed differently. Her choice of pronouns here is interesting as she uses the general *you* – or *us* – to make general statements like: if *you* (l.10+12) dressed differently, *you* (l.12) would get kind weird looks (l.13) and perceived as *an alien* (l.13), but in between, she timidly inserts that *well... I [she]* (l.11) did not like that style and had a different one. When she says that anyone who wore different clothes was criticized, she actually wants to say that she wore different clothes and that they made her feel uncomfortable. Given the strong – negative – opinion Audrey has of these girls, it may seem unfair to hold their own strong judgements against them, but Audrey clearly sees her own behaviour and values as more correct, adequate, or acceptable, which is why she feels it is OK to talk about them. Audrey’s judgements may also have appeared as a defensive reaction towards these girls who did not make her feel comfortable. Being “rejected” to some extent seems to have reinforced her own opinions and values. Thus, the general negative first impressions crystalised and the development of relationship became difficult. On the other hand, stating that she was different, not only in her interests but also in her outfits, marks a more definite distance from these girls who seemed to embody everything Audrey disliked.

Audrey’s second anecdote is focused on her host family, more precisely on her host mother’s friends (l.14). She says that her host mother often invited friends, which were occasions for Audrey to chat with them. As she introduces her second anecdote, she wants to say that *she remembered feeling kinda...* [shocked/perplex/intrigued?] but stops and

rephrases it more neutrally saying that she found it *peculiar* (1.16). The anecdote happened with one of her host mother's friends *in particular* (1.16–17), and here she is being careful not to generalize. Audrey probably had individual contacts with each of them, which allowed her to differentiate them, unlike the girls in her school. So that friend – who had come to Switzerland, to Nyon – *had been shocked to see so many black people smoking in the parks*. Audrey underlines that it was *the first thing she told her* (1.18), and she did not know how to react or what to say, thus marking a clear distance between herself and that statement. Again, that woman's attitude and opinion were so different from what Audrey is used to and what she believes to be right that it had a negative impression on her. After that initial comment, Audrey says that *they* had a *whole discussion* (1.20) about black people smoking more than whites. This comment is so unreal for Audrey that she can hardly express it. She hesitates and stops in mid-sentence, saying that *it was more...* (1.20) and then she adds *apparently* [blacks smoked more than whites] (1.21) to qualify the statement making it slightly more acceptable for her. As she concludes, she repeats that she found it *weird* (1.22) and says that *it stuck with her in a bad way* (1.22), showing that it is not something she will forget easily. Although the anecdote was focused on one of the host mother's friends in particular at first, then *they* all discussed the matter. Audrey started to associate it with her host family in general and it became something she held against them to some extent. It was another element proving their differences (others have been explained above, see *Section 4.2.2.2*) and also comforting Audrey in her own values, which she perceived as superior or more valuable.

With Audrey's last anecdote, we leave her close social circles to enter British culture more generally and the way people behave in town. In that story, she has gone out for dinner with her parents in a *nice restaurant*, and they had booked for 8pm (1.25). As she contextualises the story, she gives a little, basic information, which is enough to surround herself and her family with respectable – almost upper-class – habits and decent intentions: a family dinner outing. But as they went out, they were confronted with less decent and respectable habits and behaviour: *everyone* was completely drunk in the street and people were wearing *unusual* outfits, *especially the women* (1.27). Audrey *had experienced it before but had forgotten* (1.26), stating at the same time that it was not the first time she went out at night, and that it was not an exceptional evening but a very common one in England. Audrey uses

again the word *peculiar*, to imply judgement without being too harsh. Just like in the first anecdote, she focuses on the girls and their clothes as something that bothers her or that she takes notice of. She also generalizes the behaviour of some people to *everyone* (1.26) who is, moreover, *completely* (1.27) drunk. Her external positioning, her detachment from those people, is again blatant and asserted at the same time: she observed the locals' behaviour but did not approve of it and did not want to mingle.

These three anecdotes are very interesting because they came very naturally and spontaneously to Audrey, who seemed to have paid particular attention to them. In each of them, she puts herself in opposition to "the other," the local people, whether it was the girls in the school, her host family, or people partying in the street. For each behaviour, she alluded to higher moral values, which she believes she possesses or respects. Although her judgment is never made harshly, it is always clearly implied and the distance she put between herself and "the other" is quite apparent. She could not get rid of her cultural – and also possibly socio-economic – superiority and probably left England happier and prouder of her origins.

#### *LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

Audrey's anecdotes came as a direct reply to one of my questions, which openly addressed *peculiar, surprising or disturbing behaviours* (1.2). Hence, her positioning as an external and critical observer was encouraged or even imposed by the question. In any case, her answer was therefore addressed to me specifically, a Swiss PhD researcher and high school teacher with previous SA experience. In her different anecdotes and through her judgments or evaluations of the different situations, she may have presupposed that I would understand and share the values she defends, which is apparent in her frequent insinuations. With our somewhat similar educational and cultural backgrounds, she feels confident enough to let her opinions and values show. Yet, as was discussed above, Audrey never expresses a harsh and definite judgement but suggests it instead. This can be explained in different ways. On the one hand, she may indeed have counted on an existing common understanding between us and consequently, many things did not need to be fully explained. On the other hand, my presence may have forced her to remain cautious and respectful in her choice of words. As we had discussed issues such as stereotypes, prejudices, and

open-mindedness, she knew the kind of behaviour I expected from her and wanted to project a positive image of herself. At the same time, these values of tolerance and respect are highly praised and defended among young people today, including high school students, and certainly surpass the context of this research. In any case, Audrey tried to remain respectful and tolerant, presenting the facts, insinuating a judgement of value but leaving the conclusion to me. This could be deduced from her frequent uses of “voilà” ( “well, there you go, that’s it”) at the end of her sentences or as a conclusion to an anecdote and her repeated laughter.

### *LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

As has just been discussed, moral values are central to this specific excerpt from Audrey’s interview. Her anecdotes are imbued with discourses of our time, such as feminism, tolerance, and self-respect. At the same time, it is also pervaded with more traditional values of “proper” behaviour. More precisely, as far as women are concerned, if she seems to claim the position of a clever, thoughtful, and independent young woman for herself, she also seems to believe that some behaviours – such as being drunk in the street and dressed extravagantly or in revealing clothes – are indecent. Paying too much attention to one’s appearance and clothes at the expense of more important things – whatever these are – is also an attitude she does not understand and therefore does not accept. In this specific example, the moral values associated with different types of behaviour are clearly prevalent and guide Audrey’s opinions, surpassing feminist discourses. The issue of racism is also briefly raised with the anecdote of her host mother’s friend discussing black people smoking in Swiss parks. Audrey reports that she was flabbergasted as she heard her host mother’s friend make that comment and it demonstrates how inconceivable it is for her to express such simplistic and racist opinions. Interestingly, in this anecdote, the woman did not only attack black people but also Switzerland’s reputation, which certainly accentuated Audrey’s shock and feeling of rejection. In any case, there is no doubt that among today’s well-educated young people, those kinds of statements are mostly unacceptable as they are in total contradiction with discourses of respect and tolerance for differences. In fact, Audrey really tries to position herself positively by referring to grand discourses of open-mindedness and equality. At the same time, her own moral judgements tend to

undermine her association with these discourses and tend to position her rather within a more traditional frame of references. This is not to say that Audrey’s intentions are deliberately dishonest or deceitful, but it uncovers interesting contradictory positionings. Being an adolescent, she explores new commitments and reconsiders older ones, and this often leads to contradictions. They may result from the combination of the different discourses surrounding and influencing Audrey, whether in her family, friends, or school environments.

4.1.7 ALBERT

*General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher  
Diary*

For Albert, writing entries proved to be a difficult task or rather was something that left him regularly perplexed, and more so at the beginning. It took time for Albert to start writing about his experience for different reasons, which he shared with me via Whatsapp at the time and during the interview afterwards. First, Albert agreed to take part in the project because he felt I needed male participants and wanted to help. He had no real expectations from the support programme but was willing to write to provide helpful information. However, as I left participants quite free to discuss what they wanted, Albert felt lost and unsure about how to proceed with his entries. He sent me a couple of messages inquiring about this before starting the task. In the end, as the table below shows, Albert wrote at least once a month and took time to develop one topic or anecdote in each of his entries. Their quality is high as he managed to remain factual while nevertheless taking an analytical perspective.

His entries were consequently addressed to me with recurrent apologies about his spelling or his delay in completing his diary and were focused on elements he thought relevant for the research project, i.e.,

**TABLE 4.13** Albert’s Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August	September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts	1			1		1		3		4		1				1		12
No of words	33			259		269		774		777		415				398		2952

school, different interactions with his English family and schoolmates, or language. Some aspects of his life, such as his Swiss friends or family, are almost entirely absent from his entries for the same reason. An analysis limited to the frequency of occurrences would consequently be lacking and inadequate in his case. A precise analysis of his positioning within the research project and the correlation with the interview proved to be essential.

*Interview*

Albert’s attitude during the interview reflected his diary entries in many ways. He intended to be helpful and was happy to answer the questions honestly and at some length as *Table 4.14* below shows.

**TABLE 4.14** Albert’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 47 min 7'164 words 186 turns				
		Number of words	Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Albert	5'068	54,5	70,7
	Interviewer	2'096	22,5	29,3

On the other hand, he focused on my questions and never digressed to talk about other anecdotes or people it could have made him think of. As in his entries, feelings were mentioned but never explained at length and his answers remain mainly factual and analytical. Consequently, describing his daily activities or expressing opinions about school and people was not a problem for Albert but when the questions targeted more personal feelings or difficulties, he often remained brief or transformed the question slightly.

*The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

*Social Positioning*

Albert found a balance in his experience between the different people he met: his Swiss and English friends and his host family. They were all positive elements during his stay, and he enjoyed pleasant moments with each of them. However, the relationships with his Swiss peers and host family were easier to build than the ones with the local students, which is the reason they are described first.<sup>Al1</sup>

Like most of the other participants, Albert developed close relationships with his peers, the other **Swiss students**, very easily and rapidly. It was much easier to talk to them and be in touch with them, which is why they quickly formed a group. They usually had lunch together at school, and Albert also went to the gym twice a week with the other two male students in the group; they organized different trips as well. Albert did not describe his relationships or activities with them at length – possibly because he thought that my interests were elsewhere – but their presence in the background is perceptible and, in the end, he clearly acknowledged the important role the whole group played in his experience as general support. He was also happy to have made two real friends, Aurélien and Emmanuel.<sup>Al2</sup>

Moreover, Albert felt lucky about his **host family**, where he felt welcome. He mentioned repeatedly how nice they were to him. They had dinner together every night and spent some time together afterwards, either talking, playing games, or watching TV. Dave, the host father, planned to play pool with Albert and his son once they were all together after the Christmas holidays, a clear sign that Albert was being positioned as a family member and felt as such. Once, Albert told them about an idea he had had with his two Swiss friends, which was to run 12km to the closest McDonald's. He did not miss that kind of food particularly but liked the idea of doing something crazy. Dave found the idea funny and told Albert how to get there. Then, some days later, on his way back from work, his host father stopped at the McDonald's thinking Albert was fond of their food and called to ask him if he wanted anything. Albert thought this was very nice of him, a sign of attention that showed that he mattered, and that his well-being was important to his host family. On another occasion, Albert said that his host parents were nice and funny, "the best family", not that they had done anything in particular but through their "everyday little actions". They spent a lot of time talking and their topics were rich and varied, proof of a comfortable and pleasant relationship. Once, after a news story about a celebrity who committed suicide due to too much pressure from the press, they had "gloomy" discussions for a week, which he found "meaningless but quite funny". At other times, they discussed Albert's family and youth or the host family's wedding and childhood. They also shared their taste for music, listening to some old hits together, and discussed British TV shows. Or they could simply talk about their day as well. Albert really enjoyed these moments with them, where they could

discuss “everything and anything”. He was interested in hearing what they had to say and in spending time with them; he invested in the relationship which he clearly perceived as valuable.<sup>Al3</sup>

Although it was difficult, Albert managed to make friends with two **local students**. At the beginning, he was surprised and disappointed because of the lack of possible interactions with English students. He regretted the Swiss class group in which one belongs and where one is forced to be with each other. In the UK, as each student followed their own programme, the only possible interactions were to “chat during classes”. As Albert arrived two weeks later than everyone due to a visa issue, he had to sit at the front, which did not facilitate his chatting, but he still managed.<sup>Al4</sup>

Albert met a boy, Alex, in his chemistry class and a girl, Lauren, in his maths class. Alex was sitting next to him, and they accidentally melted a clamp during a lab tutorial: “making mistakes naturally helped them bond.” The first things Alex taught him were swear words “of course”, and they had a lot of fun during class. At first, their relationship was limited to chemistry class, and Albert was sorry he didn’t see him more often. With time though, they started talking outside of class and sometimes during breaks, and in the end, he really became a close friend. They had made plans together for the summer, Albert was to go to a music festival in Goodwood with him and his friends, and he was really looking forward to spending more time with Alex and with more English students.<sup>Al5</sup>

With Lauren, the story is quite similar as she was sitting next to him in maths, and they also had another class together. At first, Albert said that he was closer to her than to Alex since he saw her more often. They even exchanged gifts for Christmas. Their friendship lasted until the end and chatting also became possible outside classes after a while. They were still in touch months after Albert’s return to Switzerland, but towards the end, their relationship did not develop as much as Alex’s, probably due to the gender difference. In any case, Albert’s friendships with both Alex and Lauren are important elements to him: “they were very friendly to him and made school life much more pleasant.”<sup>Al6</sup>

### *Cultural Positioning*

Although Albert stated in his interview that “he was not really surprised by anything” and that “he was quite OK with what was

happening there," he reported several elements in his entries that showed he still had to adapt to his new cultural environment. He analysed his own experience separating it into two main parts, the first before Christmas where everything was new and where he had to get used to things, and the second where he was able to enjoy those same things. This scheme of adaptation is apparent in his entries.<sup>Al7</sup>

The first and most important shock for Albert was the English school system. He was surprised to see how serious the local students were about their classes and had the impression that they were there "only to study", regretting the lack of possible social interactions. Comparing the system to Swiss high schools, where classes were "really noisy sometimes", Albert had to get used to hard-working students who were preparing for university applications, and he could not fully comprehend their behaviour. During the first half of his stay, Albert really struggled with school and regularly complained about it. Unlike local students who usually took three subjects, Albert had five: biology, chemistry, maths, German and EPQ, and this proved quite challenging for him. Noting that local school administrators thought he was "crazy" to take so many subjects, he first found it "funny" as he was used to many more in Switzerland, but later realized that with the amount of homework for each subject, it was "outrageous". He also perceived the days off as "traps" because they usually meant more homework. Albert had to learn to get organized and accept the situation as it was. Being rather anxious and willing to do well, this caused Albert many difficulties at first.<sup>Al8</sup>

Returning to England after the Christmas holidays, Albert thought it was much harder than the first time in September, as the unknown and the excitement of discovery were gone. What he went back to was a sort of routine, which he did not really appreciate because of school. Albert had always liked school, a place where he could learn and meet his friends, and he regretted that the reason he had gone to England – "the most important thing" – did not please him. He felt like he wasn't making progress in some subjects and had even regressed in others. At that time, he saw school as a "punishment". In hindsight, his point of view changed completely, showing evolution and adaptation. While the five subjects were a great difficulty in December and January, they became an advantage during the second part of his stay. Albert found that with fewer subjects and less school time than in Switzerland, he was able to organize his week better and

managed to get some free time. He realized that that was impossible in Switzerland with a full timetable and homework which he would sometimes finish late at night. He felt less pressure from the teachers and a freedom to organize his work which forced him to become more autonomous. He clearly acknowledged this difference and with time, really appreciated his new-found independence and autonomy. Compared to Switzerland, where teachers “took him by the hand” and watched him from A to Z, he felt freer within the English system where teachers gave him a file to complete by a specific date without checking every step of the process. What was first a stressful situation had become an enjoyable one.<sup>Al9</sup>

On a different level, Albert had a funny adventure with the local buses. Living 40 minutes away from school, Albert took the bus at first, but the punctuality and reliability of the English transportation system rapidly became a nerve-wracking experience for him, which pushed him to walk instead. In fact, Albert complained about the buses being late or even sometimes not stopping because they were full. On one occasion, the bus driver stopped on the side of the road to call the station because he was lost. Unable to get back on the right track with the explanations he received by phone, an old lady at the back of the bus stood up and went to guide the driver. But Albert and the other students on that bus still had to walk a few minutes and were late for school. He was very angry at the time but later found the anecdote quite funny. After that, however, he stopped taking the bus and although he “missed the Swiss buses” he was happy to take his morning walk listening to music.<sup>Al10</sup>

Over time and with a positive attitude, Albert managed to adapt to his new life and transformed “what was unpleasant into positive moments or things.” He struggled on different levels at the beginning: his room, school, the weather, and the buses but managed to get the best out of it. So, although Albert never really integrated these cultural elements in his new life, he accepted them. Albert also had a similar attitude towards language.<sup>Al11</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Before his arrival, Albert already had a good level in English. To get his visa, he had to take an IELTS exam, and his results were very good, although his speaking skills were lower than the others. Albert was thus determined to improve that part during his stay in England. But

overall, he did not struggle in his classes, for example, where he understood everything.<sup>Al12</sup>

Albert took an active position towards the English language, and although he experienced stress and embarrassment, he was very conscious of it and tried to overcome those feelings. Speaking with local students proved quite challenging for him at first, as he humorously explained: he talked about a “syndrome” certainly experienced by the other Swiss students, that he defined as: “usually I speak English well but when I have to speak with someone, my brain switches off.” But he felt that it was improving with time and in January he coped better than at the start.<sup>Al13</sup>

Moreover, reflecting on his experience at the end, Albert felt that he was most comfortable speaking English in private interactions, compared to speaking in front of the whole class, for example. Once in his biology class, his teacher asked him to answer a difficult question about the path taken by electricity in the heart, which he had not yet answered in his exercise. After a moment of panic, he managed to reply satisfactorily as he remembered all the specific terms he needed, but with great stress. Albert said that he had always had difficulties speaking in front of an audience, and the stress was certainly amplified there by the foreign language. Albert managed to overcome his initial discomfort when speaking English with friends, which was a clear benefit of that experience for him.<sup>Al14</sup>

Albert rapidly became confident enough in his English skills to actively engage in conversations whenever he wanted to. His being in an unknown environment, and only for a year, made him feel that he had nothing to lose and gave him the courage to overcome his shyness. Once in October, he was in a school common room with a girl who was alone, and he wanted to talk to her, so he went to her and got her Snapchat. He felt good afterwards and from then on, he decided that he had to “meet as many people as he could” and “use his difference as an asset, even to open a discussion.” In the final interview, he examined his active attitude, and he linked it to what we had discussed during the introduction meetings, concluding that had he not heard about not perceiving his difference as a problem but as an asset, his experience may have been different. In any case, Albert kept a positive and analytical perspective throughout his SA experience, which allowed him to continue moving forward and take charge of his time away.<sup>Al15</sup>

### Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of a Diary Entry

In this entry, written in February 2020, Albert describes his linguistic evolution using two anecdotes as examples.

