## The development of social relations during residence abroad

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**Abstract**

Language students in the UK undertake their ‘year abroad’ with high hopes for a linguistic and social ‘immersion’ experience. However, past research shows that language learning success, while real, can be uneven, and that many Erasmus exchange students form social relations largely with other international students (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2006). New virtual media make it easy and cheap for the current student generation to sustain existing social networks, blurring previous clear distinctions between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ (Coleman & Chafer, 2010).

This paper draws on data from a larger 2-year study of UK students undertaking residence abroad in France, Spain and Mexico (the LANGSNAP project). The participants were involved in 3 different placement types: as teaching assistants, exchange students, and workplace interns. A series of pre-sojourn and in-sojourn interviews with 28 students spending an academic year in France are analysed, to identify both the social networking opportunities available, and the actual social relationships which were developed. The analysis shows that all three placement types offered structured opportunities for interaction with French nationals which led for almost all participants to moderate degrees of social networking. However only a minority of participants developed closer relationships or friendship with locals, from which they drew emotional support.

**Keywords**: Residence abroad, L2 French, intercultural learning, teaching assistantship, student exchange, workplace internship.

## Introduction

In her ground-breaking anthropological study *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe,* Murphy-Lejeune dubbed Erasmus students “the new strangers”. She concludes that “practically everything in the European student experience can be assessed as a benefit” (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 230). Unlike other migrants,

[t]heir somewhat privileged circumstances and attribute of youth mean that they can travel more lightly than those whose departure is a constraint rather than a choice. Their experience is less dramatic since their in-between position is only temporary. Their attachment to or detachment from the home culture is merely loosened rather than seriously tested. The difficulties which they encounter are usually transient rather than lingering. If they experience an identity crisis, it may remain superficial rather than profound (Murphy-Lejeune 2002, 232−233).

Murphy-Lejeune goes on to argue that the main practical effect for these “new strangers” is entry into a new time-space, where “notions of borders and the meaning of home” become loosened, rather than close integration into the new setting (234). However, concerning students who are language specialists, sojourning abroad with the specific objectives of developing their linguistic knowledge and intercultural skills, much more has been expected in terms of social integration and engagement in local communicative activity (Kinginger 2013; Meier and Daniels 2011).

How far, however, does the actuality of residence abroad by language students achieve such aims? Papatsiba (2006) analyses the reports written by 80 French students on Erasmus sojourns abroad, and describes the majority as socialising within an “Erasmus bubble”, largely with co-nationals or other temporary sojourners. Their accounts of local culture are static and deterministic, centring on what Papatsiba calls “cultural tourism” (111), and describing encounters with locals in terms of national stereotypes (“the Germans do not lack humour”, “Ireland is a country where people live one day at a time” 113). Doerr (2013) argues that handbooks and institutional guidance may actually encourage such a static view of host cultures. However, around one-third of participants in the Papatsiba (2006) study developed a more “relational” approach to the local culture and residents, modifying their interpretations through social experience (128). Kinginger (2008) describes similar mixed outcomes, in her case studies of American students in France.

For Anglophone students, an added complication in the development of local social relationships in pursuit of language learning is the easy availability of English, offering quick access to many international networks, and prized by many international interlocutors as a cultural good (on this theme again see Kinginger 2008). Jim Coleman, who is honoured in this special issue, has for many years led the study of British language learners abroad, and has consistently promoted a holistic sociocultural perspective on the experience (see e.g. Coleman 2013). In this paper, I explore the oral accounts of a group of British students of L2 French sojourning temporarily in France, concerning their social network development, and seek explanations for the challenges they face in creating the strong local relationships they believe to be desirable, in search of an ‘immersion’ experience (Doerr 2013).

## The LANGSNAP project

From 2011 to 2013, the author directed an ESRC-funded project titled “Social networks, target language interaction and second language acquisition during the year abroad: a longitudinal study” (the LANGSNAP project). This project tracked a cohort of undergraduate languages students at a British university, before, during and after their compulsory third year abroad (YA). The overall research aim was to track the development of participants’ L2 proficiency, and to relate this to their language use, social networks and activities while abroad. Data was collected from all participants on six occasions, before, during and after the stay abroad; measures included repeated extended interviews in the target language, questionnaires on language learning history, personality, social networking and language use, and a retrospective, reflective interview in English. Students majoring in both French and Spanish took part in the research, but this chapter focuses on 28 participants, all members of the L2 French group.

