Universitat de Lleida

Studying the impact of academic mobility on intercultural competence: a mixed-methods perspective

Josep M. Cots[1] [*], Marta Aguilar[2], Sònia Mas[1], Àngels Llanes[1]

[1] Department of English and Linguistics, Universitat de Lleida, Lleida, Catalonia (Spain); [2] Department of Engineering Design, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, Catalonia (Spain)

*Corresponding author: Josep M. Cots. Email: jmcots@dal.udl.cat

This paper is intended as a contribution to the study of the impact of academic mobility on the development of students' intercultural competence by focusing on both the results of a quantitative assessment administered to 110 studentsand a student's discursive construction of this impact during her study abroad. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach which combines (i) a quantitative data collection methodology involving an intercultural competence questionnaire administered to a group of students of two universities in Catalonia (Spain) before and after their academic stay abroad in a European country, and (b) a qualitative analysis of how a study-abroad student discursively constructs her experience by resorting to specific elements of her new environment and adopting particular stances towards them. The analysis of the data explores the potential complementarity of the two perspectives in order to better understand the impact of academic mobility on the development of the students' intercultural competence.

Introduction

The analysis of the impact of academic mobility on the development of students' intercultural competence has often been based on methodological approaches focusing on the 'product' or outcome of the study abroad (SA) experience by employing surveys or tests (e.g. Llanes and Muñoz 2013), interviews (e.g. Allen and Herron 2003), and, to a lesser extent, role-plays (e.g. Lafford 1995) or diaries and blogs (e.g. Hassall 2006). On the other hand, there has also been a line of research focusing on the 'process', through the adoption of an ethnographic perspective and paying attention to the day-to-day experience of the students as seen by themselves or by others (e.g. Jackson 2006)

This paper reports on the results of a mixed-methods study that aims to overcome this dichotomy by combining (i) a product-oriented quantitative analysis involving an intercultural competence questionnaire administered to a group of students of two universities in Catalonia (Spain) before and after their academic stay abroad in a

European country, and (b) a process-oriented qualitative analysis of how an SA student discursively constructs her experience during her study abroad by resorting to specific elements of her new environment and adopting particular stances towards them. The analysis of the data explores the potential complementarity of the two perspectives in order to better understand the impact of academic mobility on the development of the students' intercultural competence.

This paper is divided into three main sections. In the next section we review the literature on the study of intercultural competence, its connections with SA, and different proposals that have been made for its assessment. The section that follows introduces the mixed-methods approach adopted for the analysis as well as the data on which it is based. The analysis of the data is presented in section 4, which includes a separate analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data as well as a section in which an attempt is made to explore the possible complementariness of the two analyses. The paper closes with a conclusion in which we summarise the results and explore the possible implications of the study.

Literature background

Intercultural competence (IC) is defined as "abilities to adeptly navigate complex environments marked by a growing diversity of peoples, cultures and lifestyles" (UNESCO 2013: 5); more specifically, IC is usually defined as the set of attitudes, skills and knowledge that allows us to communicate and interact effectively (in relation to one's view) and appropriately (in relation to the other's view) with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Fantini and Tirmizi 2006). By and large, the construct IC has been researched, defined and operationalised from different perspectives and in different contexts like education, counselling or business and management, mostly with a view to assessing and helping people enhance their IC. IC has also been studied from language learning and the intercultural communication perspectives. In the first case, language and culture are assumed to be interwoven, and this is what has led scholars like Agar (1994) or Risager (2006) to use the term *languaculture*, in an attempt to emphasise the reciprocal influence between language use and culture. In the second case, intercultural communication skills are nowadays crucial in our increasingly interconnected and globalised world.

Many theories of IC draw upon the dominant idea that human competences consist of *motivation*, *knowledge* and *skills*, though *context* and *outcomes* have also been acknowledged as significant influences. Because competence has been associated with deployment of a particular behaviour or set of skills, much has been researched on skills. For example, drawing on Deardoff (2011), the UNESCO report (2013: 24) cited above lists the following seven basic skills for attaining minimal intercultural competences: respect (i.e. valuing of others), self-awareness (understanding the lens through which we view the world), seeing from other perspectives or world views, listening, adaptation (ability to shift temporarily into a different perspective), relationship building (forging lasting cross-cultural personal bonds) and cultural humility (a combination of respect and self-awareness). Underlying these skills is the notion of change or adaptability, which is inherent to becoming interculturally competent and which a number of theories subdivide into adjustment, assimilation and adaptation (e.g. Kim 1991).

The application of different models of IC (e.g. Bennett 1993; Byram 1997; Deardoff 2006) has been criticised as having certain biases (ethnocentric Western or European, self-selection, social desirability) and as based on self-reports, which

sometimes only seem to reflect sojourners' difficulties as key experiences (Salisbury 2011; Williams 2005; Dervin 2010). Other criticisms that have been made on these models (Spitzberg & Chagnon 2009) are that motivation, knowledge, and skills are not necessarily separable components and they do not take into account the physiological and emotional side of interactants, often depicted as too rational and conscious human beings. Finally, the conceptualisation of adaptability is also questioned, as it is not clear to what extent it is the sole responsibility of the sojourner. For example, local people's interculturality is now regarded as important too (Dervin and Layne 2013) and it is now recognised that adjustment should be reciprocal on both the sojourner and the local counterpart side (Lam 2006), yet the extent to which both must adapt to one another remains unclear (Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). While our study certainly suffers from these biases, it represents a first attempt to overcome some of these limitations by combining pre- and post-stay quantitative self-reports with qualitative data based on two different formats of 'while-stay self reports' in which the individual's self-expression is simultaneous with the experience of study abroad and less constrained by the nature of the research instrument. .