1     **24 FEB** 12:45:42 Happy

2     Hi,

3     I have a free period so I can write, today I want to talk about my relation-  
 4     ship with English and the obstacles I've run into. Before coming here, I knew  
 5     I wanted to improve my speaking skills, I'd taken a test, the IELTS, to get my  
 6     visa and got really good scores, but the speaking section was my weakest.  
 7     I've got two stories that kinda show how I've progressed. The first one hap-  
 8     pened when I got here at the end of October. There was this girl sitting alone  
 9     in a common room and I wanted to talk to her, in Switzerland I don't think  
 10    I ever would've gone up to someone I didn't know, I'm really shy and usually  
 11    not comfortable around strangers or even doing presentations in class, it's  
 12    better now but when I was younger I used to be terrified, but then I thought,  
 13    well I'm only here for a year, I've got nothing to lose, so I went and talked to  
 14    her, she gave me her Snapchat and it was a good experience, I had a bit of  
 15    trouble talking, I was searching for words, but hey, it was a start.

16       Since then, I've always told myself I should try to meet as many people as  
 17    I can and just talk to them, like use the fact that I'm different as an advan-  
 18    tage, sometimes even to start a conversation. The second story is from a few  
 19    days ago, so I canceled my gym membership but I forgot to make the last  
 20    payment so I went to talk to the people there and they told me I had to fix it  
 21    over the phone. Usually I hate dealing with problems on the phone, I can't  
 22    stand it, I could've asked my host family to do it for me but I figured it would  
 23    be an experience, speaking English on the phone, and it actually went really  
 24    well, I sorted it out in five minutes, I didn't struggle to find my words, and  
 25    I'm happy because I can really see that I've improved since the start.

26       So yeah, not being able to speak English perfectly actually pushed me  
 27    to open up more, not shut down, when I want to talk to someone I just do it,  
 28    with my host family I'm less quiet than I was at the beginning and I don't  
 29    search for words as much anymore.

30       Pretty sure there are tons of mistakes and not enough punctuation, sorry  
 31    about that.

**24 FEV** 12:45:42 Content

Bonjour,

J'ai une période de libre donc je peux vous écrire, aujourd'hui je veux parler de mon rapport à l'anglais et des barrières que j'ai pu avoir. Avant de venir je savais que je voulais améliorer mon oral, j'avais passé un test le IELTS pour faire mon visa et j'ai eu des très bons résultats mais ce que je maîtrisais le moins c'était la partie orale. J'ai deux histoires qui montrent mon évolution. La première s'est passée quand je suis arrivé fin octobre. Il y avait une fille qui était seule dans une salle commune et je voulais lui parler, en Suisse je pense que je ne serais jamais allé vers une personne sans la connaître parce que je suis vraiment timide et en général je ne suis pas à l'aise avec des inconnus ou faire des présentations en classe, maintenant ça va mais quand j'étais plus jeune j'étais vraiment terrifié, mais je me suis dit que comme je suis ici que pour un an je n'ai rien à perdre alors, je suis allé lui parler elle m'a donné son Snapchat et c'était une bonne expérience j'avais un peu du mal à parler je cherchais mes mots mais c'était le début.

Depuis cette fois je suis toujours parti du principe que je devais faire le maximum de rencontres et parler avec les gens utiliser ma différence comme un avantage parfois même pour ouvrir une discussion. Et ma deuxième histoire s'est passé il y a quelques jours je me suis désabonné de mon centre de fitness mais j'ai oublié de faire le dernier paiement donc je suis allé voir les gens du centre qui m'ont dit que je devais régler ça par téléphone. En général je déteste régler des problèmes par téléphone je trouve ça insupportable j'aurais pu demander à ma famille d'accueil de la faire pour moi mais je me suis dit que ça faisait une expérience à faire parler au téléphone en anglais et ça s'est très bien passé j'ai tout réglé en 5 minutes je n'ai pas eu de mal à trouver mes mots et je suis content parce que je vois que depuis le début j'ai eu une amélioration.

Pour résumer ne pas parler anglais m'a plus ouvert que refermé quand j'ai envie de parler avec quelqu'un je le fais, avec ma famille d'accueil je suis moins silencieux que au début et je cherche moins mes mots.

Je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de fautes et un manque de ponctuation désolé pour ça.

### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

In this entry written in February, Albert revisits his experience and analyses his own *progression* (1.7) regarding his English skills, mainly

his speaking skills. He divides his text into two main paragraphs, each devoted to one anecdote, which are similar in many ways but different in the ease with which Albert expressed himself. Before arriving in England, Albert *knew* (1.4) that he wanted to improve his oral skills, his objective was clear and consciously articulated, and with these two stories, he is happy to know and show that he has succeeded. He introduces his first anecdote with the context: it was in October 2019, he was in a school common room, with a girl who was alone, and to whom he wanted to speak. Then he presents possible options, one he would have followed had he been in *Switzerland* (1.9) and the other he did follow, being *there*, in the UK (1.13). In Switzerland, he would *never* (1.10) have gone and talked to the girl because he is *really shy* (1.10) and *not comfortable around strangers* (1.11). He even reinforces his previously passive position by adding that when younger, he was *terrified* (1.12) when he had to do a presentation in class. But there, in this specific context, he had *nothing to lose* (1.13), so he went up to her and in the end got her Snapchat. He was therefore able to position himself differently thanks to the different and unusual context, which he saw as allowing a different and unusual behaviour. In hindsight, he remembers this as a good experience although he had a bit of trouble talking (1.14–15). In fact, he does not see that as a problem at all and justifies it by saying that it was a start (1.15), so it was perfectly normal. He even learnt from that experience and developed a kind of motto believing that he was there to meet *as many people as he could* and not to perceive his difference as a problem, but on the contrary, *use it as an advantage*, something he could even use *to start a conversation* (1.18). Although he justified the choice of this first anecdote to demonstrate his linguistic evolution in the first instance – hence, to show his limited speaking skills – its prominent function seems rather to exemplify his active and confident attitude towards the use of English. In doing so, he positions himself positively from the start.

The second anecdote took place a few days before the diary entry was written, in February 2020. Albert describes it following the same structure as the first one. He starts by contextualising the story: having ended his membership at the gym, he forgot to make the last payment and wanted to solve this by going there but they told him that he had to make a phone call. Again, he says that *usually*, he *hates* (1.21) making phone calls, he can't stand it (1.21–22). But, although he could

have asked his host mother to do it for him, he decided that it would be an *experience* (1.23) to speak English on the phone and he did it himself. In the end, it all went well, *he sorted it out* (1.25) in five minutes. He did not even have to look for his words and was happy to see some *improvement* (1.25). Again, although he mentions at the end that he had no difficulty speaking English in this situation, what is emphasized is his determination to do things by himself, overcoming possible language difficulties.

Thus, although the intermediary conclusion of each anecdote about Albert's linguistic skills is slightly different, showing progress, these two anecdotes have a lot more in common. After all, Albert describes two uncomfortable situations, in which he managed to take action. In his choice of pronouns (*I* only), his non-use of any passive structure, as well as in his choice of verbs – which are often action and decision-oriented – Albert clearly positions himself as the agent of his stories, the main and almost only character. In his recurrent mention of the past and his previous behaviour, he accentuates the fact that his actions were not easy or natural for him but came from a desire to act and take charge of his life and experience abroad. If he wants to do something, *he just does it* (1.27), that is his motto in England.

#### *LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

Albert clearly addresses his text to me. He starts by saying “hello” and ends with an apology for spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation. As mentioned earlier, he chose his topics according to what he thought would be helpful and relevant for the research project. In this case, he chooses to talk about the development of linguistic skills, a very “obvious” topic. The way he writes is interesting because he does not only recount two anecdotes, but he analyses them to some extent, as if he wanted to justify their relevance or guide my reading. His style of writing seems to reflect his personality as a very composed and reflective young man. However, Albert's entry is clearly designed for me, and he would certainly not have recounted those anecdotes in the same way had he been talking to a different interlocutor.

The way he positions himself, as the agent of his experience, is also very interesting as we had discussed that issue together during the introduction meetings. Whether this was done consciously or not is difficult to say but it is undeniable that he wanted to present a positive image of himself and of his experience in his entries. In the final

interview, Albert recognized that his confident attitude towards language was partially due to our discussions, so unconsciously at least, he always associated the project with this type of behaviour. This is not to say that Albert made up his stories, but he certainly presented them with a specific intention: to position himself positively but also to offer relevant and helpful information.

### *LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

As discussed above, Albert's text is about personal agency and taking action, an omnipresent discourse in our societies in general and in SA discourses as well. Albert thus clearly inscribes his entry into that ideology, where no problem is insurmountable provided the person is self-confident enough or eager enough to find a solution. People who act – and who do not position themselves as victims or puppets – are undeniably valued in our capitalistic and individualistic societies. The belief, reflected in the ideology of meritocracy, is that by taking charge of your life, you can become the person you want to be. On the contrary, if your life is not good enough, it is probably because you did not try hard enough. The rise in popularity of “self-help” books, for instance, is an example of the importance of that ideology (Littler 2017). In his diary extract, Albert definitely wants to show that he is trying hard and that he is successful as a result.

It may be a shortcut to say that Albert's attitude – or rather his way of presenting and positioning himself in the research project – is related to his gender, but the temptation is great to link his action-driven entries and attitudes with social representations of manhood (Connell 2005). The gender issue goes beyond the scope of the present study and cannot be discussed in length here. However, it would be extremely interesting to investigate the potential impact of gender on students' experiences, in a time when gender representations and norms are increasingly questioned and deconstructed. Albert is the only male participant in the study; therefore, his narrative cannot stand for anything other than his own personal take on the SA experience; it cannot and will not be understood as a reflection or representation of a larger male adolescent population. In any case, Albert's choice to present himself facing difficulties and overcoming them with active solutions was certainly beneficial to his overall experience.

4.1.8 LEA

*General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher  
Diary*

Lea wrote 17 posts throughout the year, including 5 in the forum between the end of September and the Christmas holidays, a period when she did not write in her personal diary at all. Lea is the only participant who repeatedly tried to establish connections between the different participants via the forum, with very limited results unfortunately. From January onwards, she gave up and wrote longer and richer texts in her personal space. To some extent, her early texts were often quite general and non-committal, but they became more detailed and engaged during the second part of her stay and after her return.

**TABLE 4.15** Lea's Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August	September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts		2	2		1	1	1		1		1	3		1		2	2	17
No of words		160	355		94	30	146		230		310	582		176		663	300	3046

During the interview, Lea regretted not having written more at the beginning, notably about trips or events she took part in with the other Swiss or international students. She admitted that she mainly wrote to answer some of my questions, which is a good thing on the one hand because, as she underlined herself, it made her reflect about elements she would probably not have thought of otherwise, but on the other hand, it may have prevented her from focusing on the issues or experience she was having at the time. She also mentioned that writing was a tool she used mainly when she was feeling a bit sad or homesick, hence the repeated mention of missing her family. The happy and exciting moments are therefore explained in fewer details as she was too busy living them and had no time to write about them. Nonetheless, Lea had a very sensitive and mature view on her experience, and she also often described her own evolution and what the experience brought her.

*Interview*

Lea was very happy and eager to share her experiences with me during the interview, which is reflected in the length of her answers. Her

TABLE 4.16 Lea’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview: 97 min 15'327 words 140 turns		Number of words	Average number of words per turn	Percentage
	Lea	13'509	193	88,2
	Interviewer	1'818	26	11,8

experience abroad, away from her family, was very rich and rewarding, and she learned a lot about herself. During the interview, she clearly enjoyed sharing anecdotes, and she was able to present them with distance and maturity. Lea was extremely grateful towards the people she met (some of whom became her friends) – her teachers, her host family and her own family, and talking about them seemed important for her, perhaps as a way to thank them. Her stories and anecdotes were also frequently addressed to future students going abroad; in fact, taking part in the research project was for her a way to improve the programme and help future students. Therefore, she positioned herself as a student with experience who was able to give advice, and me as the receiver of her experience who would transmit it to the next group. Mutual support and assistance are values Lea undeniably defends – as could also be seen in her attempt to build a community of peers through the forum – and her generosity as well as her maturity is apparent in her rich and composed answers. Lea regretted the fact that, unlike the research project, Renens High School did not ask for her feedback to improve or enrich the bilingual Matura programme.

*The Whole Stay: Three Narratives*

*Social Positioning*

Lea generally had a very positive experience based on solid social encounters. An important pillar of her stay was her **host family**, who had made her feel welcome from the beginning. When she got to their house, she saw that they had put up a sign with her name on the door of her room which helped her feel comfortable right away. They were always helpful and understanding and made sure Lea felt integrated within their family. For example, they took her to a pub to celebrate her birthday and to the theatre to see a play. Both events were really appreciated by Lea who enjoyed these special moments. She was also very excited to be invited to their elder daughter’s wedding, an occasion to wear a nice dress as well.<sup>Le1</sup>

Lea was not the only student in her family as a Norwegian girl, Mary, was also staying there. Lea and Mary got along right away, and Mary rapidly became a companion in and outside the family house. Lea described her as “very nice and considerate, sweet and spontaneous”. They became very close, to the point that Lea would even talk with Mary’s family on the phone. The strong relationships Lea established with Mary and her host family made her anticipate and dread their future separation in January. More precisely, she saw how hard it was going to be to leave such generous people, a sign that Mary and her host family were important to her. And indeed, when Lea had to leave in March due to the pandemic, it was hard for her. As the decision was made so quickly, the situation did not allow for proper goodbyes, and the host family was working and could not take her to the train station. The difficulty was also increased by the uncertainty of the situation. Once in Switzerland, the strength of their links was expressed through regular contact between them. Lea wrote to her host family every week, sharing photos and news. They asked for her to come back to England at some point so that they could all meet again. Lea also stayed in touch with Mary whom she missed, and she enjoyed talking with her on the phone regularly. Lea felt extremely grateful to have met these people, as she felt welcome and was offered “stable living conditions which allowed her to thrive during her stay.” They accompanied her in her integration and her discovery of a new culture throughout her experience and remained “open-minded”. Again, Lea felt lucky to have benefited from a “safe and comfortable” family environment.<sup>Le2</sup>

If the family was welcoming, Lea on the other hand, also invested in her role as a family member, showing the importance the position – and family more generally – had for her. She was keen to give a good impression from the very beginning. She was therefore careful to behave properly and be nice in order to find her place within the family and the family house. An anecdote illustrates her active role in the creation of a pleasant family feeling. Every night before going to bed, Lea would go down to say “good night” – an important ritual for Lea in her family in Switzerland – and this was really appreciated by the family. Mary would do it as well and after a while, the parents themselves would sometimes go up to say ‘good night’. These elements introduced by Lea showed that she actively sought a comfortable family environment, and it was not simply given to her. As will be discussed below, family links and values were highly important to Lea.<sup>Le3</sup>

For Lea, the **Swiss students** who were in the same high school as her were very important and became even more so as the year progressed. At the beginning of her stay, although she acknowledged their presence, her investment in the peer group was not as strong as after the Christmas holidays. In her diary, she rarely mentioned the Swiss students until December, and she stated in her interview that before Christmas she spent most of her time with Mary and other Norwegian students, plus one Swiss girl. But although she did not spend all her time with them, the presence of her peers – a group of ten Swiss students – had played an important reassuring role since the beginning. Like many other participants, Lea described the immediate connection between all the Swiss students due to the similar difficult situations they had to face. “Away from their family and their friends”, “away from everything they knew”, they knew they could count on each other, and Lea had never before experienced a friendship which developed so fast and so strongly.<sup>Le4</sup>

One morning, Lea had an allergic reaction to a shampoo and she had red patches all over her body, all the way up to her neck. As her mother in Switzerland was working, she could not call her, and her host parents had already left for work. She was all alone, so she went to school and went straight to her Swiss friends who told her not to worry, that they would go to a pharmacy during lunch break, which they did all together. Lea told this anecdote to explain the type of relationship the Swiss students had, being able to count on each other in delicate situations and sticking together. The proximity they shared is also illustrated through another story: after school, Lea would walk home with some Swiss friends as several of them were living in the same area. Although the walk lasted about 30 minutes in the morning, it took an hour in the afternoon as they “would linger on the way”. They would also stop at a Tesco practically every day to do some shopping as one of them always had to buy something. Being in this adventure together, there was no “prudishness” among them, and when a girl had to buy sanitary tampons or a boy razors, they would still all go together. Had they been in Switzerland, Lea explained that things would certainly have been different, and she would instead have chosen to go alone. The degree of intimacy they shared shows again that they were all very close, and they endorsed the role of a substitute family for each other.<sup>Le5</sup>

The links Lea developed with the Swiss students, and three of them more particularly, became even stronger after Christmas. This

is apparent in her diary, where she mentioned them almost systematically from that point on, and also in her own narration of her experience. She compares her friends to her brothers, “always there to squabble, to make each other laugh or to comfort each other.” After Christmas, they started spending a lot of time together: going to the movies or playing board games. Lea gives two main reasons why she and three of her Swiss friends became really close. First, the flights back to Switzerland and then back to England for the Christmas holidays helped bring them together by sharing something special, being on this adventure together. Second, an outing to the movies to see *Little Women* sealed their friendship. This profound friendship influenced the rest of Lea’s experience as they realised that they had to take advantage of all the opportunities they had; they were living an extraordinary adventure and they had to get out of the routine they had established and start “travelling, discovering, and having fun”. As a result, Lea and her friends studied much less and went out a lot more. They had also planned a weekend in London and another one in Scotland, which were unfortunately cancelled because of the Covid-19 outbreak.<sup>Le6</sup>

Their strong relationship lasted after their return home to Switzerland, and they kept in touch very regularly during lockdown. They exchanged messages or called each other on the phone. With two girls, Lea started a drawing challenge: they would decide on a topic every morning – such as friendship, fears and so on – and they would then share their representation of it in the evening. She missed her friends a lot and could not wait to see them again. And as soon as they were allowed to meet, they did so at least once a week. Being used to seeing each other every day in England, and then not at all during lockdown, it was reassuring for Lea to know that their links were still the same, wherever they were, whether in Switzerland or in England. Having shared such proximity and intimacy with them, the idea of these relationships being less intense was clearly stressful and a possible disappointment. Starting her third year in Renens was also perceived through the lens of her strong friendships and the fear that things would not be the same anymore. More precisely, the ten of them had been protected while they were secluded in England but being in the middle of other Swiss students would indubitably change the dynamic of the group, which worried Lea a little. Her peers were really “an integral part of her experience”, and Lea would not have learnt and

developed as much as she had, had they not been there. Throughout her stay, Lea learnt to free herself from some values and barriers she had grown up with, and she was able to do so thanks to her Swiss friends notably. They accompanied her and she found in them real support and understanding. As Lea's personal development was key to her experience, her friends were central in it as well.<sup>Le7</sup>