## The participants

The LANGSNAP participants were volunteers from among a larger year group at a research-intensive British university. Their ages pre-departure ranged from 19-23, with a modal age of 20. The L2 French group was overwhelmingly female, reflecting well known gendered study choices; only three participants were male. In this account, participants are referred to by individual 3-digit codes from 100-129 (excluding 103 and 113). Twenty-six participants claimed English as their first language (Participant 108 claimed Finnish, and 126 claimed Spanish). However, 10 participants reported use of other languages within their family. Four of these reported French as being spoken, though only two reported themselves as speaking any French at home (100, 104). All except one had studied French as a school subject from age 11 or younger, and had passed advanced school examinations in French (for most, this was the British A’Level). Despite a general decline of languages in UK higher education (Coleman 2014; Tinsley 2013), this was a well-motivated group who had made a considered positive choice to study languages. This is reflected in their performance on the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire used within LANGSNAP (Dewaele and van Oudenhoven 2009; Van der Zee and van Oudenhoven 2000), which showed high and stable levels of “Cultural Empathy” among participants before and after the YA (Tracy-Ventura et al. 2013).

The YA is a longstanding feature of British language studies (Coleman 1998a). Since the 1980s it has merged with wider European schemes to promote student mobility (for the Erasmus scheme see Teichler, 1997). British universities typically invest considerable effort in YA preparation, and in monitoring and supporting students while abroad (Coleman 1998b; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, and Street 2001). At the home university, students of French had already attended a range of modules analysing aspects of contemporary French culture and society, alongside language courses, during their first two years of study. During their YA, they were expected to complete a substantial credit-bearing project, which was expected to build on earlier academic studies, to involve some empirical research, and to result in a 5,000 word report in French.

Three main YA placement types are currently available to British languages students: a (paid) language teaching assistantship in schools, attending university as an Erasmus exchange student, or a workplace internship. On the evidence of pre-departure interviews (Mitchell, McManus, and Tracy-Ventura forthcoming) the LANGSNAP participants choosing assistantships were usually interested in teaching as a possible career; they also appreciated the idea of a break from university and the chance of financial support while abroad. Those choosing workplace internships were keen to improve future employment prospects and CVs. Internships had to be found on students’ own initiative, and tended to attract the most confident students. Attending university was to some extent a default option, for those not wanting to teach nor seeking an internship; though the possibility of continuing formal studies in languages and other subject areas was also attractive to many, as well as the perception that university could be the easiest place to ‘fit in’ socially and make new friends. Among the L2 French participants in LANGSNAP, there were 14 assistants, eight exchange students, and six workplace interns. Their allocated participant numbers were as follows:

*Table 1: Participants and their placement*

<insert table 1 around here>

## Methodology

This chapter reports findings from the sequence of interviews carried out with the L2 French participants when abroad. The research team visited almost all participants in November 2011 (Visit 1), February 2012 (Visit 2) and May 2012 (Visit 3), and interviewed them individually each time. However, since the assistantship scheme finished in April, a few students who had returned home immediately were interviewed shortly after their return. Most interviews were conducted on site abroad, typically in schools, cafés, or hotel lobbies, by a visiting member of the research team (not always the same person); a few were conducted via Skype for practical reasons.

The semi-structured interviews in French were intended both to collect participants’ commentaries on their life in France, and also to elicit L2 French speech samples. Questions covered daily life and work, social relationships, striking incidents, and hopes for the rest of the stay (replaced in the final interview by a question concerning advice to future students). Question wording might vary, and there was limited follow-up questioning, so that participants had considerable control over how fully they answered; they were aware of the purpose of the interviews. Overall, it is likely that participants’ self-presentation in the interviews was affected partly by their level of personal confidence as French users, and also by their perceptions of their interlocutors as representatives of the home university. Nonetheless, cross checking of material from the three different visits, and triangulation with questionnaire data, as well as with the post-YA reflective interview conducted in English, shows that participants did report meaningfully on many aspects of the YA experience.

Following sections explore students’ accounts of how they lived in France, with the underlying aim of discovering how far the hoped-for social integration was taking place.