An important characteristic of research into IC is that it has been widely studied as an outcome of an SA experience because the skills that are commonly recognised as a result of the experience are increased foreign language skills and knowledge of a new culture. Many studies have probed the impact of SA on individuals' IC and language learning, in particular the impact according to the length of stay and the geographic and cultural distance (Byram and Feng 2006). This interest is due to two main assumptions. The first one is the belief that for people to be able to understand their own country and describe their country's culture with an objective lens, they must have been abroad (Catteeuw 2012). The second assumption is grounded in Allport's Contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), which posited that prejudice by one group toward another could be reduced if individuals participated in sustained interpersonal contact (Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern 2002), provided there was equality between groups, engagement toward a shared goal, opportunity to develop the level of intimacy necessary to contradict previously held stereotypes and the support of an authority figure.

Hence, contact among students from different backgrounds and the immersion that SA provides have been largely studied as drivers of boosted IC (Kinginger 2013; Fantini 2005; Messelink, van Maele and Spencer-Oatey 2015; Salisbury 2011; Byram and Dervin 2008). While a strand of research points to SA as an experience that does not only make participants more open-minded and more respectful toward others but also helps them gain a better knowledge / insight about themselves, studies like the one by Salisbury (2011) partly challenge the Contact hypothesis. Salisbury found that although SA influences students' diversity of contact, it has no statistically significant effect on students' relativistic appreciation of cultural differences and he claims that growth in ethno-relativism is not limited to the confines of college experience, as other students who stay on campus can also experience comfort with diversity. In a similar vein, Williams (2005) concluded that (i) intercultural exposure prior to the SA semester, rather than the actual stay abroad, was more predictive of high scores than the actual stay abroad, (ii) initial high levels of IC skills left little room for increase, and (iii) gender and major were predictors of ethno-relativism because female students and students majoring in communication had higher increases than male students and students majoring in business. Although in Alkheshnam's (2012) study, females, older individuals, minority individuals, and individuals who were

multilingual tend to have higher levels of intercultural competence, other intervening factors have also been highlighted, such as the time factor, prior intercultural experiences, contextual factors (like social and economic status) or institutional support. Recent studies have examined students' motivations (Krzaklewska 2008) and pointed to the lack of correspondence between students' motivations and purposes for their SA, on the one hand, and the idealised objectives of increased multilingualism, on the other. The lasting effects of a SA may extend to even ten years after SA (Alred and Byram 2002), though in very different ways for different people (Alred and Byram 2006). Finally, for both short and long stays, the impact of SA can be enhanced through institutional support and the integration of intercultural learning into the curriculum like re-entry post sojourn courses (Jackson 2013; Messelink, van Maele and Spencer-Oatey 2015) or better institutional support before, during and after SA.

IC has been measured with a wide array of approaches and research methods. Sinicrope et al (2007: 12-31) distinguish between indirect assessment methods, basically consisting of self-reports in the form of surveys, and direct methods, which comprise performance assessment, portfolio assessment and interviews. In their view, indirect methods are less time-consuming than direct ones but their main shortcoming is that they do not avoid the social desirability bias (Sinicrope et al. 2007:27), while direct methods "potentially offer more complete assessments of intercultural competence because they can provide more detailed, nuanced and individualized accounts" (p.28). Later conceptualisations of IC have contested views of interculturality that envisage culture as a "static subjectivity-less cultural representative" (Dervin and Liddicoat 2013: 6) and instead have focussed on the internal diversity in human beings and in society. Given this recent rethinking of interculturality, which essentially sees culture as changing and evolving across contexts, languages and subjects, qualitative methods may be appropriate tools to plunge into human diversity and study a case in point in greater depth, which is one of the goals of this study. Thus, qualitative assessment tools like portfolio assessment, interviews, journal writing, and ethnographic studies, which seek to elicit individuals' ability to display IC and to observe their intercultural behaviour tend to be the predominant research method (Byram and Feng 2006).

Assessment methods are not free of controversy for several reasons. Among these reasons, we can mention the following: (i) subjects are not always honest; (ii) competences, like emotions and affection, are unstable—see, for example, Dervin (2010) on IC assessment in language learning and teaching—; and (iii) subjects sometimes tend to remember only difficulties when reflecting on the key aspects of their international experience. As a consequence, and in an attempt to overcome these caveats, more recently, blended or mixed tools have been on the rise in order to achieve a more comprehensive account and understanding of IC phenomena, the Intercultural Competence Assessment project (INCA) being a well-known example. This study borrows from this line of mixed research methods. Even though self-reports have been criticised due to the sometimes highly subjective criteria and memories of sojourners (as mentioned below), we think this can be greatly overcome if the researcher has been properly trained and takes into account these problems.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach

In this study we adopt a mixed-methods approach which, according to Johnson et al. (2007: 123) is "the type of research in which a researcher or a team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration". The adoption of this approach is the result of the question that we aim to answer in this study and which, in our opinion, requires "a structured quantitative *and* an emergent and holistic qualitative type of approach" (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2010: 18). We believe that in order to fully explore the impact of academic mobility on intercultural experience, it is important to approach it by focusing on quantifiable measures and using assessment tools that allow for comparative analyses with other studies. However, we are also of the opinion that it is important to take into account how this impact can be seen as a process of discursive constructions that the students themselves make for others (i.e. family, friends or, as in our case, a researcher) during their stay abroad. Of the five purposes that Riazi and Candlin (2014) mention for mixed-methods research (i.e. triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion), this study could be included within the 'expansion' purpose, as it aims to extend the depth of the quantitative analysis by focusing on the discourse of one student who could be representative of the group for whom, according to the quantitative assessment, the study abroad experience has had a lower impact. We believe that a linguistic micro-analysis of two self-reports produced by one student can give us greater insight into the cause of the apparently low impact of a stay abroad.

In this study we aim to answer a double research question: What is the impact of academic mobility on intercultural competence as measured by a quantitative-oriented assessment tool? How is this impact discursively constructed by an SA student taking into account two key elements in the development of intercultural competence, (i) apprehension and acceptance of 'difference' (ii) and willingness and capacity to 'change'? The reason for this second question is not only that, as pointed out above, the notion of personal 'change' (or adaptability) as a response to encountering 'difference' seems to be an essential element in the definition of IC, but also they were topics that naturally emerged in the student's self-reports without directly eliciting them. After responding to each of these questions, we will try to relate the quantitative and the qualitative analyses by exploring any possible connections that come out of the 'intercultural profile' of the specific student as obtained by means of a quantitative assessment tool or an analysis of two textual productions produced by herself in collaboration with one of the researchers.

Quantitative data

A total of 110 students from two different universities in Catalonia (Spain) took the pre- and post- tests. Of these students, 65 had participated in a SA programme during one semester and 45 during a whole academic year. Given that students came from different faculties and towns, it was not possible to gather all of them in order to administer the physical surveys. For this reason 38.1 % of the total amount of students replied the pre-and post- surveys online. As to the target countries, they were mainly northern European countries (The Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Lithuania, and UK) and, to a lesser extent, central and southern European countries like Poland or Italy.

The Likert-scale questionnaire employed in the study for the assessment of the intercultural competence of the students before and after their stay abroad attempts to combine the different scales used by the INCA project (2004), Deardoff (2006), Fantini (2006), and especially Alkheshnam (2012) and summarised in Table 1. In general, we have adopted the scales that were shared among the different sources (we mark the scales selected in italics).

Table 1. Sources of scales employed in the design of the questionnaire

INCA	DEARDOFF		FANTINI	ALKHESHNAM
Communicative awareness	External outcome	*Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately*	*Skills*	*Intercultural adaptation and communicative awareness*
Behavioural flexibility				
Tolerance of Ambiguity	Internal outcome	Adaptability		*Tolerance for ambiguity*
		Flexibility		*Perspective-taking*
		Ethnorelative view		*Lack of ethnocentrism*
Empathy		*Empathy*		*Empathic concern*
Knowledge discovery	*Knowledge and comprehension*	*Cultural self-awareness*	Awareness	*Critical and cultural awareness*
		Deep understanding and knowledge of culture	*Knowledge*	
		Culture-specific information		
		Sociolinguistic awareness		*Behavioural openness to other cultures*
				Behavioural openness using news media
				Interpreting and relating
Respect for otherness	*Requisite Attitudes*	*Respect*	Attitudes	*Tolerance*
		Openness		*Attitudinal openness to other cultures*
				Attitudinal openness to

				living and travelling abroad
		Curiosity and discovery		
				Interpreting and relating

The questionnaire designed includes a total of 43 items divided into 3 sections, which correspond to the three different components of intercultural competence mentioned by Byram (1997): attitudes (i.e. what do you think or feel?), knowledge (i.e. what do you know?), and behaviour or skills (i.e. what do you do?). The scales included in each component are listed in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Distribution of questionnaire items into components and scales.

Component	*Attitude*	*Knowledge*	*Behaviour / Skills*
Scales	• Attitudinal openness to other cultures (items 1-3) • Ethnorelativism (items 4-7) • Tolerance (items 8-10) • Empathy (items 11-14) • Tolerance for ambiguity (items 15-18	• Deep understanding / knowledge of culture (item 19) • Culture-specific information (items 20, 25, 26, 27) • Cultural self-awareness (21, 22, 23) • Sociolinguistic awareness (items 24, 28)	• Behavioural openness (items 29, 30) • Intercultural adaptation and communicative awareness (items 32, 33, 34) • Interpreting and relating (items 35, 36) • Critical cultural awareness (items 37, 38, 39) • Perspective taking (items 40, 41, 42, 43)