Lea was also lucky to be in a school which welcomed many **international students** and had built an international community. This community was composed of about sixty Norwegian students, her group of peers consisting of ten Swiss students, and about twenty other students coming from Italy, Russia, Peru, Spain, the United States and others, such as English students who had lived some years in another country. As a result, Lea made friends with people from countries all around the world and was directly socialized into a larger group than just her peers. Lea had a privileged relationship with a Norwegian girl, Mary, who lived with the same host family. They soon became close and spent a lot of time together, as well as with other Norwegian students, at least during the first months. With other international students, they went to visit Castle Howard, which Lea remembered as a very enriching daytrip. She spent her day with Norwegian people, and she "was able to learn about their culture and compare it to her own and the English one." There were several other outings organized especially for the international students during the year – such as a bonfire night – and Lea enjoyed each of them.<sup>Le8</sup>

The presence of this large group of international students on campus created a friendly and reassuring atmosphere. They would usually spend their lunch break together, for example, and in each of their classes, they knew that other international students would be present. Lea had at least one in each of hers and felt reassured that she "wasn't alone". The school also organized one meeting a week to bring the international students together. More generally, she was grateful to have studied in that specific school, which promoted diversity. For her, being part of a group of eighty or more international students meant she knew she would find people with common interests. They were all experiencing similar things, which meant that there was no judgement. Moreover, there was no risk of being left alone or not integrated and the experience was just "about having fun, enjoying and discovering a lot of things about oneself, the others, and other cultures".<sup>Le9</sup>

With the stable and reassuring presence of a caring host family, a large group of peers whom she could rely on and an even larger group of international friends to socialize further, Lea's environment was safe enough for her to take risks in other situations. She did not become part of a group of **English students** but managed to develop several individual friendships. Seen as a group, the local students were not perceived as very friendly or welcoming. Knowing that Lea and her friends were only in England for one year, the local students did not bother getting to know them or inviting them to parties. In her Spanish class, Lea also felt "judged" by the local students or at least not completely comfortable. Then again, she never really complained about their behaviour or regretted not being able to spend more time with them: Lea's different social circles were rich enough for her to pay little or no attention to local students' indifference.<sup>Le10</sup>

Nevertheless, Lea took different initiatives to meet local people. First, she signed up for a drama class in town and a basketball club. Although she rapidly dropped basketball, she continued to attend the drama class until January. And in February, she started taking part in discussion meetings once a week. None of these led to lasting relationships but they were occasions to socialize. Moreover, she developed one project for her EPQ which brought her close to some local students: she put on a play with all it entailed: adaptation of a text, direction of actors and creation of costumes and setting. She invested a lot of time into her project and was working with her actors on Mondays and Wednesdays during her lunch break. Meeting with her actors – all English students – on a regular basis and in that specific context created strong and lasting links between them. They became friends and kept in touch after Lea left England. Overall, Lea had different social support, a very active approach to her socialization, and little expectations of local students. The combination of these elements undoubtedly helped her feel confident and thrive during her stay.<sup>Le11</sup>

Lea's year abroad was also an opportunity for her to reposition herself within **her own family** or to free herself from their overarching influence. Lea was definitely a family girl in the sense that she had a very close relationship with her parents and her brothers, and the family unit was extremely important to her. In fact, there was not one post in her diary in which she did not mention her family or the fact that living away from them was sometimes difficult. The very first thing she did when she got to her new room, "even before

unpacking, was to hang pictures of her family and friends on the wall.” Throughout the year, Lea called them about three times a week, sometimes just to say hello or for longer conversations at the weekend. Before her return to Switzerland for the Christmas holidays, she was very excited and could think of nothing else for the two weeks running up to it. On occasions which were symbolic for her, Lea missed her family more. On the night of the Oscars, for example, it was hard because all her family love films, and she could not discuss it at length with them, something she was used to and enjoyed very much. However, while her family is repeatedly mentioned and while they kept closely in touch, it did not prevent Lea from enjoying her experience. She never regretted leaving them, and, on the contrary, she was happy to see that she was gaining maturity and independence. The first time she got sick, at the end of September, Lea realised that she was away from her family and that she had to cope on her own. “Her mum was not there to tell her which medicine she had to take and when, or to bring her tea in bed.” And these types of situations taught her to become more independent. More generally, in her interview, she mentioned that her family were overrepresented in her posts. She said that although they remained important and present throughout the experience, her life in the UK was so rich and busy that she did not miss them very much.<sup>Le12</sup>

To some extent, Lea seemed to take care of her parents even more than she needed them to take care of her. When she called them, she would only talk about the positive aspects of her experience “so that they didn’t worry or regret having sent her.” Her experience was mainly positive but if she was feeling a bit sad or frustrated, she would not tell them. With her brothers, on the other hand, discussions were “lighter” because although they missed her, they soon got used to her absence and they “trusted her”. Lea also found it hard to be away from her family while they were going through some difficult times, as she could not “hug them”. It was also extremely important for Lea not to disappoint her family: as the pandemic struck in March, many Swiss students made the decision to go home right away. Lea, on the other hand, had first decided to stay in England. As her host family would rather not keep her during lockdown because their son suffered from Downs syndrome and was stressed by the situation, Lea had organized to go and live with another family for a few weeks. She only changed her mind and decided to go back to Switzerland when she heard from

her parents that they would not “be disappointed” if she decided to leave and would not think that she “was giving up” or that she “had failed”.<sup>Le13</sup>

For Lea, this year away from her parents turned out to be a kind of revelation: it gave her room to discover new things about herself that were different from what she had been taught, or what she grew up with. She liberated herself from some of her parents’ beliefs and preconceptions. When Lea realised that she was changing and evolving, she was initially “scared” and then wondered what it would be like to go back home where people had not witnessed her evolution. Lea gained confidence during her stay as she learnt to distance herself from her family. She accepted that she could think differently from her parents on different topics, such as gender differences and strict lines drawn between different kinds of people, for example. She was no longer afraid to challenge her family’s values. She realised how prevalent those values had been in her family and the effect it had on her and felt ready to counter them or assert her own beliefs. Having no doubt about the strength of their love for each other, she felt confident that even if she did things which were contrary to their beliefs, she would still be loved. Therefore, she was ready to assert herself and her beliefs because she refused to hide and learnt that it was OK to disagree.<sup>Le14</sup>

To conclude, Lea was able to take different stable positions, whether with her host family, her peers, or the international students, and these allowed her to thrive, meet challenges, and discover herself. In fact, Lea actively invested in all her different positions, whether safe or more dangerous, and was thus successful in making the best out of her experience.

### *Cultural Positioning*

In her different social circles, Lea was confronted with cultural differences which she had to adapt to. Within her host family first, her cultural difficulties were mainly centred around dinner time and eating habits. She was surprised about the time of dinner, which was very early and the fact that there was no equivalent to “Bon appétit” to start eating. But her “greatest difficulty” was getting used to their food or cooking habits. She had the impression that the English food was “less healthy than in other countries”. Her host family consumed a lot of frozen food – which she was not used to as her Italian father and her Columbian mother took time to cook tasty meals – and a lot

of meat, but “not like ours, more like at the McDonald’s, a bit plastic!” For Lea, meals were “interesting”, a time for “a real cultural exchange”, because she discovered new recipes. Once, on Halloween, Lea’s host parents had prepared a dish with canned meat, chopped onions, and corn, all mixed together which created a “very peculiar smell”. Lea first thought that it was a kind of joke, or that they had added something special in it for Halloween, but actually, it was a dish they were proud of, something, they told Lea, that was served to soldiers in the trenches during WW1. Neither Lea nor the other student, Mary, liked the dish but it was an occasion to discuss, share, and also, to some extent, bond with Mary. If Lea was critical of the food she was served, this did not become a real issue as there was always at least one thing she liked and she knew that their taking the time to cook for her was a reason to be grateful and to eat what was prepared. In the end, she accepted the situation with a smile, using humour. The only thing that she did not find funny was their habit of serving large portions and throwing away everything that was not eaten. There were no leftovers, and Lea could not help feeling that wasting food was illogical or unreasonable. Thus, concerning food in general, Lea observed the cultural differences and accepted them but remained nevertheless convinced of the superiority of her own habits.<sup>Le15</sup>

Living with her host family also created opportunities to question her own (Swiss) culture. As she got to know the family and the family got to know her, she was really aware of her own behaviour and eager to make a positive impression. As the family had never hosted a Swiss student before, Lea realised that they would associate her with Swiss culture, and she took the responsibility very seriously. She asked herself what it meant to be Swiss, a question she had never thought about before while in Switzerland because she had never really been confronted with different types of behaviour or beliefs. Lea remembered with humour how the family associated her wearing slippers with being Swiss, thinking that everyone in Switzerland wore slippers. For breakfast also, Lea would eat muesli and they bought her ten different types of muesli to respect her Swiss tradition. These associations made Lea wonder what being Swiss was really about, and if she did represent Swiss people with her Italian father and Columbian mother. Therefore, she questioned her own cultural positioning, but clearly aimed to convey a positive image of Swiss culture, which demonstrates her pride and respect for the education she received.<sup>Le16</sup>

Lea also encountered family habits or rituals that were different from her own and that she sometimes associated with cultural differences. Reality TV, for instance, was “a family activity” for her host family and it really “struck her” because her own parents would never watch this type of show, which they consider worthless. Lea did not hold this against her host family – because “they were so nice” – but a judgment is still implied. She did not generalize this behaviour to all English people either but heard that other host families also watched it and wondered if it was cultural. Another difference struck her: the type of discussions they had during dinner. In England, they would talk about their day, “which, to some extent, made things easy for Lea,” as she did not have to express an opinion but only described her daily activities. Things were different with her family in Switzerland, as they would often talk about the news or politics and debate. Once, Lea remembered that Mary had asked a question about the Brexit situation because they were interested in their point of view and the mother had replied that she was not sure if she could answer. Lea was surprised but understood that they did not want to share political opinions in case they differed and led to potential problems or misunderstanding they had not had so far. As presented above, Lea had a close relationship with her host family, where she felt welcome and comfortable, but it did not prevent her from maintaining a distance and remaining critical of their habits and lifestyle, naturally using hers as the prime reference.<sup>Le17</sup>

Lea also viewed the English school system critically, as she found it very different from what she was used to, with positive and negative aspects. The restricted number of subjects meant she was sometimes bored, and she was not always convinced by some of the didactic approaches. In her language classes, for instance, Lea was surprised to have to translate literally whole texts from one language to another, an exercise she had never had to do before. Mathematics was difficult for her because they would mix maths, physics, and even mechanics in a single problem, which she could not manage. In Switzerland, subjects are clearly separated, which helped her. In her literature class, however, they read *Frankenstein*, and she really appreciated it for its Swiss component. In fact, she appreciated the teacher’s choice as it allowed her and the other three Swiss students in her class to share some of their culture with the English students. Overall, Lea had a positive impression of the teachers, whom she found “much more attentive and open

to difference and diversity” than in Switzerland. The school in general defended these values and Lea appreciated it greatly. As a result, Lea felt that the teachers “took her under their wings” and she had a positive experience of this different school system.<sup>Le18</sup>

In her drama class, Lea had other occasions to question her cultural positioning. Used to one tradition of drama in Switzerland, she realised that the techniques and exercises used in England were completely different. The approach was not the same, and she had to get used to, not only acting in a second language, but also to new exercises. While she was used to working mainly with texts in Switzerland, improvisation and specific exercises were a major part of the classes she attended in England. It created many frustrations and challenges for Lea, but it made her realise, on another level, that different people had different cultural traditions and it taught her a lot. She did however, go back to what she was used to when she directed her actors for her play.<sup>Le19</sup>

To conclude, with her rich social networks, Lea had many opportunities to discover different beliefs and types of behaviour which she understood as cultural differences. As she felt welcome in her family, her school, and in England in general, she remained open to these differences and accepted them with no judgement, although they remained mainly external to her in the sense that she had not integrated them and made them her own. Living in England also gave Lea a chance to confront her own representations of the country to a reality and she realised, for example, that red-brick terraced houses were not a cliché. With her critical perspective Lea had a rich cultural experience.<sup>Le20</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Regarding language, Lea’s environment was safe enough for her to take part in different social interactions and to improve her comprehension and speaking skills. Upon her arrival, she met Mary, the Norwegian girl who was staying with her, and they started talking right away. After an hour and a half on the first evening speaking in her stressed and school-book English, Lea realised that Mary would never judge her, and she was at ease with her from then on. More generally, Lea did need some time to get used to her everyday activities and interactions being in English. Her host mother, for example, had a very strong accent, and Lea did not understand her well at first. Sometimes Lea

felt as if “she was answering a question she had not been asked”, and it made her feel quite uncomfortable. Understanding English was actually more difficult than speaking English for Lea, who had always been at ease expressing herself. Only occasionally – and at the beginning of her stay – did she censor herself when she wanted to say something for which she did not have adequate vocabulary. On these rare occasions, she preferred to stay quiet. In her classes, however, she felt confident enough to express herself and ask questions, even in maths, which she found difficult, and where she would give answers which were completely wrong. But she preferred to “say what she thought the answer was, even if it was wrong, rather than have answers in her work that weren’t correct.” Thus, expressing herself was never a real issue for Lea and the comprehension part improved as the weeks went by. By mid-October, Lea already felt that she understood what people said and her classes much better. She went to see a play with her host parents before Christmas and said that the actors were speaking fast and she did not understand everything – especially the jokes – but on the other hand, she understood enough of it to enjoy it.<sup>Le21</sup>

Lea’s confidence in English was also boosted by the international community present in her school. As “she was mainly interacting with international students, they were all in the same situation,” on an equal footing, and it clearly facilitated expression. The Norwegians were much better at English than the others, but this did not create a feeling of inferiority because they were patient and would listen to them and help them when necessary, giving them words, for example. So, even though Lea felt that her level of English was somewhat limited at first, she soon decided to take the plunge, as “we learn by doing”. Lea really appreciated this international environment as it forced her to speak English even when she was with other Swiss students, and even though it was not perfect English.<sup>Le22</sup>

Her linguistic confidence allowed her to take part in different local activities where she was surrounded by residents. For instance, she joined a discussion meeting in town for people with sick or disabled close relatives, which took place every Tuesday night. She found these moments pleasant, and she managed to express her feelings even though English was not her first language. In fact, Lea felt lucky to have met the other people in the group who were very nice and who “took her under their wings”. She also went to a drama/acting class every Thursday, which was a real challenge for her. First, because the

comedians were all adults, with the youngest being about 20, and second because they all spoke English very well. She was therefore the youngest and the only one who was not used to an English-speaking environment. Lea said that it had become “a personal challenge to stay in the class”. She finally dropped it at the end of January, partially because she never felt completely at ease or integrated there. Reflecting on the reasons why she did not feel completely comfortable in the class – whereas in Switzerland her drama class is a place she felt most comfortable in – Lea came up with English as the possible main reason. In fact, she remembered an exercise, which she found very interesting, but which caused her much frustration. The exercise was done in pairs, with the same question to ask but with different stress and intonation, which would lead to different answers. For example, they had to say ‘Who said THEY stole my money?’ and the answer would be about who stole the money. If they said ‘Who said they stole MY money?’, the answer would be about the owner of the money and so on. At first Lea did not understand the exercise and then could not do it properly. She felt really frustrated because she knew it was a good exercise to work with language. She asked her partner to do it a bit longer, which they did, but she still did not get it all right. Acting in a second language is in itself a real challenge which Lea clearly met with courage and confidence. The amount of risks taken shows an active and positive positioning towards English, even though Lea never totally overcame all the difficulties linked to that precise activity.<sup>Le23</sup>

Her theatrical activities were not limited to her class as Lea also directed English actors in her own play. In that context, she felt completely at ease as she was using methods which she was more familiar with, her “Swiss methods”. Moreover, the actors liked them, so she felt reassured. Lea had planned four months of rehearsal, from January to April, and the performance was planned for 1 May. Unfortunately, it was interrupted but Lea had very good memories of the experience. It was the first time she had put on a play, and the fact that it was in a second language made it even more special. It allowed her to “practice her language skills even more” as she had to give “precise instructions” in a pleasant and intelligible way. The idea was “to find the right words, without yelling, to bring the project together,” which she managed as the actors were almost ready. Again, Lea’s investment in different activities, including challenging uses of the English language, shows her confidence and her positioning as a legitimate user of the language.<sup>Le24</sup>

*Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of a Diary Entry*

For Lea, the experience was transformative, an occasion for personal growth and self-discovery. In the following excerpt, she describes one evening, which she defines as her best memory. Her Swiss friends and her newly found values are central to her anecdote.