## Getting started: making friends and entering a community

In the pre-departure interviews, almost all participants expressed a wish to make local French friends. In the Visit 3 interviews, though, while expressing enormous satisfaction with the experience overall, a large majority expressed regret that they had not spent more time interacting (in French) with French people. Much of their advice to successor cohorts concerned the need to make even greater efforts than they had, to join French-using networks. So what were the dynamics of friendship creation which produced this eventual sense of disappointment?

Firstly, it should be noted that as reported by Kinginger (2008), and by Coleman and Chafer (2010), participants remained well networked with existing family and friends, and easily sustained these links largely through electronic means. Most mentioned skyping or phoning home at least once a week, and a few mentioned daily contact. France is easily accessible from England, so that mutual visiting was also common. Most participants returned to England at least once while abroad, for Christmas or Easter vacations, or for family events such as birthdays. Many parents and siblings visited participants in France, and a few travelled with participants to holiday destinations in France and neighbouring countries. When 128 quarrelled with her landlord, her father visited until the situation was resolved. Several participants also reported visiting each other, as part of a wider mobility practice involving short touristic trips within France.

Secondly, both language assistants and Erasmus exchange students had structured opportunities to meet other sojourners more or less on arrival. These might involve organised induction meetings and social occasions (for assistants in a particular region, or for Erasmus students at a particular university), or access to Facebook sites targeting these groups. For example, participant 127 was a language assistant in a very small town, and living a rather isolated life in school accommodation. However, through a regional induction session he soon met other assistants in the area, and spent most weekends thereafter in neighbouring bigger cities with this group. ‘Culture shock’, and initial isolation, were remarkably brief for most participants.

Choices about accommodation also affected friendship opportunities. Many participants accepted role-related accommodation; thus e.g. many assistants lived in subsidised accommodation provided by a school, together with other international assistants (or more rarely, French *surveillants*: 127). Many exchange students accepted university accommodation, which commonly co-located them with other international sojourners, including other Anglophones. A few participants rented accommodation privately, either alone (116, 120) or with other sojourners (114, 115, 122, 124). These accommodation options determined core friendship choices for many; several reported rapidly developing supportive and close friendships with those Anglophone or international students they lived with (and only a few subsequently dropped out of these early-established networks).

A minority of participants made a proactive search for French co-habitants. Participant 108 made an early visit to her target university city, to seek out a flat-share with locals, and found an (older) female landlord who proved a constant friend and mentor. Other participants had less happy experiences; 119, 123 and 128 moved into informal sub-lets with locals, initially, but all left after a short time, because of disagreements or harassment (in their view), and moved either to solo accommodation or to accommodation shared with other international sojourners. However, Participants 104, 106 and 111 lived with French host families. This was not their preferred choice, but both 104 and 111 reported good relations and inclusion in family activities throughout the year, including country excursions and cultural events (e.g. classical concerts, a wine festival). Participant 100 (intern) lived with relatives, in the Paris region, though this entailed a long commute to central Paris for his work. These last three individuals were among those who engaged most in inter-generational socialising and activities while in France, outside the work context.

## Developing relations with French nationals

As we have just seen, only a small minority of participants co-habited successfully with French nationals or permanent residents. However, the requirements of everyday living and working obviously brought them in contact with local people outside the home. Everyone had stories to tell of negotiating service encounters of different kinds, with more or less cooperative bank clerks, hairdressers, landlords, bus drivers, or shop assistants. However, the intern participant who found a long term boyfriend behind the bank counter(!) was very much the exception; daytime work activities offered most scope for contact and formation of social relationships.

### *The assistant group*

The language assistants had regular contact with mentor teachers, and of course with pupils. Some though not all mentors were described as helpful and supportive. Most assistants spent their non-teaching hours in the school staffroom, and reported generally cordial relations and engagement in staffroom conversation (though 105 and 127 related better to school administrators, and *surveillants* [auxiliary staff]). Initially, a few reported limited participation because of language challenges:

*euh je pense que le grand problème est, c'est le vrai [?] gros problème à ce moment, c'est euh pour comprendre tous les conversations dans le salle des profs. c'est très difficile parce que c'est très vite* [Participant 101, Visit 1].