Qualitative data

The qualitative part of the analysis focuses on two elicited self reports produced by an undergraduate student (whom we will refer to as Monica) from one of the two universities participating in the quantitative part of the study, who embarked on a 5-month study-abroad experience in Denmark in 2013. By focusing on a single focal case, we do not intend to reach conclusions that can be applied to a more general population. Yet, we do support Flyvbjerg's (2011: 301) idea that a case study, which "may be studied in a number of ways, for instance qualitatively or quantitatively, analytically or hermeneutically, or by mixed methods", comprises "more detail, richness, completeness and variance- that is, depth" and, therefore it allows us to "represent the unique nature of each experience" (Kinginger 2008:61) and understand how individual particularities may affect "the qualities of their experience" (Kinginger 2008:112). We approach Monica's discourse from the perspective of how she constructs her encounter with 'difference' and the impact this encounter has on her 'self'. The two elicited self-reports were produced in the middle of her stay abroad. The first one consisted of a text that the student was asked to write in English in which she described 'a typical day abroad'. The second one takes the form of an interview that was carried out involving Monica and one of the researchers (RES) in

Catalan. The interview took place in the middle of her SA period and it focused mainly on Monica's perception of the differences that she was encountering compared to 'home' and the extent to which she felt that the experience was changing her. The participant consented to have her reports recorded and anonymized for research purposes. As the analysis will show, the themes of 'difference' and 'change' are not directly elicited by the researchers but introduced by the student. Thus, both data sources - the written self-report and the interview - allow us to see whether the encountered difference and the changes that, according to Mònica, she is undergoing have to do with a "move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism" (Bennett 2004:62).

Departing from the theoretical premises that individuals construct their identity through discourse (Norton 2010) and therefore language is inextricable from identity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006), we focus our analysis on the elements of Monica's environment that she resorts to in order to construct her personal SA experience. The analysis adopts two main notions from discourse analytical methods: 'membership categorization device' and 'stance'. On the one hand, the notion of membership categorization device, which we borrow from ethnomethodology (Hester and Francis 1997), allows us to explore the ways in which Monica categorizes her new sociocultural environment. Although most of the work in ethnomethodology has focused on how social members categorize other social members (see, for instance, Schegloff 2007; Stokoe 2012), in this study we follow McHoul and Watson (1984) by considering any categorisation (including personal and non-personal referents as well as actions/events) that Monica makes in the course of the reflective narratives she addresses to the researcher. On the other hand, with the notion of stance (Jaffe 2009), we can also focus on how she positions herself towards that world. In other words, in our analysis of the texts produced by the student we are interested in (i) the 'elements of the world' that she resorts to in order to construct her experience and (ii) how she relates to those elements.

Analysis of the data

Comparing pre- and post-stay measurements of intercultural competence
The analysis of the students' responses to the questionnaire was aimed at answering two main questions: (1) In what ways is the students' intercultural competence different in terms of pre- and post-stay measurements? (2) Is there a correlation between length of stay (one term vs. one academic year) and increase in the level of intercultural competence?

In order to carry out the analysis, in the first place, the distribution of the data was tested and it was found that most of the variables violated the assumption of normality. Therefore, a non-parametric test was run to answer the first research question. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed in order to see whether there would be statistically significant differences between the pre- and the post-test in all of the 43 items included in the questionnaire. As can be seen in Table 1 below by looking at the M pre-test and M post columns, which reflect the average score for each item, participants experienced significant gains in 19 items.

Table 3. Questionnaire items showing a significant change between the pre- and post-measurements.

Question	Z	p	M pre-test*	M post-test	Component (attitude, knowledge, behaviour): scale
1- I like the differences that exist between myself and people from other countries, races and ethnic groups.	-3.850	.000	3.8 (1.02)	4.22 (0.71)	**Attitude**: Openness
2- I like to have contact with people from other countries in order to learn as much as possible about them and their way of life.	-2.134	.033	4.45 (1.01)	4.69 (0.51)	**Attitude**: Openness
3- I think it is important that people have friends from other countries, races, and ethnic groups.	-2.672	.008	4.47 (0.66)	4.67 (0.6)	**Attitude**: Openness
6** I see no good reason to pay attention to what happens in other countries.	-2.320	.020	1.37 (0.68)	1.53 (0.77)	**Attitude**: Ethnorelativism
14- I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.	-2.583	.010	3.63 (0.75)	3.84 (0.71)	**Attitude**: Empathic concern
15- I can enjoy being with people whose values are very different from mine.	-1.999	.046	3.54 (0.85)	3.71 (0.79)	**Attitude**: Tolerance for ambiguity
20- I know the essential norms and taboos of the host culture (e.g., greetings, dress, behaviours, etc.)	-4.788	.000	3.4 (0.93)	3.93 (0.78)	**Knowledge**: culture-specific information
21- I recognize signs of culture stress (caused by living in a culturally different environment) and some strategies for	-2.821	.005	3.04 (1.05)	3.37 (1.11)	**Knowledge**: Cultural self-awareness