1 **17 APR 18:02:02 Nostalgic**

2 *I used to think I'd never be able to answer the question "what was the best*  
 3 *moment of your exchange year?" But when I think about it, there is one*  
 4 *memory I treasure. It was January 11, 2020, and we had just gotten back*  
 5 *from Switzerland, where we'd spent the holidays. I was really happy to be*  
 6 *back in York, I wasn't nervous anymore and I knew what to expect (unlike*  
 7 *my first trip in September 2019). I'd made myself the promise to enjoy every*  
 8 *single second of this amazing experience until it came to an end. So with*  
 9 *Claudia, Thaïs, and Gabin (other Swiss exchange students), we decided to*  
 10 *go see Greta Gerwig's new adaptation of Little Women, a movie we were*  
 11 *all super excited about for different reasons. We were the first ones to enter*  
 12 *the theater. We were talking and laughing way too loud, and you could tell*  
 13 *the other viewers there, who were probably just waiting for the movie to*  
 14 *start so we'd shut up, were totally giving us the side-eye. I remember this*  
 15 *feeling of freedom and friendship that we all shared right in that moment.*  
 16 *Then the movie started... It was interesting, seeing how different the story*  
 17 *felt in this theater, even though we all already knew it. Meg, Jo, Beth, and*  
 18 *Amy weren't just sisters bickering and making us laugh, but rather pow-*  
 19 *erful women, each fighting in their own way against a patriarchal society.*  
 20 *I think it hit me emotionally a little, I realized I'd grown, changed, maybe*  
 21 *even matured and certain things that at first used to feel small or unimport-*  
 22 *ant started to seem really meaningful. That's exactly how I feel about my*  
 23 *friendship with Claudia, Thaïs, and Gabin. That night brought us closer,*  
 24 *and from that moment on, I think we all knew we could really count on each*  
 25 *other and our friendship was one of the things we would remember most.*  
 26 *(April 17)*

**17 AVR 18:02:02 Nostalgique**

*Je ne pensais ne jamais pouvoir répondre à la question « quel a été le meilleur moment de cette année d'échange ? », pourtant, lorsque je me mets à y penser, il y a bien un moment que je garde très précieusement en tête. C'était*

le 11 janvier 2020 et nous venions de rentrer de Suisse, où nous y avions passé les fêtes de fin d'année. J'étais très heureuse de revenir à York, je n'avais plus d'appréhension et savais à quoi m'attendre (contrairement à mon premier voyage en septembre 2019). Je m'étais fait une promesse en me disant de profiter de chaque instant de cette expérience magnifique jusqu'à qu'elle ne prenne fin. Avec Claudia, Thaïs et Gabin (des étudiants suisses) nous avons décidé d'aller au cinéma voir la nouvelle adaptation de Little Women de Greta Gerwig, un film que nous attendions tous avec beaucoup d'impatience pour diverses raisons. Nous étions les premiers à rentrer dans la salle de projection. Nous parlions et rigolions beaucoup trop fort, si bien que les spectateurs, qui attendaient sûrement avec impatience que le film commence pour que nous nous taisions, nous regardaient de travers. Je me souviens de ce sentiment de liberté et d'amitié qui nous portait tous à ce moment précis. Puis, le film a commencé... Il était intéressant de constater que cette histoire, que nous connaissions tous, paraissait si différente dans cette salle de projection. En effet, Meg, Jo, Beth et Amy n'étaient plus que des sœurs qui se chamaillaient à nous faire se tordre de rire, mais des femmes fortes qui luttaient à leur manière contre une société patriarcale. C'est alors avec un peu d'émotion je pense, que j'ai réalisé que j'avais grandi, évolué, peut-être même muri et que certaines choses qui me semblaient sans importance à première vue pouvaient en réalité avoir une grande valeur. Ça a été le cas de ma relation avec Claudia, Thaïs et Gabin, de qui je suis devenue très proche après cette merveilleuse soirée passée en leur compagnie. À partir de ce moment, je pense que nous avons réalisé que nous pouvions compter les uns sur les autres et que cette amitié était l'une des choses dont nous nous rappellerions le plus. (17 avril)

### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

Lea starts her entry with a negative sentence: she never thought she would be able to define one moment as her best memory. As an introductory sentence, this implies that Lea had a rich experience with a lot of memorable moments and that picking one was not an easy task for her. But after thinking about it for a while, one moment stood out as one she treasured (l.4) in mind, which gives it even more value. She then contextualises the event very precisely, as it was on 11 January, just after the Christmas holidays. In this first part, she mixes sentences starting with *we* (l.4–5) and *I* (l.5–6): *They* had come back to England after *the holiday season* (l.5) spent in Switzerland, and *she* was *glad* to be back,

without the *apprehension* caused in September by an unknown environment, ready to enjoy *every single second left of this amazing experience* (1.7–8). She then starts describing that special evening with the first names of the people who were with her, because they are extremely important to her story and deserve to be properly introduced. So, together, they went to see the new adaptation of *Little Women* by Greta Gerwig, a movie they were *all super excited about for different reasons* (1.11) – which are actually not given, leaving the reader to wonder what they could have been. The time before the movie starts is described as a very bonding experience, in the sense that she presents herself and her friends as a group outside or even in opposition to the rest of the spectators. They were the *first* in the theater (1.11), they *were talking and laughing way too loud* (1.12) and the others, who were *giving them the side-eye* (1.14), could not wait for the movie to start so that they *would shut up* (1.14). With her friends, Lea was untouchable, their group was so strong that they felt powerful and the others' opinion of them did not really matter anymore. Lea remembers that they were *all* driven by a feeling of *freedom* and *friendship* (1.15). Her memory of that time and the emotions associated with it still seem vivid and the latter left a permanent mark on her.

*Then, the movie started...* (1.16). The use of suspension points is suggestive and leaves the reader wondering what important or exciting thing will come next. As it turns out, the movie came as a kind of revelation to Lea and her friends. They realised that the story they all knew from childhood looked very *different in this theater* (1.17). The four main characters had changed from *sisters bickering* to *powerful women* fighting against a patriarchal society (1.18–19). At that point, Lea realised that she had *grown up* and *matured* (1.20–21) and that what may have seemed trivial before could actually be of great importance. Finally, she concludes with her three friends, and their first names again, to insist on the fact that their friendship was sealed that night, watching that specific movie, and that it was the one thing they would all remember the most. In this small anecdote, Lea positions herself clearly as part of this Swiss group of friends, which she values very strongly. At the same time, she is also making a clear statement about this whole experience having changed her deeply and permanently: she grew up and developed a new perspective on life. The evening has become symbolic for Lea and the way she narrates it – in retrospect, a few months later – is tinged with romanticism or idealism, with the events all corroborating her global – coming of age – impression.

*LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

In this entry, which she wrote when she was back in Switzerland, Lea is directly answering one of my questions, although she transforms the plural of “your best memories” into a singular in “her best moment.” Through her first sentence, she questions what I asked her, implying that she may not have found it relevant at first but after reflection, one precise evening stood out almost naturally. As she narrates her story, her intention is double: telling factual elements and giving me her interpretation of them, or their meaning for her. Written as such, the anecdote is therefore clearly directed to me with a focus on the most important elements the experience brought her. Her story is precisely recalled and constructed in order to convey a well-defined message. As she is addressing me, a PhD researcher, and not one of her friends, for example, she focuses on serious and analytical elements. She positions herself as a thoughtful and reliable participant who is willing to help and at the same time, as a mature woman who sees her experience as life-changing and analyses it as such.

Lea said elsewhere that she appreciated writing, as it allowed her to gain distance between the facts and her interpretation or understanding of them. In this case, the distance may be interpreted in two ways, as time had already passed between the event and the narration. Her text, however, is a good example of her own reconstruction of an event with a specific intention in mind: showing me her own evolution.

*LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

Three themes emerge from Lea’s text, all seemingly equally important to her: friendship, growing up, and women’s rights. Friendship is central and probably put more to the fore as it is primordial for teenagers, and it accompanies Lea’s evolution as well as her realisation that women’s rights matter to her. In fact, the strong feeling of belonging to a group that would support her in any situation is presented as essential to Lea’s well-being and development. If friendships are usually very strong and exclusive during adolescence, being abroad and away from their families certainly strengthened these relationships and their importance even more. In any case, the discourse of genuine and true friendship is undeniably integrated by Lea who is happy to be part of such ideal relationships. Moreover, letting people know about it positions her as a person worthy of that kind of friendship, with honest values. Surrounded by her true friends, Lea becomes more independent and more mature.

Again, she is happy and certainly proud of her newly found independence and maturity: a quality society expects from young adults. Lea presents herself as a reasonable young lady, thus fitting the ideal representation of an educated young person with their feet on the ground. Lea's anecdote is an example of her evolution and at the same time a moment of realisation for her. Her childhood story has been adapted to the time – to her time – and she realises that her understanding of it changes drastically, because with age and experience she gets access to a new level of meaning. As she is leaving the world of childhood, she refers to her representations of what maturity means and presents herself along these lines. Studying abroad acted as the trigger, the context that allowed or accelerated her growing up.

Lea's new understanding of her world is also full of feminist values. On that matter, Lea is fully part of her time in the sense that her personal preoccupations echo larger social gender reconsiderations. As a young woman, she is looking for her place within society, and realises that all positions may not be available to her. She looks at the world around her through the filter of women's rights and sees where these might not be achieved yet. Seeing her childhood heroines through this lens shed new light on them and paralleled her own evolution to some extent. The discourse of equality is in fact recurrent in many of Lea's texts and even became the focus of the play she put on. It also became a potential issue within her family as she realised that her parents had different beliefs. This discourse is not specific to studying abroad but it is a transversal social issue. Nonetheless, it developed during that time of her life, as she was discovering new facets of herself outside her family environment, and it became central to Lea's identity.

#### 4.1.9 LILY

##### *General Positioning in the Study and Towards the Researcher Diary*

Lily used her diary extensively making her one of the most prolific writers among the participants. Although there is a gap in December and January when she did not post anything, it is compensated by longer posts in February where she talked about the past months and the present at length. Lily wrote her entries on her phone or laptop whenever she had some time and posted them later, often two or three at a time. She used the project – and the online diary more specifically – as

a personal diary, in which she wrote down personal anecdotes in her own words and style. As a result, her texts are often full of exclamation or question marks and capital letters to suggest different intonations, and she often used slang and informal language.

TABLE 4.17 Lily’s Posts: Frequency and Length.

	August		September		October		November		December		January		February		March		April	May	Total
	19-31		1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-30	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-31	1-15	16-28	1-15	16-31	1-30	1-31	
No of posts	4		2	3	1	4		1					4				1	2	22
No of words	288		305	421	879	1345		580					2183				632	711	7345

This does not mean that Lily was not aware of my presence, but she took part in the project mainly to have a stronger motivation to write about her experience, to record her memories of it, and she wanted these memories to be fully hers, i.e., written in a style that she could relate to. Lily really enjoyed reading her posts to prepare for the interview, specifically the many different details which reminded her of the way she felt at the time or what had happened specifically. Interestingly, Lily first described her posts as “messages” implying that they were addressed to me, but then corrected it and chose the word “notes” instead, which is a more personal type of text.

*Reading the messages again, I was so happy, I mean the notes, I was so happy to have something left because there are so many little things that make a huge difference, in a way, and I'd forgotten them, so I was super excited to read them again and be a part of it, you know. (Interview)*

*En relisant les messages, j'étais tellement contente, enfin les notes, j'étais tellement contente d'avoir des traces parce que y a plein de petits détails qui font presque toute la différence si on peut dire et que j'avais oubliés, donc ça m'a fait vraiment super plaisir de les relire et de participer aussi, quoi. (Interview)*

In her final post in June, Lily wrote that she had been happy to write “on my wall” during the whole year and that “although the UK part of the experience had been over for a while”, she was sad to see “its parallel experience [the research project] over as well.”

*And for the entire year, in a way I was constantly thinking “if I write this it’ll go on Murielle Ferry’s wall and I’ll have a real record”, but now, even though the exchange year in the UK ended long ago, her parallel experience is over as well and it makes me sad. (15 June)*

*Et toute cette année, indirectement je me disais «ah si j’écris ça va aller sur le mur de Murielle Ferry et je vais en garder une vraie trace» mais là, bien que cette année en UK soit finie depuis longtemps, son expérience parallèle est finie aussi et ça m’attriste. (15 June)*

This clearly shows her enthusiasm for the project and for sharing her experience. However, Lily obviously chose what she wanted to share, and although she experienced difficult situations, which could amount to a kind of bullying, she only vaguely referred to it in her posts and did not elaborate on it. In her interview, she admitted that she was a “bit ashamed” and chose not to post those notes.

*I have notes, I don’t know if I have them, if they’re in the post, but... because I think I was feeling a bit of shame ((laughs)). (Interview)*

*J’ai des notes, je sais pas si je les ai, si elles sont dans le post, mais... parce que je crois que j’avais un peu honte ((rires)). (Interview)*

Lily was therefore always aware of my distant presence and chose to paint a more positive portrait of her experience – which in the end it was – and she intentionally left out some more negative details.

### *Interview*

As in her diary, Lily made the interview her own, and although I was guiding the discussion through different questions, she developed many anecdotes and emotions without the need for my intervention. She started the interview by saying how happy she was to take part in the project, as a way to show her appreciation, and she was very enthusiastic throughout the hour and a half of the interview sharing her different experiences. Being face to face, and certainly also a few months after the facts, allowed Lily to discuss the more negative aspects of her stay as well, without positioning herself negatively.

Before developing Lily’s different positionings, it is interesting to note that among all participants, she was the only one who described her stay abroad as a continuity of her Swiss life and not as distinct or separate from her “real life”. More precisely, when asked to divide

TABLE 4.18 Lily’s Interview: Length and Distribution of Turns.

Whole interview:		Number of words	Average number of words per turn	Percentage
97 min	Lily	15'174	240,8	90
16'840 words	Interviewer	1'666	26,5	10
126 turns				

her experience into different parts, Lily started with the preparation phase when still in Switzerland and thanked me for the advice given during the introduction meetings. After having divided her stay per se, she concluded with the readaptation period in Switzerland, which was “not longer than she expected but longer than for the others”.

*So, for example, I could say, there is... Oh, OK. I think that, especially thanks to you, there was the preparation at first, with lots of tips and tricks, like advice, you know. [...] but so my... basically letting go, the hardest part, it was really the end, which was much longer. I mean, I can't say it was much longer than I expected, but it was long, especially compared to the others. (Interview)*

*Par rapport, par exemple, je pourrais dire, y a... ah ok. Moi, je pense que, surtout grâce à vous, y a eu la préparation au début et il y a eu beaucoup de trucs et astuces, enfin de conseils, voilà. [...] mais du coup mon... deuil en quelque sorte, le passage qui était le plus dur, c'était vraiment la fin qui a duré beaucoup plus long. Enfin, je peux pas dire beaucoup plus long que ce que je m'attendais, ce à quoi je m'attendais, mais qui était long, surtout comparé aux autres. (Interview)*

Her inclusion of a before and an after shows that she perceived her experience as being an integral part of her life. In this, she really differs from most of the other participants who presented their SA experience as an episode, an adventure detached from their everyday life. This perception is certainly related to her level of integration which was also distinctly higher than any other participants.

The Whole Stay: Three Narratives

Social Positioning

As for most participants, the other **Swiss students** played an important role in Lily’s stay and experience. However, unlike many other

participants, Lily also invested in other important relationships, mainly through sport. The importance of her Swiss group was thus not so exclusive. As soon as she met the other Swiss students, they got along very well – “even too well” as they were afraid it could prevent them from meeting other people – and they started spending time together. They went to Birmingham soon after their arrival and organized a weekend at a local fair as well, where they were able to see many people that they knew from school outside of their regular environment. They shared fun moments and also helped each other with schoolwork when necessary, which she perceived as very beneficial. They really got along well, and she felt lucky to have them. In mid-October, Lily realised that she had not been homesick by then and explained it by the fact that she had great friends, Swiss and English. The Swiss students gave her a certain “peace of mind”: they were “her closest friends, with whom she spoke French without barriers or embarrassment” and they allowed her to fully experience the rest, as well as the maybe more dangerous situations. Their reassuring presence in the background is also visible in Lily’s diary where she mentions them regularly but very briefly as the experience moves forward. In fact, although she says how much she appreciates them and how lucky she is to have them, she prefers to develop other, more individual aspects of her stay with her basketball team or local students, for example.<sup>Li1</sup>

Once in Switzerland, Lily and her Swiss friends met again: they spent four days together to work on their EPQ and lived together like flatmates. It went really well, which made Lily think that these friendships would last. In hindsight, she recognized the important part they played in her experience, but she also saw herself as somewhat different from them and did not want to define her experience through them exclusively. In the group, she was less present than the others due to her frequent basketball training and games. She underlined that unlike the others, this group of four was not her whole experience but “only a fourth of it”. Lily’s forced return to Switzerland in March was really painful and hard for her to accept, in contrast to her Swiss friends. She saw this significant difference as the result of their different involvement in the experience. Although for them, the “experience continued in Switzerland, because the four of them were still friends and could still see each other,” a great part of Lily’s experience had ended, and she was extremely sad about it.<sup>Li2</sup>

So, what did the rest of Lily's experience abroad comprise? The **local students** definitely played an important part. At first, Lily had to deal with the same difficulties as most participants when it came to meeting local students: they already had their group of friends and were not very interested in meeting new – moreover foreign – students. But rapidly, she managed to get them interested in her because she joined the high school basketball team, and she was the only girl in the team. Before her first training session, Lily naturally felt extremely stressed hoping she would find her place among all the male players both in sporting and social terms. As a matter of fact, she rapidly gained acceptance in the team and although “the guys were a bit embarrassed” at first, she started to develop friendships with some of them. She met Flynn, for example, the team captain, who drove her to and from training, which saved her a lot of time.<sup>Li3</sup>

Her being part of the high school basketball team gave Lily privileged access to local students. More precisely, it made her rather special, as the only female basketball player in the school, and she enjoyed local students' interest as a result. For example, she was once challenged to play a 1-on-1 game during a lunch break against a younger student because some of her teammates were sure that she would win. Lily originally took it as a joke, but it was not, and moreover, many people – students and teachers – heard about it and wanted to see it. Lily said that a boy in her class who had never talked to her before, started to include her in his group of friends after that. During her first games, Lily felt highly observed – not always positively – by the players of the other team and by the girls watching the game, who were wondering what she was doing there. Even the physical education teachers had heard about her skills and told her that they would stay to watch her play. After her second game, she was extremely happy because she scored a 3-pointer, but she also explained that the girls in Year 13 came to watch the game, and it seemed to have led to an uncomfortable situation. Lily regretted some of the girls' ways of behaving, e.g., Flynn's girlfriend, who was nice and talkative in the car, but who would not even say “Hi” or smile at her when they met at school. If Lily's position on the basketball team gave her more visibility, her being the only girl on the team did not necessarily facilitate her access to groups of girls, and it was still difficult to integrate at first. But the basketball team was very important to Lily, and she really enjoyed going to all her different training sessions and games, which took place almost every

day, sometimes even twice a day. Towards the end of November, she twisted her ankle and could not play for seven weeks, which was a very long and sad period for Lily. She found comfort in the fact that “ALL her teammates” repeatedly commented on her absence, making jokes about her coming to training, which made her feel happy and still part of the team.<sup>Li4</sup>

Through her repeated contacts with the team and thanks to her “fame”, Lily managed to develop deeper relationships with different local students after some time. By February, she happily got along with many of them and had started being invited to different parties. She had been going to parties for the previous three weekends and hoped it would continue. Having been invited to a first party, more invitations had followed, and Lily was thrilled that it was finally happening – because it had been calmer before – as it helped getting to know local students better. She realised that she was “rather appreciated” at school and she was the “most sociable” of the Swiss. She was called “basketball Lily” and she enjoyed the daily greetings she received from many different local students. Describing herself as “naturally sociable”, she needed those different interactions to “get her energy” and be “in a good mood”. She was also happy to hear her host family say that she was the most socially active student they had ever had, a proof of her integration.<sup>Li5</sup>

Once back in Switzerland, Lily stayed in touch with many different English friends. During lockdown and the following weeks, she was actually in touch with English people more than with the Swiss ones, a sign that Lily had not really accepted her sudden departure and wanted to make her experience last as long as possible. She regularly called those who she was closest to and used social networks to chat often with other friends. Away from England, there was one person she “missed enormously”, Fin, who she played basketball with and spent a lot of time with. They were in school together; they played together in two different teams on weekdays and saw each other at the weekend for training and for the games; they met at parties as well and they realised, once physically separated, that they got along extremely well. So, they called each other often, and Lily truly hoped that she could go back to England to be with him again.<sup>Li6</sup>