Five mentioned specifically that they ate lunch with staff on working days, and five reported invitations to teachers’ homes, which gave opportunity for greater conversational participation and even cultural debate:

*oui et une femme m'a invitée pour le dîner vendredi dernier euh et […] avant quand j'étais chez elle j'étais un peu timide, et je ne voulais pas parler beaucoup parce que j'avais peur de faire des erreurs tout ça. euh oui mais le semaine dernière j'avais une débat avec son mari euh en ce qui concerne euh l'importance pour les personnes anglais d'étudier les langues étrangères oui parce que il a dit que “c'est pas nécessaire parce que tout le monde parle anglais alors pourquoi pourquoi tu étudies le français?” tout ça et oui. alors j'avais une débat avec lui* [Participant 109, Visit 2].

One teacher mentor introduced Participant 120 to students at the local university, and by Visit 3 she was reporting she had made a good (local) friend there; Participant 127 played badminton weekly with staff. Overall relations with teachers remained largely workplace-based, and restricted to professional relationships.

Relations with school students were more complex. Some assistants became engaged in their students’ learning, and expressed pride in their achievement, as when 120 spoke about her special needs class:

*j'essaie de leur faire apprendre um les numéros euh pendant des semaines et semaines, et la semaine dernière (.) tout d'un coup tout le monde dans la classe a connu comment compter à une à six [?] cent, alors j'étais très très contente, j'étais tellement fière* [Participant 120, Visit 2].

Others took part in extra-curricular activities such as a school choir (109), or a trip to England (117); 120 was asked to provide temporary maternity cover for a ‘real’ teacher. Several undertook private tutoring of individual children, which led to some socialising with the families concerned. Several however mentioned classroom discipline as an issue, and described incidents of student rudeness and bad behaviour which they had found personally distressing. For those working in upper secondary schools, students were close in age to themselves; two participants (122, 127) noted that despite this age parity, their roles meant that they could not be friends with their students even if they wanted to. Participant 114 expressed more complex attitudes. She complained about older male students whom she did not know, who made insulting remarks about her in the corridor. On the other hand, she had greater empathy with some of her all-male classes:

*j'ai quelques classes qui sont très sympas trop sympas en fait parce que je suis une fille et ils m'écrivent de lettres comme «est-ce que tu veux aller à une soirée demain ?» des choses comme ça. mais euh c'est pas un problème, c'est plus amusant, et ils sont sympa . donc je préfère ça parce que je peux parler avec eux dans le cantine dans le couloir plus comme des amis parce que nous sommes le même âge* [Participant 114, Visit 2].

On the assistants’ departure, some teachers and pupils made positive gestures, giving gifts and organising farewell parties. But apart from occasional visits to teachers’ homes, assistants’ social activities out of school hours were primarily with other assistants and/or international students.

### *The student group*

The exchange students had structured daytime opportunities to meet local university members in class and around the campus. None formed close relations with staff (though some language teachers and Erasmus mentors were helpful, e.g. in resolving a dispute with neighbours: 112). However, most reported spending some time with local classmates during the day. For example, 126 described her small L2 Italian class group:

*et après en italien on est quatre filles. il y a une écuadorienne, et les autres sont françaises. elles sont très gentilles, et puisqu' on est quatre seulement on s'est oui euh connues assez bien euh oui* [Participant 126, Visit 2].

Tandem language exchanges also took place on campus:

*mais maintenant j'ai quelques amis français qui euh sont avec moi dans les cours, et euh oui on sort quelquefois. et j'ai fait des tandems aussi avec eux les Français et les Allemands. […] on parle une demi-heure en français, et après on parle une demi-heure en anglais* [Participant 118, Visit 1].

However, most participants found it difficult to extend their friendships with local students beyond campus encounters. 126 commented in Visit 2 on her wish to take this step with the group from the Italian class, but eventually found a local walking companion through a tandem partnership instead (Visit 3). Students lived with other Erasmus students, and this was the group concerned in most evening activities, i.e. visits to bars, clubs or restaurants. Some students reported efforts to include French acquaintances in these activities, but with limited success. Early in her stay, Participant 112 describes her weekday evenings spent with Participant 107 and others:

*mais normalement on regarde toutes ensemble avec les autres Erasmus euh une film français les soirées um après une dîner ensemble quelquefois. normalement moi et [Participant 107] on mange toujours ensemble. mais normalement plusieurs fois trois ou quatre fois à chaque semaine on mange avec les autres Erasmus. normalement c'est ici en fait, et euh on essaie à inviter des autres étudiants français* [Participant 112, Visit 1].