overcoming it.					
22- I can contrast my own behaviours with those of my hosts in important areas (e.g., social interactions, basic routines, time orientation, etc.).	-3.433	.001	3.8 (0.65)	4.09 (0.59)	**Knowledge**: Cultural self-awareness
23- I can discuss and contrast various behavioural patterns in my own culture with those in the host culture.	-3.708	.000	3.85 (0.64)	4.11 (0.56)	**Knowledge**: Cultural self-awareness
24- I am familiar with conventions of communication and interaction that are different in my culture and in the culture of the country where I am going.	-4.728	.000	3.36 (0.9)	3.87 (0.75)	**Knowledge**: Socio-linguistic awareness
26- I know about the geography, regional differences, language varieties, etc. of the country where I am going.	-2.240	.025	3.67 (0.88)	3.88 (0.79)	**Knowledge**: Culture-specific information
28- I am familiar with the language, levels of formality, conversational conventions, and non-verbal behaviour in the country where I am going.	-3.963	.000	2.91 (1.03)	3.37 (0.97)	**Knowledge**: Socio-linguistic awareness
29- I travel to other countries.	-2.902	.004	4.07 (0.95)	4.30 (0.82)	**Behaviour**: Behavioural openness
30- Whenever possible I eat at ethnic restaurants.	-3.445	.001	3.18 (1.13)	3.5 (1.13)	**Behaviour**: Behavioural openness
35- I often compare things in other cultures with similar things in my own culture.	-3.767	.000	3.76 (0.83)	4.1 (0.79)	**Behaviour**: Interpreting and relating
37- Sometimes I evaluate situations in my own country	-3.848	.000	3.86 (0.84)	4.14 (0.64)	**Behaviour**: Critical cultural awareness

based on my experiences and knowledge of other countries.					
38- I often notice the prejudices and stereotypes that are held by people in my country toward culturally different people's way of life.	-3.179	.001	3.87 (0.75)	4.16 (0.82)	**Behaviour**: Critical cultural awareness
39- I often make judgments about both the good things and the bad things in the Catalan/Spanish culture by comparing Catalonia/ Spain with other countries.	-2.352	.019	3.9 (0.72)	4.11 (0.83)	**Behaviour**: Critical cultural awareness

* Standard deviations in parentheses
** A decrease in the post-test shows improvement in terms of intercultural competence.

Table 3 shows that participants, on average, display quite a high degree of intercultural competence already in the pre-test, resonating with previous findings (Williams 2005). However, the SA experience still had a positive, though small, impact in almost half the questions included in the questionnaire. The only item in which participants only showed a significant decrease was number 6 (*I see no good reason to pay attention to what happens in other countries*), where it was found that the SA experience caused a reverse effect, i.e., on return of their stay abroad students disagreed less with the statement than before leaving.

If these items are analysed in terms of the IC components and scales that are most positively affected by SA, the Knowledge component stands out as component in which most gains in terms of intercultural competence are found, as 7 out of 10 items (70%) showed a significant increase. The next component in term of IC gains is Behaviour (6 out of 15, 40%). Finally, in the Attitude component we find only 5 out of 18 items (27.7%) that showed a significant increase, as can be seen in Table X-2. Attitude is therefore the component that is less sensitive to change. By the same token, the results point to the fact that SA results in an increased intercultural competence in some scales more than others and in a few scales there is no significant change. Thus, in the case of the Attitude component we can see that with the scales of Tolerance and Tolerance of ambiguity, with a total of 7 items, only 1 shows an increase. In the Knowledge component the scale that appears to be most resistant to change is Deep understanding of knowledge and culture. Finally, in the Behaviour component the most resistant scales are Intercultural adaptation and communicative awareness (3 items) and Perspective taking (4 items) with no items showing a significant increase.

Table 4. Questionnaire items showing a significant change between the pre- and post-measurements

Component	Scales
Attitude *27.7%*	• Openness: significant increase in 3 out of 3 items • Ethnorelativism: significant increase in 1 out of 4 items • Tolerance: no significant change • Empathic concern: significant increase in 1 out of 4 items. • Tolerance for ambiguity: significant increase in 1 out of 4 items
Knowledge *70%*	• Deep understanding and knowledge of culture: no significant change • Culture-specific information: significant increase in 2 out 4 items • Cultural self-awareness: significant increase in 3 out of 3 items • Sociolinguistic self-awareness: significant increase in 2 out of 2 items
Behaviour *40%*	• Behavioural openness: significant increase in 2 out 2 items • Intercultural adaptation and communicative awareness: no change • Interpreting and relating: significant increase in 1 out of 2 items • Critical cultural awareness: significant increase in 3 out of 3 items. • Perspective taking: no significant change

In brief, the students in the study increased their IC after their study-abroad experience first and foremost in terms of the Knowledge component (70% of the component items); in terms of the scales, Cultural self-awareness and Sociolinguistic self-awareness showed an increase in all of their items and Culture-specific information increased in 1 of the 2 items in the questionnaire. These results support Fantini and Tarmizi's (2006) claim that self-awareness is a key component in IC. In the second place, the Behaviour component also experienced significant gains but in a much lower percentage of items (40% of the component items); the affected scales were Behavioural openness and Critical cultural awareness, with all of their items showing a significant increase, and Interpreting and relating, with a significant increase in 1 of the 2 items. Finally, we can see that the lowest impact of the academic stay abroad was the Attitude component (27.7% of the component items), and in this case the increase is concentrated in students' Openness, with all of its items showing a change, and to a much lesser extent in the scales of Ethnorelativism, Empathic concern and Tolerance for ambiguity, in all three cases with just one out of four items.