However, Lily’s experience and relationships with the local students was not without their own difficulties. Being so “remarkable” – in both senses of the word – Lily was able to develop friendships with

the local students, but she also received unwanted attention. Many students felt free to criticize her physical appearance and her every move openly. Lily endured those unwanted comments on a weekly basis and although she was very strong and usually managed to deal with them in one way or another, it was sometimes too much for her to handle and she would “explode” and feel very sad and upset. To some extent, the fact that Lily was extraordinary in many ways made people believe that her life belonged to everyone and could be discussed freely. Moreover, her foreignness may have made her more vulnerable because she was not supposed to fully belong there. Even within her basketball team, the players watched and judged her; for example, photographs of her taken at parties were discussed and questioned, often with a reference to her sexuality. The fact that Lily spent a lot of time with male students – and that she was pretty, liked to party, and was from another country – led to rumours and jealousy, and made her life difficult. Lily perceived students’ attitudes towards her as a negative cultural difference and it will therefore be developed at more length in relation to culture.<sup>Li7</sup>

If her Swiss and local friends were an integral part of her experience, so too was her **host family**. Lily had been in touch with them even before her arrival – to the point that they had planned a holiday in Greece in October – and she felt welcome right away. She got along very well with one of her host sisters, Isabella, from the beginning. They used to chat every night in each other’s rooms, talking about their days “like real sisters”. Her host parents were also very nice and helpful people. They came to pick her up after her basketball training, or at the train station, and even drove her to school when she was late. Her host father made jokes all the time, and she initially appreciated that and found it very funny. On the other hand, Lily had very serious and interesting conversations with her host mother, for example, about the form of eczema she was suffering from, its different treatments, and some of its consequences. Overall, Lily’s host family played a central role in her experience, and she was grateful for their presence and support. She developed a very strong relationship with Isabella; they spent a lot of time together and had made a lot of plans which unfortunately had to be cancelled. Lily considered Isabella as a real sister and also as a friend. They spent evenings together “dancing, cooking, and doing whatever”. Isabella helped her a lot when she was injured and supported her throughout the year. Their relationship consequently

lasted after her return. They called each other every week and had planned to meet again, in England and in Switzerland. Lily underlined that her host family was intrinsically linked to her sporting activities – since they made it possible for her to be involved so intensely – and to her friends – with the presence and multiple roles of her host sister – and she recognized that her experience was successful thanks to the combination of these elements, which were all equally important.<sup>Li8</sup>

On the surface, the situation may have appeared ideal but in reality, it was not always so, and her relationships with her host family were not always perfect. Combining all her different positions was challenging for Lily, especially since she cared about giving a good impression of herself. On the one hand, she wanted to do things well, help the family, have good grades and hand in her homework on time, and on the other hand, she wanted to hang out with her friends, party, and take part in her numerous trainings and games. She was worried that her different positionings may have seemed incompatible and that one of them – her liking to party and dress up – may have harmed her position as an honest and helpful member of her host family. Gaining her host mother's approval and respect was important for Lily who, again, invested in that role. The situation was also sometimes tense with her host father and his regular jokes, which towards the end Lily did not always find funny. He had a strict approach to schedules, and Lily was not very organized at first – she was often late – so he made many comments and bad jokes about that. And although after a while Lily made an effort to no longer be late, her host father kept making jokes about it during dinners with family or friends. Lily was really annoyed about his running gags; he also laughed at her putting pesto or mustard in her sandwiches so many times that she did not know what to do anymore. She pretended to laugh but underneath, she was very angry. The family's dogs – or rather the way the family treated their dogs – really got on her nerves as well, apparently, but she never explained why in detail. Dinners with her family were also situations which could drive Lily mad at times, as they could often go on forever. Sometimes, the host father talked for a long time and had not finished eating so everyone had to wait. As Lily had a very busy schedule, she would have preferred to eat more rapidly to have more time for her homework or to be able to go to sleep earlier. But she had to stay with the family and be patient, which sometimes was extremely hard. But again, Lily wanted to present a good image of herself and show respect

to her host family, which is why she did not say anything and coped with the situation.<sup>L19</sup>

The importance of her role as a member of her host family certainly came from the importance Lily gave to her **own family** as well. However, they did not play an active part in her experience abroad, in the sense that Lily did not really miss them and she did not call them all the time, but she valued the education she received and their distant presence. On several occasions, when Lily felt sad or tired, she missed them more. When she had difficulties dealing with the local students' disrespectful behaviour towards her, she would call her father and confide in him, although he never knew the real extent of the situation. She knew that he would understand because he had experienced similar situations and he gave her advice, and values, which helped her. When she had health problems linked to her eczema, she missed them too and wished that they were there to help her feel better. But other than that, she did not think about them so often. She called them from time to time and if she did not, they knew that she was happy and enjoying her experience. Two members of her family had a special place in her life nevertheless: her grandparents. She did miss them and wished she could have seen them from time to time. Lily admired them – they had had a difficult life but always looked on the bright side of things – and she hoped that nothing serious would happen to them while she was abroad. She called them every Wednesday evening to talk with her “very chatty” grandmother. Her respect and love for her different family members is evident in her way of speaking about them, and she used this to bolster her own strength and enjoy her experience fully, focusing on the positive elements of her stay.<sup>L110</sup>

To summarize, Lily had rich social networks as she developed strong relationships with her Swiss friends but also with many local students – thanks to her basketball team – and with her host family. All these networks intermingled and played a central role in her experience.

### *Cultural Positioning*

As mentioned earlier, Lily's active participation in local communities did not go unnoticed and her rapid integration became problematic for some. As a result, she became victim to a kind of bullying. Lily questioned this bullying and as she could not understand it, she saw it as a cultural difference, and positioned herself as an outsider, a Swiss girl. She felt that her behaviour was no different from her behaviour in

Switzerland, and since the responses she got were different, she concluded that it was due to local students' "ways of thinking". Lily suffered from their behaviour, including their "passive aggressive jokes". Although Lily rapidly became the target of their comments, she only shared it in her diary in February and even then only superficially. In her interview though, she explained some of the situations she had to deal with in more detail. The one which struck her most was a thing called "Woman Crush Wednesday". This usually harmless way of sharing one's crush on social media was transformed there into a way to point at one "hot" girl in the school. Concretely, about twenty popular guys had created a group on a social media app and every week, they added a new girl to the group. For 24 hours, the girl could chat in the group, and "at the same time, be laughed at and made fun of", before she was asked to leave the group again. Lily was picked among all the schoolgirls to be in that group after a few weeks only, and she did not appreciate it. Although, it was apparently a "big thing" to be nominated, and many girls were very excited about it, Lily was not. Although she was somewhat flattered at first to be chosen and noticed, even though she had just arrived, being selected because of her physical appearance was not something she could accept and appreciate, due to the education she received from her father in particular. When she shared her experience with the other Swiss female participants, they were both appalled. As a result, they questioned the image local students had of girls.<sup>Liii</sup>

Lily was deeply affected by this episode and took time to "get used to it" or rather to "put up with". Sometimes she would have panic attacks at night or on her way to school and she would call her father crying. The W.C.W. lasted for a day but the comments she received afterwards were neverending. She rightly felt insulted, and it was hard for her to accept their behaviour and know what to do or what to say in some situations. During her basketball training sessions, for example, some guys would come to watch and instead of saying "hello", they would tell her how hot she was. This again, was so against her own values of respect that she felt hurt, but also helpless. These comments were made almost daily, and when she became sulky or unfriendly as a result, people would tell her that it was only a joke. But the recurrence of these comments transformed the jokes into bullying. Lily felt "alone against a country, or a way of thinking that everyone shared" and realised that her power to change anything was very limited. However, she

found a way to resist, which left her self-esteem unharmed. By perceiving the local students' behaviour as being due to cultural difference, Lily was able to better understand the situation. Going abroad meant adapting to new ways of thinking, and Lily was glad we had discussed these issues during the introduction meetings. Even though our topics of discussion were not so "drastic", she associated it with what was happening to her, and it helped. Unable to make sense of the students' behaviour and comments, she recognized herself in one of the different stages of the DMIS and she felt relieved. She concluded that what she felt was normal and that her not understanding the situation could be linked to cultural difference. Our discussions had left her changed, more open-minded, and although they were not aimed at making her accept the unacceptable, they did nevertheless help her position herself positively in that difficult situation. Although these experiences could have significantly affected Lily's experience, she managed to keep focused on the positive aspects and enjoyed her stay.<sup>Li12</sup>

Her positive attitude was also visible in her perception of the English school system. School was inevitably an important part of her year and the amount of work she had to do was often problematic. Combining homework, revisions, her social life, and basketball was not always easy, but she coped as well as she could. Being dyslexic on top of it, she needed more time to do what she was asked but she did not complain much. On the contrary, she described school in positive terms. She went shopping and to a restaurant with her teachers shortly after her arrival and found that "sweet". Compared to Switzerland, she initially found German easy and maths quite difficult because the methods used were different. But she loved her economics class which focused on her favourite part of the subject, although she anticipated that it might be hard when she came back. In hindsight, she loved English – where they actually did psychology – and economics. She discovered new teaching methods and was "extremely grateful" for that. On the other hand, maths remained difficult and German "not her thing" – although she was with all the other Swiss students, which helped. In the end, Lily managed to take a critical look at her classes and enjoyed them for what they were. She even fully embraced some of them, happy to experience new approaches to learning.<sup>Li13</sup>

Overall, Lily tried to position herself actively towards culture in general. Having travelled before, she approached her experience abroad as a way to discover new things in order to learn more about herself. If

she found something that she liked in that new culture, “it could only be beneficial.” If, on the contrary, she discovered something she did not like, then it would be beneficial as well because she would have learnt something about herself, and could go back to her old life, which was very pleasant and comfortable in the first place. Again, her positive perception of the experience allowed her to enjoy her positive discoveries and gave her strength to face the more negative aspects.<sup>Li14</sup>

### *Linguistic Positioning*

Generally speaking, Lily felt comfortable speaking English and positioned herself as a legitimate user of the language, although she was also learning it at the same time. Soon after her arrival, Lily got into the habit of writing in English and had to make a conscious decision to switch to French in her diary, which showed her rapid immersion. While she did not have local friends at the very beginning, she was happy nevertheless to be able to speak English with her basketball team, her host sister, or people in the bus. But after a while, she met more people and was often surrounded by English friends, and thus spoke English regularly. Even when she was with her group of Swiss friends, local students would join them, for lunch, for example, and they would switch to English. Lily faced few difficulties regarding language. Her English teacher – who was actually Irish – had a very strong accent and spoke very fast. She therefore needed some time to get used to it. Other than that, at night, sometimes she would be so tired that she would “talk gibberish” or even answer in French sometimes. Her host parents would make fun of her seeing the difference between mornings and nights. But overall, Lily did not face major difficulties. At the same time, she thought that she was different from other Swiss students because she had been in a bilingual school before and although some accents were difficult for her to understand, she understood RP almost perfectly.<sup>Li15</sup>

Her perceived initial good level of English undoubtedly helped her take some risks, which she did not hesitate to do. In October already, having signed up at the law society, she took part in a debate about the death penalty. Lily was quite stressed, not so much because she had to talk or because she was scared of running out of arguments, but because she was afraid she wouldn’t be understood. At first, her pulse quickened whenever she spoke, and it became even more difficult to speak. But after a while she realized that people were very

friendly, and she enjoyed the exercise. There were six in her team but she and another girl talked the most, against two guys from the other team. She was quick to respond and made the others think, thus she “REALLY LOVED IT!”<sup>L116</sup>

Her proficiency in English cannot fully explain her ability to take so many risks with the language. Her personality, as Lily stated, also contributed to it. Lily apparently truly wanted to reach out to others, and she was persuaded that she would be understood. Consequently, she did not hesitate to position herself in “a teacher-student relationship” with some of the locals hoping that they would help her; she did not care about her “deficiency” because she was there to learn. In fact, she managed to position herself positively, in the sense that she knew at least two languages, possibly unlike her interlocutors and therefore they could not make fun of her. Although Lily did not directly refer to it, we had discussed this position together during the introduction meetings, and it may have comforted her in making it hers. Lily did confess nevertheless that it was hard sometimes, that people laughed at her or her accent, or that she felt “good for nothing” but she was determined and remained undeterred. She used different strategies to be understood, “using Google, explaining, miming”, “anything she could,” because what was more important for Lily was meeting people, talking, and laughing together. She managed “not to take it too seriously”, instead of being “ashamed or uncomfortable” like her Swiss friends were most of the time.<sup>L117</sup>

To conclude, Lily experienced the English language in much the same way as she did the rest of her experience, making it hers. Interestingly, after her forced return home, her posts became bilingual, with English used to refer to her SA experience and what she missed deeply. Her using English was obviously a way for Lily to remember her stay and make it last as long as she could.

### *Positioning Analysis: Close Reading of a Diary Entry*

The following diary entry is the first one Lily wrote after returning to Switzerland in March. She writes about her strong negative feelings, mixing French and English, and she looks back at her experience, remembering different elements and episodes she misses greatly.

1 **4 APR 19:59:50 Sad**

2 First of all, I'm not just sad. I'm mad, nostalgic, disappointed, overwhelmed,  
3 extremely angry, and yeah, on top of all that, I'm sad.

4 ***I am fucking so sad like what the fuck can I do about it? I think***  
5 *[Translator's note: bold text indicates passages originally written in*  
6 *English]* I just wanna see the therapist. I'm just sad and nostalgic. I can't  
7 take it anymore, I think about it all the time, literally every second, I can't  
8 grieve. One little thought about someone, about something, an idea, a song,  
9 a game, photos, clothes, new reflexes, habits, languages, expressions... every-  
10 thing reminds me of England. It's just horrible, I can't let go and I don't  
11 know what could help me. I just want to go there, go back, finish, continue  
12 what I started. I still had so much to live there. The best part of it all was still  
13 ahead of me, everyone had told me. I'd been looking forward to those things  
14 for more than 6 months, like the US trip, and I kept telling myself not to  
15 get too excited, 'cause I knew it was gonna be better than anything I could  
16 imagine, and now? Just like that, stop. Everything's canceled. Everything's  
17 over. ***It's over. Go the fuck home and your dream is over. I miss everything,***  
18 ***everyone, every message in the morning from Flynn to tell me he was here***  
19 ***to pick me up "here", every "OUTLET" from the boys of the team, every***  
20 ***smile as soon as I was coming in the studio because I was just happy. All***  
21 ***the weird discussions with Alex Evans who was talking so quickly on pur-***  
22 ***pose that 1) I was ashamed to ask him 3 times to repeat but 2) even his***  
23 ***friends who were English didn't understand him so... :) I miss all the train-***  
24 ***ings, all the eye contacts, all the fake fights w Fraser in the English class,***  
25 ***all the daily discussions with Miles during the English lessons, all the eco-***  
26 ***nomics lessons that I just loved. I was just so happy to have economics***  
27 ***and now I know what I wanna study later I am 100% sure. Even the dogs***  
28 ***that I used to hate, I mean if it was the only thing I had to have again to***  
29 ***go back there again I would not wait here even a second. How many times***  
30 ***did I say "I could pay to go back" but this hadn't and still doesn't have a***  
31 ***price and no one can ever imagine or understand what it was. Even if I try***  
32 ***to explain. Cannot. It's like going through grief, that's what my mom said.***  
33 *But the hardest part is that it's like there's a grieving period but I'm the only*  
34 *one who has to mourn because nobody lived this amazing experience, even*  
35 *the other people who were in the UK with me, it was different. It's like I'm the*  
36 *only one who knew this person who passed away. Like no one else even knew*  
37 *them, or could imagine knowing them.*

38 *People will think I'm crazy if they find out I still cry, 3 weeks after coming*  
39 *home from England. And that's why I don't wanna tell them that I'm even*

40 sadder about having had to go home, but yeah... it's hard, and I have no idea  
41 how long it'll keep being this hard.

42 Of course, Lily wouldn't be Lily if she didn't look for the silver lining, but  
43 right now, I'm struggling. It's taking up so much of my energy and the nega-  
44 tive stuff just keeps winning, and I'm losing it. I hope I don't sound crazy, but  
45 this is how I feel, from the tiny little life of a 16... wait no, 17 year old... almost  
46 forgot I had my birthday in quarantine.

#### 4 AVR 19:59:50 Triste

Tout d'abord je suis pas juste triste, je suis énervée, nostalgique, déçue, bouleversée, j'ai la haine, et pour finir je suis triste.

I am fucking so sad like what the fuck can I do about it? I think que je veux juste voir la psy. Je suis juste triste, nostalgique. J'en peux plus j'y pense tout le temps, à chaque instant. Une pensée pour quelqu'un, pour quelque chose, une idée, une musique, un jeu, des photos, des habits, des nouveaux réflexes, habitudes, langages, expressions. Tout me rappelle l'Angleterre. C'est juste horrible je n'arrive pas à faire le deuil et je sais pas ce qui pourrait m'aider. Je veux juste y aller, y retourner, finir, continuer ce que j'avais commencé. J'avais trop à vivre encore. Le meilleur de tout était encore à venir et tout le monde me l'avait dit. Ça faisait plus de 6 mois que je me réjouissais pour ces événements genre le USA trip et je me forçais à pas y penser trop parce que je savais que ça allait être mieux que tout ce que je pouvais imaginer et là? Stop on arrête. On arrête tout et tout est fini. It's over. Go the fuck home and your dream is over. I miss everything, everyone, every message in the morning from Flynn to tell me he was here to pick me up "here", every "OUTLET" from the boys of the team, every smile as soon as I was coming in the studio because I was just happy. All the weird discussions with Alex Evans who was talking so quickly on purpose that 1) I was ashamed to ask him 3 times to repeat but 2) even his friends who were English didn't understand him so... :) I miss all the trainings, all the eye contacts, all the fake fights w Fraser in the English class, all the daily discussions with Miles during the English lessons, all the economics lessons that I just loved. I was just so happy to have economics and now I know what I wanna study later I am 100% sure. Even the dogs that I used to hate, I mean if it was the only thing I had to have again to go back there again I would not wait here even a second. How many times did I say "I could pay to go back" but this hadn't and still doesn't have a price and no one can ever imagine or understand what it was. Even if I try to explain. Cannot. C'est comme si il y avait un deuil a dit ma mère. Mais le plus dur

*c'est que c'est comme si il y avait à faire un deuil mais il y a que moi qui ai à le faire ce deuil par ce que personne n'a vécu cette magnifique expérience, même ceux qui étaient en UK avec moi, c'était différent. Comme si que moi ne connaissait cette personne qui était décédée. Comme si personne d'autre ne la connaissait et pouvait imaginer la connaître. Ils vont me prendre pour une folle si ils apprennent que je pleure encore, 3 semaines après être rentrée d'Angleterre. Et c'est pour ça que j'ai pas envie de leur dire que je suis encore plus que triste d'avoir dû rentrer à la maison mais ouais... c'est dur et je sais pas pour combien de temps ça le sera encore.*

*Bien sûr, Lily ne serait pas Lily si elle ne voyait pas le positif mais là je galère. Ça me prend beaucoup d'énergie et le négatif de tout ça prend toujours le dessus et me fait craquer. J'espère que je n'ai pas l'air folle mais c'est ce que je ressens du haut de ma petite vie de 16... ah non 17 ans que j'ai fait en quarantaine j'allais oublier!*

#### LEVEL 1: Positioning within the STORY

Having written “sad” as the general emotion of the post, Lily corrects this feeling right away saying that “sad” is not enough, that what she feels is stronger and much more complex than that. Thus, she adds that she is *mad, nostalgic, disappointed, overwhelmed, extremely angry and on top of that she is sad* (1.2–3). In her next sentence, she repeats her extreme sadness and anger, but this time in English, using swear words (1.4). The repetition in English emphasises Lily's feelings, and it also fixes herself back in the environment she was forced to leave. In doing so, Lily clearly identifies with her lost UK experience and shows that she is still there, to some extent. Rapidly switching back to French, she keeps insisting on her negative feelings, talking about her sadness and nostalgia, and saying that she wants to see a psychologist to seek help, emphasising again the strength or severity of her emotional state. Then she explains that she thinks about England all the time in many ways – about *someone, something, an idea, a song, a game, photos, clothes, reflexes, habits, languages, expressions* (1.8–9); England is everywhere, she cannot escape it and *she does not know what could help her* (1.10–11). She cannot accept her forced return, and she just wants to *go there, go back, finish, continue what she had started* (1.11–12). Again, her repetition of words – or more precisely her use of different words to express one simple idea – shows her insistence and her despair in the situation. She feels like she missed something, like the best of it all was still to come (1.12–13) and she was

robbed of it. She was in the middle of her experience, and then *stop, everything's canceled, everything's over, it's over*. (1.16–17). This first part of her post clearly situates her in an unbearable present; she has to face a situation that she refuses to accept, and it is driving her crazy.