Participant 112 attributed the difficulty of engaging more closely with new French acquaintances to their perception that the Erasmus students were already a bonded group, which was off-putting to locals (Visit 1). 118 said that French students were “reserved” and did not go out in the evenings; 126 (herself aged 23), said they were “too young”. However, by some means not described, Participant 107 did find a French student boyfriend, and the long-lasting relationship included visits to his family home, a trip to Paris, and his inclusion in a road trip with 107’s own family. As Participant 112 was the flatmate of 107, this was a significant relationship for her as well, and French was often spoken when he was around. Only one other participant (105) reported being invited home for the weekend by a (female) French coeval – this trip memorably included a visit to the local fire station!

Of the eight exchange students in our study, however, there were three who progressed beyond the Erasmus group for their main social networks. All three brought a serious prior talent to their sojourn: 108 was a competitive athlete, and 104 and 129 had musical abilities.

Participant 108 largely avoided the Erasmus social scene, making an exception only for a French-using Asian student, who became a year-long friend. Having joined a local athletics club, she was quickly absorbed in training and competitive events, making close friends with her local coach and team-mates. These relationships survived personal injury and disappointment (at a major end of year competition, she could only cheer her team from the stands). Participant 104 lived with a French host family who were active on the local cultural scene, and spent free time with them throughout the year. A student of anthropology and history, he enjoyed university classes in these subjects (Visit 1). However, he also played music and joined different singing groups; eventually he enrolled in the local music school and enjoyed rediscovering neglected talents:

*ça a été pour moi très important de structurer mon temps […] de retrouver quelque chose que j' avais un peu lâchée l' année dernière” [104, Visit 3]. By February, he reckoned he knew “pas mal de gens qui circulent dans le monde musical de [City]”, and only wished this had happened sooner. He saw other English students only once a week, though he enjoyed the fact that his classes were “very international” with, for example, many Asian students* (Visit 2).

Participant 129 had chosen her particular university placement because of the musical reputation of the city, and very quickly embedded herself in the local traditional music and dance scene, both on and off campus. She told an early anecdote showing how she got started:

*un des premiers gens que j'ai rencontrés euh un français qui s'appelle Antoine. il habite sur mon étage. euh euh ce point là je connais personne. euh j'étais dans ma chambre, c'était le deuxième jour. j'étais un peu isolée, j'étais un peu triste de n'être pas en Angleterre. et donc j'ai pensé que xxx je vais me s'asseoir dans la cuisine et je vais attendre quelqu'un. donc j'ai attendu, et puis Antoine est entré. et j'ai dit “tu t'appelles comment, qu'est-ce que tu fais”. ehm ehm j'ai découvert que on aime les deux la musique. il joue de la guitare, je joue de la clarinette. donc on a joué ensemble un peu, et maintenant on est amis* [Participant 129, Visit 1].

Later she joined student dance associations, and took part in music sessions in pubs and other locations throughout the year.

### *The interns group*

As for the interns, two lived together on the campus of an international business school, where one (102) worked in the library and the other (125) in programme administration. Participant 102 developed friendly daytime relationships with library colleagues, with whom she shared work rotas, coffee breaks and lunchtimes (and some evening leisure time, reported in Visit 1 but not subsequently); of course she also engaged with students, over the library counter. However, her social life after work involved group activities with others, such as a choir, training for a marathon, and a bible study group. She was close friends with her flatmate 125, but much of her home life was spent with her boyfriend from the local bank, e.g. cooking and watching TV together. When she made a birthday trip home to England, she had a surprise:

*le week-end de mon anniversaire était très bien pour moi. je suis rentrée en Angleterre. hum oui je suis partie le matin de mon anniversaire, et j'ai rencontré ma famille à l'aéroport. et euh le soir on est allé manger dans une très bon restaurant, et en fait mon copain il était là. et je savais pas qu'il venait, donc c'était une belle surprise* [Participant 102, Visit 3].

Participant 125 was working as an administrator with a more international team of colleagues, and associated at work mainly with other interns. However, in her leisure time she did dance and sport, and at Visit 2 she described helping to organise the student-run Fashion Week of the business school, an activity which led to a friendship with a French girl.