In order to answer the second research question, which enquired whether there would be a correlation between length of stay (one term vs. one academic year) and those items in the questionnaire that showed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and the post-test, Spearman Rho bivariate correlations were run between length of stay (one term vs. one academic year) and the gains in the measures that showed a significant change between the pre- and the post-test. Very few significant correlations were found, namely between length of stay and question 1 (r= .302**, p= .001), question 29 (r= .218, p= .026), and question 35 (r= .194, p= .049). In other words, it was found that participants who spent an academic year overseas, scored significantly higher than those spending one term *only* in three items: item 1 (*I like the differences that exist between myself and people from other countries, races*

and ethnic groups), item 29 (*I travel to other countries*), and item 35 (*I often compare things in other cultures with similar things in my own culture*). In general, , it can be concluded that length of stay did not seem to have a major impact on intercultural competence.

The discursive construction of 'difference' and 'change'
The qualitative part of the analysis focuses on the discourse produced by Monica, one of the 110 students who responded to the pre- and post-stay questionnaire when she was in the middle of her stay (2.5 months). Monica's scores show a level of IC which is slightly lower than the average in 11 items and higher than average in 8 of the 19 items in which we found a significant change between pre-stay and post-stay. It is also interesting to note that in 11 items, her post-stay score is either the same or lower than the corresponding pre-stay score; these items were distributed as follows:

Table 4. Monica's scores in the questionnaire compared to the rest of the group

	Lower score	Equal score	Higher score
Attitude (6 items)	3	1	2
Knowledge (7 items)	2	1	4
Behaviour (6 items)	1	3	2

If we add the items with lower and equal scores, we could suggest that Monica's five-month stay abroad in Denmark had a relative impact on her intercultural competence and that this impact shows a similar pattern to that for the rest of the group, with Knowledge as the component experiencing the greatest impact and Attitude as the component in which we find the lowest impact.

Encountering 'difference'
In the first elicited narrative that we focus on for this study, Monica was asked to take pictures of all the key moments that, according to her, made up a typical day abroad and then write a text in English describing what her day abroad was normally like. Without being asked, Monica organises the narrative of her 'day abroad' around the differences that she encounters on a daily basis with respect to her previous daily routine. We could therefore say that the categories to which she refers form part of the membership categorization device 'difference'. This is made clear by the fact that she constantly uses adjective phrases like 'strange', 'unusual', 'not the same' and 'different' as 'category-resonant descriptions' (Schegloff 2007) of categories which she considers as cultural markers: the weather, the window blinds, the shower curtains, the trolley, the daily academic routine, the classroom dynamics or the students' eating habits. She even ends her description of her day abroad by describing what she expects her 'tomorrow' to be like: 'different'. Extract 1 shows how Monica begins her description of 'a day abroad':

> Extract 1
> All the days at university are different; we start at different times, sometimes at 8 o'clock, sometimes at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and so on. I couldn't imagine that it was like this!!

The *membership categorization device* 'difference' also appears in the interview which two of the researchers held with Monica and her Catalan friend Helena (HEL), with whom she shared the whole Erasmus experience. In this interview, as can be seen in Extract 2, Monica and her friend establish a binary distinction between "*our* things" and "things *here*"; and also between "the food that *they* eat" and "the food that *we* eat" (authors' italics), which again reinforces the appraisal of those objects Monica is constructing as different.

Extract 2

HEL: *ens hem intentat posar també lo nostre\ perquè els horaris si no ens l'han fet_ si ens diuen a les onze i mitja heu de dinar perquè a les dotze tenim classe_ nosaltres no dinaríem a les onze i mitja\ o sigui que també ens intentem emportar lo nostre*

we have tried to keep to our things\ because the timetables if they haven't done it for us, if they tell us that at half past eleven we have to have lunch because we have class at twelve_ we wouldn't have lunch at half past eleven\ so we also try to keep to our things\

Apart from specifying her environment into categories through which she constructs difference, Monica also takes a stance towards these categories not just by means of adjectives like 'strange', 'different' or 'unusual' but also, in the case of the written narrative, by means of punctuation, capital letters and even emoticons - all of them serving different communicative functions. Monica is constantly expressing an affective stance (Biber and Finegan, 1989) of surprise through (a) the frequent use of (a) exclamation marks, (b) the repetition of a sentence controlled by the negated modal verb "could not imagine", and (c) the expression "I freaked out". Faced with so much difference, we notice that towards the end of her written narrative, Monica says that she is "trying to get used to it although it's difficult".

Resisting 'change'

Monica's stance towards her daily encounter with difference, as expressed in her written narrative, is addressed to during the interview through the researcher's question "How is it going in Denmark?". To this question, Monica begins to orient herself to the membership categorization device 'change' by describing her experience in Denmark as "generally good, but for example all those changes we have found at the university…" (*en general bé, però per exemple a la universitat pues els canvis que hem trobat...*). By using the adversative conjunction "but", Monica makes it clear that the experience could be better. And the reason for this is precisely the "changes" they have found at the university. As she puts it, these changes, which could be synonym for 'difference', involve "doing things differently" (*t'implica fer una cosa diferent*) and they force one to change ("whether you want it to or not, you have to change" - *vulguis o no has de canviar*).