She then continues in English, and she repeats the last sentence expressed in French as a sort of transition and again, as a way to emphasise important elements. Interestingly, she again uses swear words (1.17) as soon as she uses English, as if it was more permissible to do so in another language because of the distance it creates, or also possibly as a way to conform to the language register that she used with her friends in England – whom she misses so much. Once Lily switches to English, she lets herself be lulled into her memories and lists many little things that she misses. First, she mentions anecdotes with different people: Flynn, the boys on the team, Alex, Fraser, and Miles. All of them are very positive and focused on privileged moments of interactions: a message to pick her up (1.19), passes from her teammates (1.19), *smiles* (1.20), *weird discussions* (1.21), *trainings* (1.23–24), *eye contacts* (1.24), *fake fights* (1.24), and *discussions during the English classes* (1.26–27). She then remembers *her economics classes* which she loved so much, and which convinced her to study economics after high school (1.27). She even remembers her host family's dogs, which she used to *hate* (1.28), but which she would be happy to put up with if only she could go back. There seems to be nothing that could make her hesitate to go back. She *would not wait a second* (1.29) before leaving Switzerland and she would be ready to *pay* (1.30), if only she could go back. This second part of her post is a deeper immersion into her memories which seemed only possible through English. In fact, English is the language of these memories, and it allows a comforting and closer identification with the experience. This part ends with the realisation that, again, her experience is over.

In the following part, Lily comes back to the present and her sufferings and she positions herself as all alone in her situation, isolated and misunderstood (1.33–34). No one else can imagine the extent of her pain and *her grieving* (1.33). Lily uses this term on several occasions (1.8+32+33), comparing the ending of her experience to the death of a loved one. Once again, it reflects the severity of the situation for her, and it implies that it will take time for her to recover. Interestingly, after two sentences in English describing her grieving, she again switches back to French to discuss her present situation and context.

She mentions her mother, who she apparently shared her pain with and who tried to comfort her (l.32). But then, she once again focuses on herself and herself only because she is *the only one who has to mourn* (l.34). Since she went through that experience alone – away from her family and friends – she is now alone in her attempt to accept its abrupt ending. *Nobody* (l.23) can understand, not even her Swiss friends who were with her in England, because for them it was *different* (l.35). Lily feels so distant from her peers that they *could not even imagine* (l.37) what she feels. They would think she was *crazy* if they knew that she was still crying three weeks after leaving England (l.38). So, she does not tell them, and she keeps her memories close, and to some extent, her pain as well, as a symbol of her refusal to move on, a sign that her experience is not totally over.

Lily concludes her post with an attempt to be more positive and a way to distance herself from what she has just shared. She even talks about herself using her first name (l.42) to materialize that distance, in contrast with the very personal – first-person – narration of the whole post. She says that she is trying to remain positive but that it's taking so much of her energy and that *the negative stuff just keeps winning* (l.43–44). She justifies her emotions, she does not want to sound *crazy* (l.44) but at the same time, it is what she feels *at 16... wait no, [she turned] 17 in quarantine* (l.45–46). Her concluding with her almost forgotten birthday is symbolic of her life which seems to have stopped with her experience. All that happened after her return – even the most important things such as a birthday – are blurred and do not seem to matter to Lily anymore.

#### *LEVEL 2: Positioning within the INTERACTIVE SITUATION*

In her post, Lily never addresses the reader – me – directly but my presence is implied on several occasions, mainly at the beginning and at the end. As was just discussed, Lily concludes her post hoping that she does not sound crazy, and she certainly speaks to me there. The fact that she tries to distance herself from the situation and consequently analyse it a bit more is also a way to conclude on a more positive note, an attempt to show that although the situation is really hard on her, she is still coping, and she is not completely helpless. Had she written this post in her personal diary, Lily may have limited herself to discussing her pain and her memories but since she knew I would be reading it, it may have been important to also mention that she would

find a way to address the challenges she was facing, by gaining distance, for instance. In fact, the last sentences mark a change in tone – becoming less personal and informal – and in perspective on the situation. The same can be said about the first sentences, where Lily gives a global description of her feelings. As she gives more details about her mood, an element of information the online platform asked her to provide, she seems to be addressing me more particularly.

The rest of the post, or the main paragraph, sounds more like a personal diary, as Lily freely writes down the thoughts that spontaneously come to her mind. This is not to say that the impact of the research context is non-existent but there seems to be less control as she lets her memories resurface one after the other. At the same time, showing her weaknesses can also be a way to bring her strengths to the fore. In fact, the intensity of her reaction is proportional to the quality, uniqueness of her experience. She says it herself, if she is so sad, it is because she made her experience so great for herself. And it was not an easy task; the other Swiss students did not succeed and consequently, did not react like her. In that sense, Lily's reference to her sadness could also be read as a way to praise her experience, whether this praise was addressed to me or to herself.

### *LEVEL 3: Positioning with regard to DOMINANT DISCOURSES*

Linking this extract to dominant discourses is not as obvious as others in the sense that Lily's post is not so much looking outwards as inwards. In other words, Lily does not focus on her place, role, or position within society but rather on her own well-being or mental health in a given, uncontrollable, and unexpected context. She certainly questions what it means to be sane, repeating several times that she is afraid to sound crazy and does not want to do so. Through her text, Lily justifies her strong emotions and claims her right to react profoundly. She had no control over her leaving England, and she wants to remain free to feel sadness, anger, and disappointment. She does not want to be robbed of everything. To some extent, Lily plays with the codes of psychology and therapy. She pictures herself as the sick patient who needs to be cured; she is grieving her lost experience – which is not actually a disease – and fighting hard not to fall into a kind of depression. Her pain is cherished – as a token of her extraordinary experience – as much as it is fought. Lily's text is thus structured according to two sets of references: the past and her happy memories versus the

present and her struggle. As discussed earlier, her past is associated with English, whereas French is preferred to describe her present. Her post tends to be caricatural and does not offer much nuance. Although Lily mentions the host family's dogs as a negative aspect of her stay and an attempt to look at the bright side of things in the present, she mainly adopts the logic of the lost ideal, a dream which is over and the extreme disappointment that follows. It would be unfair to pretend that Lily did not experience those strong feelings, because contrary to many other participants who expressed expected – almost polite – regrets regarding the end of their stay, Lily's reaction is definitely more global and complex. It is accompanied with multiple anecdotes of people that she misses, and it does not sound empty. However, in regard to all the difficulties Lily faced during her stay, this post can also sound idealized. Finally, reading this post through the lens of therapy and psychology also makes sense, since Lily certainly wrote it to feel better.



# Revisiting Key Concepts: What Do Students' Narratives Show?

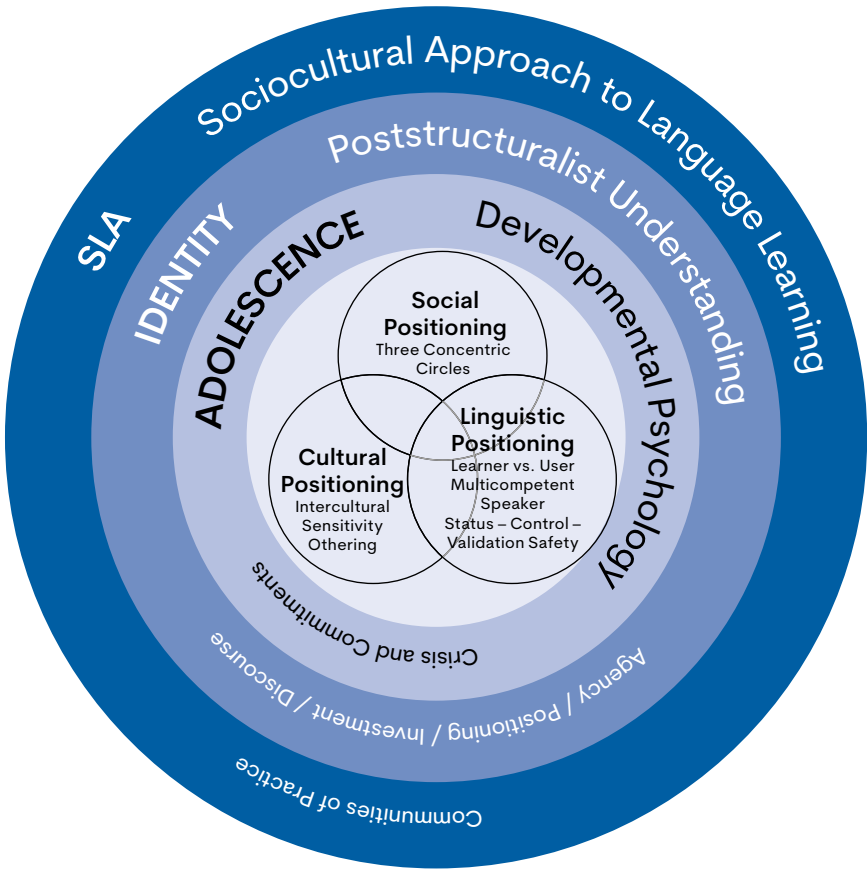
## 5

The general objective of the following chapter is to look at each of the key concepts identified earlier (see *Section 2.4* and *Figure 2.5*) and apply them more specifically to students' narratives. This change of perspective – switching the focus from participants to framework – will help explain and link the highly divergent experiences narrated earlier. One section will be dedicated to each of the three positionings – social, cultural, and linguistic – with their different key concepts. The more general views and ideas concerning adolescence, identity, and SLA will be discussed within these different chapters, when relevant, as they broadly define them all. The relevance of each concept will thus be underlined, both for the analysis of students' experiences and for supporting future SA students. This synthesis will conclude with a table integrating all important elements to accompany adolescents abroad, which stems from the theoretical framework.

### 5.1 Social Positioning

#### 5.1.1 The Three Concentric Circles Model

In his model of the three concentric circles, Coleman (2013, 2015) stated that while studying abroad, students first develop relationships with their co-nationals, then with other outsiders such as international



students and only later with locals, depending on their personal goals and motivation. This is, to some extent, reflected in the students' narratives. The major importance that all participants gave to the other Swiss students is the first element which directly follows the model. In fact, the feeling of belonging provided by their peers was essential for all of them; it worked as a base, a reference mark, a safe and stable place in the middle of a new, different, and unsettling environment (Ward et al. 2001; Brown and Richards 2012; Coleman 2013, 2015; Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy 2021). As they shared a common language, similar educational backgrounds, and cultural references, and as they were all separated from their families and friends, they rapidly formed a small but solid community. To some extent, this safe base seemed fundamental for the students to thrive in their year abroad. For instance, Chloé, the only participant who did not develop strong

links with her peers, was not able to either enjoy her experience fully or truly invest in other types of social networks. She may have lacked the essential reassuring connexions which allowed the others to explore their new environment in a safer way. Most participants highlighted how easily and rapidly their new friendships formed with their peers – they described it as “love at first sight” – which was something they had never experienced before (Brown 2009b; Allen 2010). Again, their common difficulties brought them together naturally – almost as a survival instinct – and they developed strong links instantly, to help manage the unknown and the differences. In fact, peers are essential and highly significant during adolescence (Erikson 1968; Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus. 2008; Greischel, Noack, and Neyer. 2018). They accompany adolescents' quest for identity and allow strong identification(s) as they test different roles and positions. As access to local peers was difficult, the connection with their Swiss peers was thus, again, essential.

With that common base, participants nevertheless differ greatly in the way they approached their experience from within that group. For some students, like Billie and Manon, their group of peers was rich enough, and unfortunately they were not highly motivated to develop other networks. For others, like Audrey, Melanie, and Rose, the group of peers was used to try and meet local students or others. These attempts were not always successful, but the group helped face failure or rejection and gave them strength to find new ways to enter different local communities. For Lea, Lily, and Albert, the Swiss students acted as a stable and safe base, which contributed to their self-confidence and well-being and allowed them to take greater risks on their own. These three participants managed to develop real relationships with some locals, each in their own way but all through personal effort and motivation (Goldoni 2013; Meier and Daniels 2013). These individual differences also reflect Coleman's model, since the move towards the outer circle is believed to be possible with time and personal motivation only. In any case, I would argue that the presence of co-nationals is highly beneficial and that it does not prevent, in itself, the development of other social networks (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017). As Coleman (2013) underlined, the popular belief which says that SA students should be on their own, away from their co-nationals if they want to optimize their stay abroad is wrong and can cause frustration and low self-esteem. The message should be more nuanced

with a warning about the risks of creating a L1 ghetto – and the importance of agency – but also a word about the benefits of co-nationals.

International students, as Coleman (2013, 2015) modeled, are second in line and quite easily reached. One participant, Lea, was lucky enough to be in a school with a large international student community. For Lea, this community acted as a second group of peers that offered many advantages. Just like her co-nationals, the other international students were experiencing the same need for social interactions and were thus organized in a friendly and welcoming community which she could enter right away. This broadened her possibilities of social interactions significantly, as well as her opportunities to improve her linguistic and intercultural skills (De Federico de la Rúa 2008; Van Mol and Michielsen 2015). The other participants attended smaller schools and could not benefit from the support of an organized international student community unfortunately. Some nevertheless met international students, like Billie who, towards the end of her stay, developed a relationship with a Latvian girl, who was away from her country and eager to meet people. Audrey, for her part, became quite close to a boy in one of her classes who spoke French and Spanish. If he was not technically an international student as he was there with his family, he had experienced living in different countries and certainly understood her situation better. When present, international students thus present an important resource SA students can easily invest in, and they should be encouraged to do so.

As mentioned above, meeting local students, on the other hand, proved to be challenging for all participants and few reached the outer circle (Coleman 2013, 2015). Upon arrival they were all eager to meet their local peers, but they also all noticed the locals' apparent coldness or indifference towards them (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Ward et al. 2004; Pellegrino Aveni 2005; Brown 2009a), and they consequently chose to invest more or less time in their attempts to meet the locals (Norton 2000, 2013). The relation between the social and the personal – structure and agency – needs to be understood as a dialogic relation where both are permanently influenced by the other. Self-positioning, as well as identity construction, is done through constant back and forth between assimilation and opposition to the other (Bakhtin 1981). More precisely, many students regularly felt as if they were being looked at funny and judged because of their difference, and some preferred to disengage from those uncomfortable contexts. Peers are essential

to the development of adolescents, who also tend to be rather clan-nish and intolerant to differences as a way to fight a sense of identity loss (Erikson 1968). If adolescents feel that they are being rejected by a group they wish to integrate, finding refuge within their own clique, and reinforcing it, becomes a sensible reaction. In the end, only a few managed to overcome these barriers and to develop real relationships.

It is interesting to look at the students' development of a local social network through the lens of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Following this sociocultural framework to learning, students' slow integration and limited participation in local groups can be framed positively. These asymmetric forms of social interactions can be understood as *legitimate peripheral participation*, a first essential step towards full participation. For example, Rose, Audrey, and Billie had regular but small interactions with some English students. Even though these interactions remained mostly superficial, they were probably a necessary first step. They would chat with someone in a class or during a break, and sometimes they would be invited to parties with the other Swiss students. Unfortunately, their stay was not long enough for these relationships to grow into something stronger, and they were never granted the position of full participants. Albert, on the other hand, built two individual relationships with a boy and a girl sitting next to him in class. With time (and personal motivation), he became close to them and after a few months, they were planning trips together, extending their friendship outside of school, a sign that he was reaching full participation. Lea and Lily are interesting examples of integration because both of them had a specificity or talent – drama for Lea and basketball for Lily – that allowed them to be integrated more rapidly (Whitworth 2006; Campbell 2011; Goldoni 2013; Meier and Daniels 2013). In their specific context, Lea and Lily rapidly gained legitimacy in a useful and recognized position and were consequently considered worthy by the locals, who enjoyed their experience and competence in a particular field. Their transition from legitimate peripheral participants to full participants was thus accelerated.

However, rapid integration is not without its own problems either. As stated earlier, most participants had to deal with the locals' disinterest towards them, which meant they found it difficult to even be considered as legitimate peripheral participants, and they integrated only very slowly. But two girls, Lily and Melanie, had to face

more aggressive behaviours, which could be linked to a need or desire for rapid integration, an integration process which does not respect Lave and Wenger's (1991) two-step model towards full participation. As the only girl in the boys' basketball team, Lily's experience of rapid integration was clearly not unproblematic. If the locals could not stop her integration because her particularity made her highly visible and extraordinary, they reacted very strongly against her personally. It is possible to interpret those reactions as a feeling of illegitimacy; Lily was legitimate as a basketball player, but some may have felt that she could not be so quickly legitimate as a popular girl in the school and decided to let her know. Melanie's experience may be read through the same lens, although she never managed to reach full participation, nor, to some extent, legitimate peripheral participation. Melanie was very active in her desire to be integrated and to meet local students and this may have been the cause of her never succeeding. As a matter of fact, she had to deal with open and unpleasant rejection from the locals, possibly because she tried to skip the first phase where her position could only have been peripheral: she wanted to be part of the locals' communities right away. As a result, she may have been perceived as an intruder or an adversary and she was not welcome.

### 5.1.2 Recognizing the Importance of Host and Home Families: A New Model Representing Social Integration Abroad

The participants in the present study are high school students and not university students as in most existing SA studies, and those used by Coleman (2013, 2015) to design his model. They were all only 16 as they embarked on this challenging experience, and it is a significant parameter in the understanding of their experiences and the analysis of their social positionings. In fact, the significance and influence of high school students' families on identity development – which is rarely brought to the fore in studies focusing on university students – is considerable (Taylor 2013; Greischel, Noack, and Neyer 2018). Families are so central to adolescents' lives that in most SA programmes designed for them, high school students stay with a host family, who can sometimes act as a substitute family (Shiri 2015) and play an important role in their social and cultural integration. More precisely, host families can offer privileged access to local communities since they are supposed to "take care" of the adolescent abroad.

