Reimagining the Familiar:
Managing Student Expectations of ‘Familiar’ Identities and Languages

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Session Outline

• Definition of Terms
• Pre-Departure Mindsets
• Case Study: Ireland Context
• Case Study: Spanish Language Heritage Learners
• Implications for Practice
Key terms

• **Erikson** - *Ethnicity* is the “*classification of people and group relationships*” (2002: 4)

• **Anderson/Gellner** - *Nationalism* as an imagined community is primarily a political principle
  - It is essentially a sentiment, a movement - something intangible

• **Hobsbawm** - *Traditions* are, at some point, established or invented
  - Invented Traditions can include those most recently invented, and easily traceable, to those more long standing events

• The study abroad experience can both challenge and conflate these issues for the heritage seeking student.
Pre-Departure Mindsets: Obstacles to Learning
Romanticization of Host Country

- Incomplete knowledge allows room for embellishment and misconceptions
- Unbalanced portrayal of ancestral home by relatives
- Host country viewed through the lens of tourism marketing and media representations
Overestimated Familiarity

• Shared cultural norms with the “west”
• Specific shared cultural norms regarding food, traditions, language, etc.
• Poor understanding of created identities and traditions
• No urge to prepare for time abroad
Knowledge is Static or Regionalized

- Lack of knowledge or oversimplification of political or ethnic history
- Lack of respect for regional differences
- Static knowledge of the country, from parents or grandparents
Hyphenated Identities

- Alternate identities very common in the US and emphasized over an American identity
- Source of pride for heritage students
- Point of differentiation from their peers
- Parental support or challenge for heritage seeking
- Lack of a theoretical framework for identity formation
Irish American Identities and Study Abroad in Northern Ireland
Complexity of Conflicting Messages

- **The Gathering**
  - ‘come home’ narrative - direct appeal to the American audience
    - [http://youtu.be/cW3StGvNYzI](http://youtu.be/cW3StGvNYzI)
  - The ‘begorrah’ image
  - Most pre-departure student research would have uncovered this
  - Arrivals ‘played up’ to it

- **Post-Recession**
  - Contemporary, European culture
  - Post-national, technologically and industrially driven country
  - Still ‘connected’ to USA
    - [http://youtu.be/9wmIZE1nSo](http://youtu.be/9wmIZE1nSo)
Profiles

- **Student ‘A’**
  - Deeply rooted Irish American background
  - Pre-existing family connections to Irish republicanism (primarily Sinn Féin)
  - Romantic, biased view of The Troubles
  - Struggled with meeting Orange Order (comparative language used by OO to equate IRA with Al Qaida) and learning of local conflicts within Sinn Féin

- **Student ‘B’**
  - Deeply rooted Irish American background
  - Strong family connections to midlands region of Ireland
  - Struggled with being ‘the Yank’ in the family
  - Concerned with returning to USA with new perspective on the northern conflict, concepts of ‘victim’, and Irish republicanism
Profiles cont.

• Student ‘C’
  • Strong self identification with Ireland, but not from vibrant Irish American background
  • Radical socialist and liberal political views
  • Firm supporter of Sinn Féin upon arrival
  • Immersed themselves in many Sinn Féin linked events
  • Dismayed by behaviour at ‘Rebel Night’

• Student ‘D’
  • Aware of Irish American heritage before arrival & investigated family origins pre-departure
  • Upon arrival realised significance and difference between Scots Irish & Gaelic Irish

• Student ‘E’
  • No stated Irish American ancestry
  • Was told to ‘support his own kind’ during conversations with family back home
Cultural Events - perceptions, impact, discussions

• Saint Patrick’s Day - Belfast/Dublin
  • Pre-event discussion & Post-event debrief
  • Tourism (The Gathering) in Dublin, tourism (local conflict) in Belfast
  • “It’s much bigger back home”

• Music
  • Concerts and bands in America versus sessions and groups in Ireland
  • Temple Bar tourism
Latin@ Heritage-Language Learners Abroad: Linguistic Self-Esteem and Identity Within a Cross-Cultural Context

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Point of Departure

I would love to travel the world, go to Spain, see all of Latin America... but I speak – you know – ghetto Spanish.

– Former advisee at City College, CUNY
Summer Program in La Rioja, Spain, July 2010

7 out of 14 were Latin@s
Winter Program in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Jan 2011

15 out of 32 were Latin@s
Motivation

- Social issues affecting linguistic self-esteem and identity within Spanish-speaking communities
- Latin@ heritage-language (HL) learners within the margins of home and U.S. cultures
- Self-prescribed “poor command” of heritage language
- Underrepresentation of Latin@s in study-abroad enrollments
- Need to document HL learners’ linguistic self-esteem and identity during pre-departure and reentry
Questions

- Does studying in a Spanish-speaking country help or hinder the linguistic self-esteem of Latin@ heritage-language learners?

- Does such an experience change or reinforce a Latin@ heritage-language learner’s sense of identity through language? Do they identify themselves as Latino, Latin American, or even Spanish because of cultural and language hybridity?

- Does academic performance improve with exposure to language instruction in a Spanish-speaking country? Can the measurement of academic performance correlate to the nature of the learner’s linguistic self-esteem?
Language Ideology & Self-Esteem

- Every utterance as “act of identity”
- Language ideologies and “verbal hygiene”
- A global pan-Hispanic community?
- Who are HL learners?
- When HL meets L2
- Defamiliarization of an intimate language
- Linguistic self-esteem correlated to language proficiency?
Identities of HL Learners

- Standardization and stigmatization
- Hyphenated varieties (Chicano Spanish, Spanglish) flourishing outside la RAE and national language policy
- Language as artifact and performance
- Lack of motivation and low linguistic self-esteem in academic contexts
- How can study-abroad programs address these issues and foster a validating learning environment?
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: PRE-DEPARTURE
Discuss identity and hyphenated identities
Educate students about regional differences and historical background.
Help students identify gaps in knowledge and understanding of the host context.
Highlight differences and de-romanticize the host culture
Connect participants with students from the host country before departing.
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: ON-SITE
On-site

- Allow for students to connect with in-country family
- Allow space for guided reflection and discussion: shifting identities, emotional reactions, cultural differences.
- Draw connections between historical pre-departure content and student experience.
- Create cognitive dissonance by bringing cultural differences to their attention and create meaningful and varied cultural experiences.
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: RE-ENTRY
Re-entry

- Opportunity to discuss increasingly changing identity upon re-entry (reverse culture shock)
  - How has their identity shifted?
  - What have you learned?
  - How do you feel about the US now that you have come back?
- Pre-Departure and Re-entry questionnaire