Despite Monica's apparent acceptance of having to adapt to the new environment, it is interesting to point out as a possible example of her resistance to change that when the researcher (RES) asks her whether she has changed at all, she hesitates and cannot immediately suggest one aspect in which she has changed. This can be seen in Extract 3, in which it is Helena (HEL), and not Monica (MON), who takes the floor in response to the researcher's question, but she does not give a specific answer either. Faced with this situation, the researchers feel forced to propose

different categories that might be used by the students to exemplify how they have changed:

Extract 3

RES: *creieu que esteu canviant des del principi a ara amb alguna cosa/ heu notat algun canvi amb vosatres mateixos o amb l'altra/ (2) dieu vam arribar amb aquesta idea i ara ja no·_*

do you think you've changed from the begining until now in any aspect/ have you noticed any change within yourselves or in the other/ (2.) you say we got here with this idea and now we don't_

HEL: *mm·· però· mm· (3) canvi en el sentit de que t'esperes una cosa i te'n trobes una altra/*

mm·· bu·t mm· (3.) change meaning that you expect one thing and you find another one/

RES: *bueno que_ que_ * sí\ o que no en· * al principi no en menja-*

well_ that_ that_ * yes\ or that you do·n't * at the beginning you didn't eat-

HEL: *o canvi d'actitud o·_*

or_ change in attitude o·r_

RES: *o·_ o d'actitud o· de conducta\ no/ que dius al principi no menjava mai pa negre i ara sempre· * ara en menjo\ o· al principi no feia mai això i ara ho faig*

o·r_ or in attitude o·r in behaviour\ right/ that you say at the beginning I never ate Black bread and now I alway·s * now I eat it\ o·r at the beginning I never did this and now I do\

MON: *ah_ bueno_{(@) el muesli aquell que ens fa gràcia\}*

oh_ well_ {(@) that muesli that we like\}

HEL: *ah_ sí*

oh_ yes\

In the interview with the researchers, Monica says that the university is different and that therefore you are somehow forced to change, if only from an academic point of view. When asked to specify what these changes are about, she refers to three different category-bound activities for the category 'student': 'having a couldn't-care-less attitude' (*passotisme*), 'using the laptop in class' (*utilitzar el portàtil a classe*), which "is unthinkable" (*és impensable*) in her home university, and 'eating in class' (menjar *a classe*) during the lesson. Thus, Monica mentions different ordinary activities in which she has inevitably changed. Yet, these changes do not only have to do with the incorporation of new activities in her life abroad but also with the fact of having stopped doing some activities which for her were bound to the category 'student' or before her SA experience. On the one hand, Monica and Helena say that in Denmark they "don't wear high heels" (*no portem talons*) because they have noticed that when Danish women go out, "they wear a dress and sport shoes" (*van amb vestit i bambes*) and therefore one "doesn´t need to worry about anything" (*no t'has de preocupar per a res*). On the other hand, Monica and her friend refer to

another category-bound activity associated with the category 'student', which is 'going out at night'. In this case, the two students admit that they have changed in Denmark because they don't go out, and if they had been in their home country they "would have gone out every week for sure" (*haguéssim sortit cada setmana fijo*).

Despite the fact that Monica chose this experience voluntarily and although she already expected to encounter "a new country, new people and a new culture," Monica and Helena express that they respect other ways of doing and they do "try to adapt in some aspect" (*ens intentem adaptar en algun sentit*). Yet, for them this adaptation "is difficult" (*costa*) and they activate the categories 'timetable' and 'food' to exemplify two of the aspects in which they *haven't* changed. In the following extract we can see that Monica constructs her discourse of resistance to change by aligning with Helena's discourse. Although Monica had previously said that she had changed in some aspects, in this extract they both seem to eschew some of these differences into her environment and cling to habits from their home culture. In fact, at the end of the interview they conclude that "we have adapted, but we haven't integrated" (*ens hem adaptat però no ens hem integrat*). Extract 4 illustrates the students's stance of resistance to integration, which is summarized in Monica's last utterance "everything like us" (*tot com nosaltres*) when she explicitly says that they do everything as they would in Catalonia.

Extract 4
RES: *ah·_ amb els horaris de menjar\ no· no·· no els· respecteu/*
oh_ you don't keep to the meal schedule \ you don't_ you don't_ you don't keep to them\

HEL: *no no\ o sigui per exemple avui_*
no no\ I mean_ for example today_
MON: *no*
no\

HEL: *hem dinat a la una i mitja\ i_ i_ i si podem els caps de setmana dinem a la una i mitja*
we had lunch at half past one and_ and_ and if we can_ we have lunch at half past one at the weekend\

MON: *sí\ sempre tard*
yes\ always late\

HEL: *i el menjar tampoc es que· comprem lo que· ells mengin o mengem lo que ells mengen*
and we don't buy the food or eat the food that they eat either\

MON: *no\ tot com nosaltres*
no\ everything like us\

Confronting quantitative and qualitative data
As seen above, the quantitative scores corresponding to the 19 items in which students' responses show a significant change before and after their stay abroad reflect a group of individuals who, according to the pre-stay scores, seem to be well prepared for an 'intercultural experience', which, in the light of the scores obtained in the post-stay questionnaire, has been effective in helping them to still increase their

intercultural competence. However, when we look in detail at the composition of those items, we see that the students' experience of academic mobility has only a clear impact on their knowledge, but less significantly on their behaviour or attitude. In front of this result, a possible argument could be that the redefinition of these last two components of intercultural competence probably requires a much longer period of immersion in the new culture. Nevertheless, when we compare the pre- and post-stay scores of the students with a one-term stay abroad with those who spent an entire academic year abroad, we do not find any major differences, and it is precisely in the Attitude and Behaviour components that we find 3 items that show that whereas the students' degree of 'openness' increases with a one-semester stay, it decreases when the length of the stay abroad is a whole academic year. While it is not clear to us whether a one-semester stay is short enough for a majority of students to remain within what has traditionally been referred to as the 'honeymoon stage' of intercultural adaptation and a one-year stay abroad coincides with the ''crisis' or 'hostility' stage (see, for instance, Ting-Toomey 2005), we think that, in order to be able to understand the process that the students go through and the reasons why they may accept or resist adaptation to the new environment, it is important to delve into the nature of the discourses of 'difference' and 'change' that the students construct in the process of reflecting upon their experience.