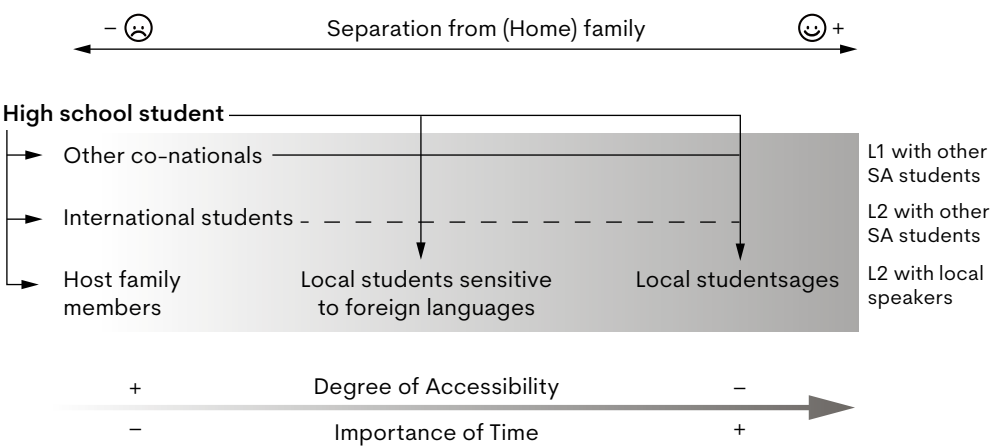
In the present study, some host families played a significant role in students' experiences, whereas others did not. The explanation for these differences often lay in the combination, or the dialogic relation, between students' investment in these relationships and the reception given by the family. Lily, Lea, Albert, Audrey, and Melanie were extremely happy with their host families, and they enjoyed many different moments with them. They felt grateful for the welcome they received by their host families and gave importance to their position within that new family. Concretely, they invested in these relationships and made the necessary efforts to help build the latter, even though their values were sometimes not in accordance with the family's. We can infer that family and family life were important for them as they were willing to endorse the position of a "daughter" or "son" in their host family. Manon, Chloé, and Billie, on the other hand, chose to remain more distant from their host families. Manon and Chloé had a very friendly family as well but something – possibly their introvert personality – kept them at a certain distance throughout their stay. The situation was slightly different for Billie, who rightly felt unwelcome from time to time, but who also rapidly decided that she did not need her host family except for food and shelter. As noted earlier, Billie was so invested in her group of peers that she left everything else out; she may have wanted to position herself as free or independent rather than in relation to a new family. Finally, Rose's situation was different as her host family was particularly unhelpful and hampered her experience. Although she tried to invest as much as time and energy possible to improve her situation, the living conditions supplied by her host family remained problematic, and they did impact her experience significantly. In this type of situation, age can become a barrier because adolescents are left under the supervision of a family, with its rules and values. Although students can resist such positioning and choose to refuse any position within the family, they are still legally minor and may still have to cope with such a situation in spite of everything. Thus, the importance of the host family is undeniable in the sense that it can affect the experience positively but also negatively (Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight 2004; Tanaka 2007). On the other hand, students' investment in the family is clearly crucial to the development of positive relationships or any type of relationships.

Home families also play an important part in students' experiences and partially echo – directly or indirectly – their positioning

within their host family through their home family's influence, habits, and values and their need, desire, hesitation, or refusal to be part of a family life. In any case, the significance and influence of high school students' families has, here, often proven to be considerable. This is not surprising since their stay in England was their first long experience outside their family circle, away from their parents' daily support and guidance. As many theorized, parents – along with peers – are an essential factor in adolescents' identity development (Taylor 2013; Greischel, Noack, and Neyer 2018). In fact, Greischel, Noack, and Neyer (2018) concluded that parents seem to influence adolescents' development while abroad even more than friends, possibly because they represent more reliable and stable relationships in a time of change. In the present study, the separation from their family was experienced both positively and negatively by the participants, with different consequences. For example, it was particularly difficult for Manon and Chloé, to the point that it sometimes prevented them from enjoying their experience. These individual experiences tend to show that a certain degree of independence is required to be able to enjoy the stay. For all participants, their Swiss families acted as a strong support in the background; they talked on the phone on a regular basis, whether it was every day, twice a week or twice a month and kept in touch via messages even more regularly. On the other hand, their parents' physical absence was also highly beneficial on different levels: Audrey and Billie were relieved to be away from sometimes conflictual situations, and Lea felt liberated from her parents' influence and able to thrive and discover other positionings for herself. Finally, all students gained in independence and maturity during their stay, as they all had to deal with difficult situations – or simply live – on their own (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, and McManus 2017; Greischel, Noack, and Neyer 2018). They all proudly noted and underlined that their stay abroad helped them grow up.

In order to integrate these different elements, I propose a new model which represents the development of social networks for high school students in relation to linguistic familiarity and accessibility (see *Figure 4.1* below). With the idea of the degree of accessibility, the general dynamic of formation developed by Coleman is kept. Groups that are easily accessible are depicted on the left, while those less accessible are situated on the right. The various arrows signify potential trajectories to connect with different groups, either through individual

student initiatives or with the support of co-nationals. The dotted line which starts from international students expresses the possibility of meeting locals with an international group. Nevertheless, this option was not observed in the present study, as international student communities were rare and when present, they tended to be self-sufficient. The line at the top represents the variability of the experience of separation from their families (between students' experiences but within one student's experience as well). When the separation is experienced positively, adolescents are more likely to reach the less accessible groups. On the other hand, when separation is difficult, adolescents tend to have less strength and motivation to reach the less accessible groups. One may rightfully wonder if the relation is not reversed, i.e., if the difficulty in reaching locals, to take only one example, does not also influence the experience of separation and make high school students more homesick. It seems appropriate to consider the existence of a dialogic relation between these elements.



**FIGURE 5.1** The Development of Social Networks for Adolescents Abroad: A New Model.

**5.2 Cultural Positioning**

**5.2.1 Intercultural Sensitivity**

The variety of cultural differences noticed and experienced differed from one participant to the next and was certainly correlated to how much

each invested in the different local communities. As Bennett (1986) theorized, the more students experience culture, the richer their understanding and interpretations of these experiences will be, i.e., the more they will develop intercultural sensitivity. Thus, for most of them, cultural differences were naturally mainly experienced at school and within their host families since participants spent most of their time in these two specific environments. First, the English school system was experienced both in very positive and very negative terms by the students. Lily loved the different didactic methods she encountered; so did Lea who also highly appreciated the fact that her school was extremely tolerant and open to diversity. Rose enjoyed her school's tradition of assemblies and rewards organized around different "houses" and a healthy competition. Audrey, on the other hand, hated the elitist and competitive atmosphere instilled by the many praises and prizes received during assemblies. As for Albert, he disliked the large amount of work for each class which generated stress, and the overly serious and studious atmosphere which prevented social contacts. Social contacts were also key to Billie's perception of the school system as she rated her classes according to the liberty she had to chat with her Swiss friends and only invested minimally in schoolwork. Chloé was very critical of her teachers and did not like being with younger kids in the school building. Although Manon and Melanie did experience stress regarding the workload and their results, they appreciated the lighter timetable which provided them with more free time, and the global interest shared by the teachers and the students in the subjects they chose. As can be seen from these examples, most of the students' comments about school were logically self-centred and made in comparison to what they had been used to in Switzerland (Patron 2007; Kinginger 2009). They appreciated those differences that made their life easier – such as shorter school days, easily accessible tutorials, and passionate students and teachers – and criticized those that were uncomfortable, either in terms of atmosphere or workload. These perspectives thus remain rather ethnocentric (Bennett 1986, 2012) in the sense that cultural differences were mainly perceived and understood using their own Swiss lens and extremely rarely as a system of its own, with its own logic.

In their host families, most participants were very critical of the food they were served, and had to adapt to pre-cooked meals, "plastic" meat, simple preparation, and unusual recipes, often served in oversized portions. Some also complained about the temperature in their

rooms, its furniture and decoration, or the general cleanliness of the house or bathrooms. On a broader societal level, some criticized the lack of public transport; Audrey was shocked to see so many people drunk in the street early in the evenings; Rose regretted the extreme English politeness which prevented efficient communication. Again, through their comments and observations – which were sometimes fuelled with stereotypes – all participants remained Swiss-centred and maintained a sense of their own cultural superiority. Their life in Switzerland was taken as their reference and remained – or sometimes became – a very valued one (Kinging and Whitworth 2005; Jackson 2012; Kinginger 2013b; Mitchell et al. 2021). Contacts with locals were either not rich enough or were too conflictual to allow a real deconstruction of stereotypes. Thus, participants noticed differences, criticized them more or less vehemently – with an inversely proportional degree of acceptance – but very rarely adopted them at their own initiative. They learned to tolerate, accept, or adapt to cultural differences but their stay was too short for a real understanding, which could have led to deeper transformation or integration.

Nevertheless, even though none of them seems to have been able to escape their Swiss point of view – which was to be expected given the limited time at their disposal – they all learnt to question culture and differences. Only by being confronted with the reality of cultural difference can students generate more complex intercultural experience and become more competent interculturally (Bennett 2012). The complexity of their interpretation of cultural events or behaviour is thus linked to their intercultural experience; as the latter was often small due to their young age, the breadth of their interpretation was therefore limited. Making them aware of cultural differences and having them think about and write about them was the chosen way to help them develop intercultural competence; its success is unfortunately hard to define. In any case, even though participants may not have been able to abandon a self-centred point of view, they nevertheless made efforts to understand, adapt, and accept different situations, which is an encouraging first step. As defined in the present study, *othering* is an essential step in the discovery of another culture and should not be perceived negatively (see Section 4.2.2.2 below). In addition, it could also be argued that within the support programme and students' interactions with the researcher, it was difficult to escape a self-centred position. More precisely, as we were working with the concept of culture, and I repeatedly

asked them about the differences they noticed – to learn about them and their positionings – they inevitably described things taking a perspective which put them into confrontation with the “other”.

### 5.2.2 Othering

This confrontation is key to the concept of *othering*. Working with the concept of culture presents a clear paradox: on the one hand, noticing differences between groups or cultures is essential for learning, both about others and ourselves, and on the other, it tends to objectify others and reinforce stereotypes (Dervin 2012; Doerr 2017). Both the benefits and risks of discussing culture can be found in students’ narratives. It helped them question their own cultural identity – *what does it mean to be Swiss?* – and it told me a lot about them. At the same time, it was sometimes used in a simplistic, over-generalizing, and even defensive way. Interestingly, keeping a Swiss perspective was sometimes used as a means of defence for some, a way to put distance between themselves and an uncomfortable situation (Erikson 1968; Doerr 2012, 2017). Manon, for example, explained the locals’ lack of interest in their classmates – i.e., for herself – using cultural difference. Audrey perceived the behaviour of the local girl – highly different from her own – through a cultural lens. Albert regretted the English school system which prevented him from meeting locals. Lily and Melanie, who both experienced a kind of bullying, justified the English students’ way of thinking and behaviour through cultural differences as well. If they were treated that way, it was not coming from them but from a kind of cultural misunderstanding. In doing so, they protected themselves and their self-worth as well as their own cultural values. Culture became their answer to everything they did not understand or appreciate. As Dervin (2009) had previously noted in his study, SA participants were not able to avoid the discourse of *same vs others* – maybe because no other was available – in order to apprehend their reality differently. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) noted that with time, the focus on global differences tends to wane and be replaced by more specific observations. In other words, stereotypes are slowly replaced by a more accurate understanding of people and behaviour. To some extent, it could be argued that the general lack of full participation within the local communities – hence with the local culture – prevented this transition from fully taking place.

### 5.3 Linguistic Positioning

#### 5.3.1 From Language Learner to Language User

Not all participants faced the same difficulties regarding language, but the use of English certainly made all their different positionings more complex and became a salient and conscious element in those processes. All students had to transition from being a learner of English to becoming a user, as English was suddenly all around them. This shift happened with relative ease and rapidity. First, most participants who had prior experience of short stays abroad or intensive language courses – Lily, Rose, Billie, and Audrey – reported fewer difficulties and felt more confident in their language skills; to some extent, they had already (partially) transitioned from learner to user and had gained in self-confidence. Albert, who had to take an exam for his visa also felt reassured about his skills. On the contrary, it was more difficult for Manon, Chloé, and Melanie, who believed their English to be deficient – or not as good as their peers' – which was logically correlated with a rather low level of confidence in their language use. For them, English was associated with the language classroom and their “mediocre” grades, and although becoming a user of English helped them improve their *linguistic self-concept* (Benson et al. 2012), the transition took more time and remained fragile. It is interesting to note that for those students, speaking English with the other Swiss students was more intimidating than with the locals; during interactions with “better” language learners, they could not overcome their position of (mediocre) language learners. In fact, returning to the English language classroom for their 3rd year brought back the fear of not being good enough for Manon specifically, and for Chloé to some extent. In any case, all students' transition from learner to user contributed to a gain in self-confidence regarding their linguistic skills specifically, but also, more generally, identity-wise. Moreover, having endorsed new positionings as English users certainly confirmed some of their commitments as multilingual (and intercultural) adolescents.

#### 5.3.2 Status – Control – Validation – Safety

The transition from language learner to language user is not only a question related to personal factors such as linguistic skills and confidence. The environment, and the way students are introduced and

received within that environment, is also key to their positionings. Some social environments proved to be generally safe for most participants. For example, after the stress of the early conversations, host families became a privileged setting where many participants felt comfortable expressing themselves. Manon, Melanie, Audrey, Chloé, Lea, Lily, and Albert all had no trouble in talking with their host families or at least less than in other social circles – and more particularly with the host parents as the children were not always eager to communicate. In that context, their linguistic situation was clear to everyone, and everyone was ready to make the necessary effort to understand each other (Tanaka 2007; Allen 2010; Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart 2010; Shiri 2015). Their *right to speak* was recognized and participants felt that they were equal and valid interlocutors. In the case of Lea, the group of international friends presented similar safe conditions; talking with people whose L1 was not English either put them on equal terms, and Lea felt legitimate and comfortable (Murphy-Lejeune 2002; Magnan and Back 2007). The other participants also felt more at ease talking to people who were generally sensitive to foreign languages. For example, Audrey and Billie enjoyed speaking with the students in their German classes. Audrey also had many discussions with a boy who spoke more than one language – French and Spanish – and Billie was happy to speak with a Latvian girl. Undeniably, those specific contexts and people offered safe conditions for the participants to position themselves as confident speakers of English and were positively experienced.

Other contexts were clearly experienced as less safe and less pleasant for the participants. Speaking in the classroom, with the presence of local students, proved to be a situation most participants avoided as much as possible. Rose and Lea were the only ones who felt safe in the classrooms and confident enough in their skills – in English but also in the different subjects studied – to express their opinions and ask questions. On the other hand, Billie, Albert, and Melanie were intimidated by popular or competent students and did not want to take the risk of saying something wrong or saying it the wrong way. Audrey, Manon, and Chloé felt that some students would laugh at them – or their accent – and remained mostly silent in those classes. The fear of failing to give a correct answer or not being understood, and thus revealing their weaknesses, prevented many participants from taking an active part in most of their classes. They preferred to address

the teacher after class if they had a question. These individual experiences raise the question of how many risks students were willing to take, balanced with potential benefits (Pellegrino Aveni 2005). When the risks (misunderstanding, negative judgements, mockery) outnumbered the benefits (get answers, give a good impression), the decision they took was to remain silent. Self-representation and making jokes also became an issue sometimes, as Rose and Manon narrated. In fact, because of language difficulties, they sometimes felt unable to show specific aspects of themselves – identities – and experienced frustration (Pellegrino Aveni 2005). Again, in some situations where the risks were high, such as with local communities they wanted to join and whose opinion mattered, it may have prevented them from taking part in discussions where it appeared preferable not to be noticed rather than convey a wrong, inadequate, or incomplete image of themselves. Finally, as the students struggled with their decision to participate or not, personal motivation also appeared to be a central and essential incentive to their linguistic investment. In fact, the higher the motivation, the more difficulties participants were able to overcome. For example, Lily and Melanie kept trying to socialize although they were confronted with bullying, and Albert reached out to others although he had always been very reserved before. But a low motivation may have hindered actions and investment even when the general context was favourable, as it was the case for Billie or Manon to some extent.

### 5.3.3 The Multicompetent Speaker

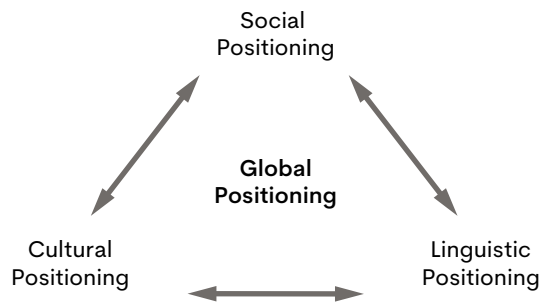
The discourse of the *native speaker* (Cook 1995, 1999; Davies 2013) as well as the discourse of immersion (Kubota 2016; Güvendir, Acar-Güvendir, and Dündar 2021) undeniably played a part in some of the students' insecurities. It may have led students to feel deficient in some situations, either because they did not feel good enough or that they were not progressing fast enough. More positive discourses and concepts do exist, however, and are available to students, such as the idea of the *multicompetent speaker*. In the present study, different students managed to position themselves positively within that discourse. Rose and Lea, for example, felt that the local students and teachers were impressed by their competences and often expressed their opinions or asked questions in class. This perception and its associated behaviour were certainly induced by a belief in their own legitimacy as speakers of English

as an additional language. Albert and Lily experienced something similar as they decided to turn their difference into an advantage and to perceive themselves as multilingual and not as a non-native speaker of English (Cook 1995, 1999). In doing so, they managed to thrive and successfully challenged their usual limits. Albert who, according to his own description, had always been very reserved before, managed to reach out to others using his difference as an asset. Lily, on the contrary, was a very sociable young woman, and she believed that as she was the one making more efforts in her interactions with locals, she deserved to be heard. Thus, if the power of the discourses of the NS and immersion are strong, language learning and language use abroad can be framed differently to allow positive positionings.

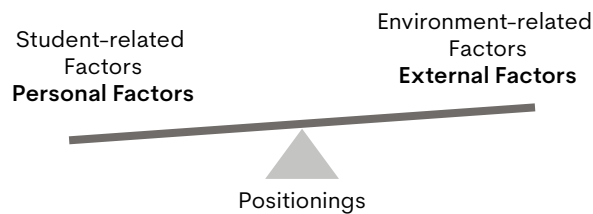
#### **5.4 Key Concepts Brought Together: A Framework to Design Targeted Practical Interventions for Future Bilingual Matura Students**

As a preamble, I wish to repeat two essential aspects which frame adolescents' positionings abroad. First, if the three different positionings were separated above for the purpose of the analysis, it is evidently not the case in real life where students position themselves globally in the interaction. Thus, all aspects – social, cultural, and linguistic – come together to influence the process of global positioning. If one type of positioning is modified, the others will most likely change as a result and impact the global positioning, as is illustrated in *Figure 5.2* below. Second, each positioning is by definition dependent on personal and external factors, with different and changing degrees of importance and influence over one another. The balance between personal and external factors is therefore never fixed and is adapted in each specific context (see *Figure 5.3*). I would argue that the difficulties and challenges faced by students during their experience abroad come from the multitude of new positionings and their changing and unexpected nature. Away from their familiar references, no positioning is stable and secure; all of them need to be renegotiated permanently. Dealing or coping with these unsettling situations is key to positive positionings. Thus, the rapid and quasi-systematic creation of a community of peers among participants derives from this uncomfortable situation – it is only with their co-nationals that students experience a sense of stability and security at first. That is, within that community, students

do not experience the constant and disconcerting re-evaluation of their social, cultural, and linguistic positionings; they can rely on what they have constructed and known so far in their life. That is why they are brought forward as essential in students' narratives. And in fact, once participants leave their reassuring circle of peers, new social, cultural, and linguistic positionings must be actively and repeatedly appropriated or rejected, leading to challenging situations not everyone was ready to face. In this study, each participant chose the amount of novelty and discomfort they were willing to face, consciously balancing the risks and benefits of any challenging positioning, which explains the great variety of personal experiences and positionings in their narratives.



**FIGURE 5.2** The Interdependence of Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Positionings.



**FIGURE 5.3** The Combined Impact of Personal and External Factors on Positioning.

To offer an overview of all the significant, identity-related aspects of the experiences of adolescents abroad, the personal and external factors of all three different positionings were compiled in a table (see *Table 5.1* below). All factors – and their correlation – derive directly or indirectly from the key concepts and approaches which delineate

the study. The general sociocultural approach to learning is present in the whole table, through the constant dialogism between personal and external factors and the importance of communities of practice in all three positionings. The poststructuralist understanding of identity also permeates all factors since they define the key concept of positioning. Moreover, the importance of personal agency, possible (dis) investment in different contextualised interactions, and the power of discourses are also key to the understanding of the different factors and their influence. The specificities of identity construction during adolescence are not forgotten either and should define all personal factors; they could also be of importance in some external factors. As for the key concepts used to describe and analyse the development of social, cultural, and linguistic competence or positionings, they are referred to directly in the description of the factors. All these aspects have emerged as prominent and influential on adolescent SA students' global positioning and need to be understood, again, as contextually situated and interdependent.

**TABLE 5.1** Personal and External Factors Influencing the Three Positionings.

		<i>Positionings</i>		
		<b>SOCIAL</b>	<b>CULTURAL</b>	<b>LINGUISTIC</b>
Factors	<b>PERSONAL</b> <i>Skills and objectives</i> <i>Agency</i> <i>Adolescence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Need to integrate</li><li>• Will to integrate</li><li>• Social objectives</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural awareness</li><li>• Cultural openness</li><li>• Cultural objectives</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Linguistic skills</li><li>• Self-confidence in linguistic skills</li><li>• Linguistic objectives</li></ul>
	<b>EXTERNAL</b> <i>Acceptance and safety</i> <i>Communities of practice</i> <i>Discourses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acceptance in community</li><li>• Safety of community</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural openness</li><li>• Cultural safety</li><li>• Cultural difference</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acceptance of English as an additional language</li><li>• Safety when using English as an additional language</li></ul>

The aim of *Table 5.1* is to present, in a rather short and simple way, the complexities of the challenges that high school students face abroad. As such, it could be useful for students, teachers, school leaders, and administrators involved in a SA programme. Any programme which seeks to accompany and support high school students abroad could use it with their specific aims in mind. The programme organizers – whether teachers or school leaders – could use it as a checklist to

make sure that the modules or more generally the support they offer deal with all or most of these key aspects. It could also help school administrators understand the challenges faced by adolescents abroad and guide their decisions when it comes to implementing different immersion programmes.

On the other hand, it could hardly be shared with students as it is, as they would probably not understand it or not see its relevance. But a simplified version could also be made and shared with them: *Table 5.2* is an example of simplification where the concepts are transformed into questions for adolescents.

**TABLE 5.2** Key Questions for Adolescents linked to the Three Positionings.

	<b>QUESTIONS CHECKLIST</b> Think about these questions before leaving, while you are abroad, and when you come back
<b>My social experience abroad</b>	Do I want to meet local students? Do I need to meet local students? (Do I have enough friends otherwise?) What are my social objectives? What can I do to ensure they are reached? Am I accepted within the host community? How long will it take for me to be accepted in the host community? Do I feel safe and respected within the host community?
<b>My cultural experience abroad</b>	What do I know about the culture of the host country? Am I curious about the culture of the host country? What are my cultural objectives? What can I do to ensure they are reached? Are the hosts curious about my own culture? Do the hosts respect my culture? Is there a significant cultural difference between my culture and the hosts'?
<b>My linguistic experience abroad</b>	What can I do/say using the hosts' language? Do I feel self-confident in my linguistic skills? Why/Why not? What are my linguistic objectives? What can I do to ensure they are reached? How long will it take me to be comfortable with the different speech genres I need? Do the hosts listen to me when I speak their language? Are the hosts judging/making fun of my linguistic skills?

This is only an example; it would need to be tested and completed with specific questions which integrate adolescents' contexts and the particularities of each SA programme. It is not conceived as being self-sufficient either, and a more global accompaniment would remain necessary. But it can be envisaged as a valid and important base on which to build targeted interventions.



# **Moving Forward:**

## **6 Now What?**

High school students' experiences abroad were explored holistically. Three fundamental dimensions, namely the social, cultural, and linguistic components, were analysed seeking to find out how adolescents position themselves socially, culturally, and linguistically throughout the SA experience. The findings are rich and varied and have highlighted important aspects that influence adolescents' stays: (a) their family and their autonomy towards them, (b) the host family and its roles and functions, (c) adolescents' need to identify with a group of peers and the positive and negative consequences on the development of different social networks, (d) their cultural and intercultural awareness, (e) students' linguistic history and self-confidence, and finally (f) their SA objectives and expectations. The combination of personal and external factors – for each participant and in many different contexts and situations – has led to a high diversity of experiences, actions, and reactions. Adolescents can take many different paths to enjoy and take advantage of such a challenging experience. It should be noted that the distinctive and remarkable aspects of adolescents' experiences lie predominantly in their newfound independence and self-discovery, and only anecdotally in the discovery of the other, including their language and their culture. I have repeatedly drawn connections between the self and the other – following Bakhtin (1981) – asserting that the other plays a constitutive role in shaping the self, in the sense that one is always defined through

association with, or dissociation from, the other. Consequently, it is undeniable that self-discovery is to be treasured as much as the maturity gained through SA, particularly for adolescents. To some extent, the value of such an experience cannot be denied, however, it appears highly relevant to define this value more specifically. With such information, school leaders and administrators could possibly verify if the value of adolescents' experiences matches with the specific objectives of their SA programme, or define realistic objectives accordingly.

Two final sections conclude the study. First, practical recommendations to help support future bilingual Matura students are outlined. Second, relevant topics related to the bilingual Matura are proposed for further investigation, taking a more critical stance.

## **6.1 Practical Suggestions for Future Bilingual Matura Students**

Based on my theoretical framework and the analysis of students' narratives, I have suggested above a table summarizing all key aspects that should be integrated within a support programme for high school students going abroad (see *Table 4.19*). The aim of the present chapter is to give suggestions for practical interventions based on the experience of accompanying high school students gained in the present study. Broadly speaking, all nine students enjoyed their participation in the study with its different interventions and benefited from it. This general observation has led me to conclude, as many scholars before me (DeKeyser 2007; Paige et al. 2009; Baker-Smemoe et al. 2014; Beaven and Borghetti 2015), that every effort should be made to provide targeted support for students going abroad. Sending high school students abroad is undeniably a great opportunity for them and the value of the existing programme is indisputable. Through such an experience, students can learn a myriad of different things, ranging from linguistic and cultural to personal aspects. However, sending students abroad should not be done thinking that they will learn by themselves or that others will support their learning. Whether the canton of Vaud has thought that they would not have the structure or the staff to operate the French-English bilingual Matura on its soil and within its high school with CLIL classes and opted for the immersive stay to outsource its teaching (see Lys and Gieruc 2005 on the French-German bilingual Matura), or has deliberately opted for a programme with a year abroad,

does not change the fact that these students are part of the state system – even when in England – and should be offered proper support on many different levels. This is not to say that presently high school students going abroad are neglected or badly treated. However, nothing focusing on their social, cultural, and linguistic development is available for them. A support programme targeting key elements and that is accessible to all could certainly enhance the quality of students' experiences, and consequently, the quality of the bilingual Matura as well. On the official website,<sup>3</sup> the presentation video praises the bilingual Matura for its “total immersion” which will bring “an excellent mastery of the English language, both written and oral”. It is also said to offer a unique life experience in an English-speaking culture from which students will gain autonomy, maturity, and independence. Since, as research has repeatedly showed, few of these benefits have proven to be automatic, it is legitimate to question what is being done to accompany students in their development and suggest ways to fill the gaps.

So concretely, what could be done? I provide here a list of practical ideas based on some of the elements I implemented, participants' evaluation of their usefulness and applicability, and on my understanding of their positive or contrasted results. More precisely, the following conclusions are drawn from explicit remarks made by the participants as well as more implicit comments and behaviour; what students said about the benefits and drawbacks of some targeted interventions was analysed in terms of its coherence with what they did, said, and experienced more generally. They result from a combination of different types of data: diaries, interviews, and post-programme questionnaires.

### 6.1.1 Meetings with the Students Before their Departure

Meeting students before their departure seems to be essential both on a cognitive and affective level. If the meetings must deal with administrative and organizational aspects of students' stay to some extent, they should not be limited to these aspects. They should be designed as an opportunity for students to express their concerns, ask questions, and get different answers from several sources. Consequently, parts of it at least should be planned as workshops, in small groups, and not as

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vd.ch/themes/formation/formations-gymnasiales/ecole-de-maturite/certificat-de-maturite-avec-mention-bilingue-francais-anglais> (December 2022)

a plenary conference. Ideally, students should also be introduced to a person of reference, someone who will be able to follow them throughout the SA experience. Thanks to the introduction meetings organized for this study, many participants became aware of issues they had not thought about before and felt reassured afterwards. Globally, students appreciated our discussions focused on social, cultural, and linguistic positionings and left with tools and answers that they did not forget. One key element, the presence of students who had just come back from a similar experience in England, was unanimously appreciated. Meeting returning students before the experience allows future SA students to adapt some of their expectations to the reality of a lived experience and get answers to precise (practical) questions. Returning students can also provide a very rich input to the different discussions about social, cultural, and linguistic positionings and give credit to what is being said. The content of the workshops/discussions may vary, as covering all the factors listed in *Table 4.19* above may not be realistic. Nevertheless, it seems relevant to address topics related to the three positionings to reach as many students – and their different sensitivities – as possible. Raising the importance of agency and having them fix clear objectives for themselves should also be a priority, to encourage them to take initiatives and become actors. Thus, the format and content of pre-departure meetings can be adapted to institutional constraints, but they should be offered to all students. As explained, it is a unique opportunity to equip students with different knowledge, tools, and strategies to face the different challenges of study abroad. Moreover, institutionalized meetings with former SA students and other students who are ready to embark on a similar experience are highly reassuring for students, as it allows them to share their concerns with people who really understand them.

### 6.1.2 An App While Abroad

A digital platform is a practical tool to accompany students' learning and development abroad. Ideally, a specific application designed for bilingual Matura students could be developed; it would be easily accessible on students' smartphones, developed according to the specificities of the programme and its objectives, and targeted for high school students. Existing platforms could possibly also be adapted for a similar use. Inspired by some elements used in the present study and the

app Eyckmans (2021) developed and tested in her study, it should contain at least two main interfaces: a private diary and a shared working space. The first would be private and look like a diary with the ability to add pictures or other personal documents. Writing during and about their SA experience presents many benefits and should be encouraged. In fact, the benefits of diary-writing are of different types and can be divided into two main categories: short-term and long-term benefits. First, writing about a problematic situation tends to help students feel better. It often allows them to step back from a particular situation and helps them get rid of their worries; it also helps them reflect and find solutions to potential problems or simply improve their future experiences. Thus, writing has short-term benefits and can help students reposition themselves in a more positive way, whether socially, culturally, or linguistically, while abroad (Elola and Oskoz 2008; Stewart 2010; Lee 2012; Belnap et al. 2018, Eyckmans 2021). Students can see and take advantage of these benefits while or just after writing, which is extremely important because it generates a stronger motivation for them to write. These benefits may also last and help SA students develop long-term strategies to improve their well-being and their social, cultural, or linguistic skills. Using their diary to keep memories is another long-term benefit which is sometimes difficult to envisage in advance. Although this aspect may initially be a reason to start a diary, it may sometimes not be strong enough to motivate students to keep writing over the long term. It is the reason why diary-writing could be coupled with a photo-diary, which takes less time and effort to keep up to date. Thus, encouraging SA students to write about their experience should be part of any support programme as it is beneficial in many ways and quite easy to implement.

The digital platform should also propose a second interface to connect students with the institution, with some small tasks to perform and report on from time to time. Depending on the human resources available, the presence and availability of a programme coordinator within this interface could be of varying degrees. With only limited human presence, it could be interesting to think about how to integrate nudges into the app to incite students' answers without having to force them. On the other hand, if a programme coordinator is regularly present and active on the platform, it is important that students meet this person beforehand, during pre-departure meetings, for example, and share some discussions with them to begin to establish a relationship

of trust. More precisely, it is important that the students know who they are writing to and feel that this person is benevolent and supportive, as well as knowledgeable. Once these conditions are met, the programme coordinator can send occasional questions related to social, cultural, and linguistic issues, and it is very likely that students will answer regularly. The objective is to have students think about specific elements and contemplate them in a more guided way and with a more informed look. Finally, it seems important to give students the opportunity to share personal issues with the institution while abroad. The programme coordinator could be the ideal interlocutor, and this could be done directly through this second interface or by sharing entries from their diaries. The combination of these personal and institutional interfaces could, in my view, meet two essential objectives: offer proper support to students to cater for potential personal problems and help them improve their social, cultural, and linguistic positionings.

### 6.1.3 Welcome Back Meetings

After their stay, it could be interesting to meet with the students again. In fact, it can be a great opportunity to discuss issues of identity, language, and culture again to fix students' learning and build on it (Peckenpaugh 2018). Thanks to their recent experiences abroad, students are more receptive and more capable of understanding key concepts linked to the development of intercultural sensitivity, for example, or the importance of language on their identities. Making these issues explicit and having students reflect on them can be key to develop their learning and capitalize on their rich experiences. If dedicating time for returning students only is not realistic, it could certainly be possible to integrate this element into the workshops for the students who are leaving. As explained earlier, the presence of returning students is highly beneficial for students who are about to leave; in addition, returning students could benefit from it at the same time. I realize that all the possible interventions listed above may not be easily or rapidly implemented within the high school(s). Nevertheless, any small additional intervention which would provide students with more support is welcome. In my view, all these different elements could be beneficial both for students' learning and development, and for the institution, as it would allow a closer supervision of students while abroad and enhance the quality of the programme.

## 6.2 A Critical Look at the French-English Bilingual Matura Programme

As I have repeatedly mentioned and as students' narratives have highlighted, it takes a lot of courage to embark on such a demanding adventure, and only a very limited number of students dare to take the plunge (less than 3% of all high school students). And once abroad, not all students successfully face the challenges ahead of them. Knowing about the competences required of students to take part in the French-English bilingual Matura programme and those required once they are abroad, one may rightfully wonder to what extent this type of bilingual programme is ideal for adolescents in a public institution.

To some extent, only the best students can take part in the French-English bilingual Matura programme. More precisely, in addition to a good dose of courage and maturity, they need a lot of competences. A minimum of 49.5 points in their first-year bulletin is required, which corresponds to an average of 4.5/6 in all subjects taught. Since Brexit was enacted, all students have needed a visa which is granted only with a guarantee of their linguistic skills. A minimum of 5.5/9 at the IELTS exam is now required in all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), which corresponds to a B2 level – the level set as the target for the end of high school in Switzerland. In addition to these elements linked to students' qualifications, the complexity of the administrative procedures means that only the more literate and educated families may feel able to begin such a project. The economic aspect may be yet another obstacle for some families, although some financial aid is available. Thus, if the programme is destined only for an elite, is it worth the investment from the canton? In other words, is it right for a public institution to invest so much money for only a handful of (already privileged) students? The cost for the canton is hard to estimate and no data are available, but even though students must pay for their stay (travel, accommodation, etc.), the institution still pays for the different partnerships with schools and the local organization which recruits host families, as well as for all the new classes created in Renens for 3rd year BM students, among other related costs. In light of these reflections, the choice of almost all other Swiss cantons to offer bilingual programmes through Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Elmiger, Siegenthaler, and Tunger 2022) is probably more equitable and closer to a programme which aims for equal opportunities.

### 6.2.1 A Need for Further Studies

The accessibility of the French-English bilingual Matura programme has not been studied *per se* in the present study and it would need further investigation. It would be extremely interesting to delve deeper into the reasons that bring students to join the programme and their sociocultural profiles. It could also be enlightening to question the institution at different levels (cantonal department of teaching and professional training, high school management, and teachers) to learn about their positions on this sensitive topic. More broadly, further studies should investigate the different paths taken by BM students after high school. This would shed light on the possible impact of the bilingual Matura on adolescents' personal and professional choices and opportunities. Further, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences, it would be extremely relevant to focus on the hosts, i.e., local students and host families. Observing social interactions on site has very rarely been done in SA research, indubitably for practical reasons. Nevertheless, it would be essential to focus more precisely on SA students' right to speak and to be heard. Determining the point of balance between self- and social censorship would help target students' support to increase its significance and its influence, in order to instil change. Suggestions for further studies on adolescents abroad are endless, as research in the field is only nascent. I have thus only mentioned a few, which take a critical perspective, because in my view, these are the next steps to be taken. The aim of the present study was to explore high school students' experiences abroad – nine adolescents were at its centre, they trusted my project, and confided in me in different ways. My role was to pay tribute to their rich, personal, and various experiences, which happened within an institutionalised frame for which they were not responsible. But now, I wish to put all high school students in the canton of Vaud at the centre, which makes me question that same institutionalised frame. And these questions of equity have become even more essential since the changes brought by Brexit. Should the aim of a bilingual Matura programme in a public institution be about the linguistic improvement of most students and not about the consolidation of the already excellent competences of a privileged few?

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