The analysis of the reflective narratives produced by Monica two and half months into her SA period produces a student profile that involves a heightened awareness of 'difference' between her home environment and the new one but, at the same time, a stance of resistance to adapting to this difference. This heightened awareness is expressed by lexical and other graphological means, and it focuses on common cultural markers such as the weather, household objects or routines. However, it may be precisely this heightened awareness of difference which forms part of Monica's new everyday life that makes her adopt a stance of resistance towards embracing it. This stance is reflected, for instance, in the fact that when the researcher asks her about the SA experience, she responds "generally good" and immediately after adds an adversative clause pointing at obstacles in her adaptation process. Two more indexes of Monica's resistance are her incapacity to respond immediately with a specific example when one of the researchers asks her whether she has changed and her rather negative stance towards the 'inevitable' changes she has had to make in her ordinary life.

After the analysis of Monica's reflective narratives, we can begin to glimpse a possible conflict between discourses of 'difference' and 'change' in the construction of her experience of academic mobility. It seems as if in some cases a heightened awareness of difference may render the students' enterprise of adapting to the new environment very daunting, given the limited period of time they have. Faced with this perception of danger of destabilization due to the number of changes they have to make, the students may react by mounting stiff resistance to change.

Conclusion
The mixed-methods approach adopted in this paper in order to explore the impact of academic mobility on intercultural competence has allowed us, in the first place, to specify the degree and nature of this impact in connection with pre- and post-stay quantitative measurements and taking into account different scales belonging to three main components of intercultural competence: attitude, knowledge, and behaviour. When comparing the students' collective profile that these measurements render, we

see that students already show a high level of intercultural competence before their stay abroad, which may explain the fact that we have not found dramatic increases in their post-stay scores in any of the 19 items with significant differences between pre- and post-stay. The clearest impact of an academic mobility of one or two terms is an increase in the degree of knowledge about other cultures. As for the other two components, attitude and behaviour, it seems that the impact is not so clear and the difference in the length of the stay, between one and two terms, is generally not significant. These results lead us to speculate not only about the possibility that changes in attitude and behaviour require a much longer period of time than an academic year in order to be affected, but also the possibility that it is precisely the limited duration of the academic mobility programme that predisposes the students to resist changes in these two components as a way of protecting themselves from the danger of destabilization of their identity.

The qualitative part of this study has allowed us to enquire into the nature of a discourse of study abroad, which seems to be in line with what we interpret as students' resistance to modify their intercultural attitude and behaviour. Through the analysis of two experiential narratives constructed by a student who is participating in a SA programme, we have seen that whereas the notion of 'difference' appears naturally and plays a very important role, the notion of personal 'change' as a result of the student's experience is almost non-existent after 2.5 months. This may confirm the results obtained in the quantitative part of the study, in which the Attitude and Behaviour components of intercultural competence after 5 and 10 months of stay abroad showed fewer significant changes than the Knowledge component between the pre- and post-stay, suggesting that the notion of 'change' may involve mainly the first two components, which are the ones that may require not only a longer immersion in the new culture but also the students' willingness to modify their habits and perception that it is possible.

The limited nature of the qualitative part of our study allows us only to hypothesise a line of analysis of the discourse of study abroad. In this respect, in order to be able to draw more solid conclusions about the relevance of the discourses of 'difference' and 'change', it would be important not only to take into account the experiential narratives of the same student at different stages of her stay as well as the narratives of other students, but also the institutional discourse of study abroad to which students are exposed via institutional channels like their own university or less formal channels such as students who have previously participated in a study-abroad programme. At this institutional level, perhaps it would be important to consider carefully the students' individual expectations prior to their participation in a SA programme and work from these in order to prepare them for an enriching intercultural experience. Likewise, we think that universities should also devote some attention to post-stay actions with the students (as recommended in studies like Jackson 2013 or Messelink, van Maele and Spencer-Oatey 2015), departing from their personal experience abroad and making of it a solid basis on which to continue developing their IC.

Transcription conventions
− Laughter: All laughter and laughter-like sounds are transcribed with the @ symbol between the '+' symbol, approximating syllable number; utterances spoken laughingly appear between claudators.
− Lengthening: Lengthened sounds are marked with one dot (·) or two dots (··) depending on the degree of lengthening.
− Pauses: A number in parenthesis is used to indicate the duration in seconds of a pause.
− Repetition: All voluntary and involuntary repetitions of words and phrases are transcribed.
− Terminal pitch movement: Rising pitch movement is marked with a slash (/); falling pitch movement is marked with a backslash (\); continuing or level pitch movement is marked with an underscore (_).
− Truncated word or utterance: An asterisk (*) indicates that the speaker has truncated a word or an utterance, leaving the end unuttered.

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