Two other interns worked for an international media company in central Paris, one in marketing (100), the other in public relations (128). Participant 100 lived and socialised with relatives and had a long daily commute; he was an active member of the marketing IT team, but saw them only to a limited extent outside work. Participant 128 was using her English skills extensively in the PR department, translating publicity materials and checking translations. The work was pressured, but she was given increasing responsibility, and felt she was valued within her (international) team. She had attempted flatshares with locals, but these broke down twice, and thereafter she lived alone. However, a fellow (French) intern helped her with these difficulties and later met her weekly for cocktails and conversation. By Visit 2, 128 had also found a French boyfriend. Illustrating their close relationship, she later spoke about his help with her university project:

*mais en fait le mercredi soir j'avais [Boyfriend] qui m'a appelée en disant “bon j'ai lu euh tout ce que tu as écrit et je pense qu'il y a des petits trucs. peut-être on doit parler un peu quoi je suis un peu perdu”. j'ai dit ”d'accord”, et jusqu'à cinq heures du matin […] on était là ensemble en faisant les petits modifications, et c'était trop mignon qu'il a fait ça parce que franchement ça si j'étais lui je sais pas. […] c'était vraiment quelque chose je pense de travailler comme ça la journée et la nuit* [Participant 128, Visit 3].

The remaining interns (116 and 124) said in general terms that everyone at work was friendly, but both formed their closest relationships with other Anglophone sojourners, outside the work setting.

## Discussion

### *The dynamics of social relations*

Across the different placement types, we can see certain commonalities in the development of relationships, and find some clues to participants’ relative failure to find close French friends. In a change from much earlier research, all participants could now sustain home networks throughout their sojourn through the internet (as also reported by Coleman and Chafer 2010) and/or through travel. Fellow assistants, interns and Erasmus students of similar age were immediately available, either in shared accommodation or through induction events and Facebook, to provide an emotionally supportive peer network. These new relationships rapidly provided a group social life outside the work context, involving informal visiting and sharing of food, going out to bars, clubs and restaurants, and touristic trips. These clusters of sojourners may have seemed socially somewhat exclusive to locals of similar age. Sexual attraction, and/ or a ‘bankable’ talent such as music or sport, might lead to closer same-aged relationships, but these worked out for a minority only. Interestingly, many students concluded their stay by wishing they had co-habited with similar aged French people. But for the few who actually tried it, things could turn out badly, with perceptions of exploitation and/or of harassment on the part of a local main tenant; here, the exceptions were participants who lived with older, settled families or a more altruistic landlord.

### *Language learning and personal growth*

Despite these limitations in terms of social insertion with local communities, other results from the LANGSNAP project confirm that overall the group made very considerable progress with target language development, analysed so far for overall proficiency, for fluency, and for lexical development (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, McManus, Richard, and Romero de Mills 2013) – their workaday use of French in role-related social relationships, plus rich input from the wider social context, were usually sufficient to assure this. Additionally, results from the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire show significant development while abroad on the dimension of “Emotional Stability”, reflecting a greater sense of self efficacy and ability to handle problem solving (Tracy-Ventura et al. 2013). The interview data also broadly confirmed these questionnaire findings concerning growth in self-efficacy; many participants related positive anecdotes of problem-solving, some involving negotiating a range of routine service encounters independently for the first time (such as opening a bank account, renting a flat or buying a car), while others involved coping with more unusual life events such as travel disruptions during extreme weather, dealing with difficult landlords, or an attempted metro station mugging.

## Conclusion

This study partly confirms conclusions from preceding research into social relations among European student sojourners. As noted by Murphy-Lejeune (2002), the participants are young and still in the process of mastering adult independence; some of the learning they go through abroad would have been replicated had they stayed at home. They expect the sojourn to be temporary, and invest effort in maintaining home-based networks; meanwhile, they find emotional support in a more or less instantly created network of other international sojourners. But it is also necessary to construct working relations with local teachers, school pupils, fellow students and/ or workplace team members, which must be managed alongside Erasmus networks, and may interpenetrate them and occasionally even supersede them (the “Erasmus bubble” of Papatsiba (2006) is not hermetically sealed). They find that their English language skills constitute an attractive cultural resource for many local interlocutors (e.g. for employers, or for student tandem partners); most learn to navigate this actual codeswitching environment, extending social relations (and developing their French skills considerably) as a result, despite regretting an imagined, more complete immersion experience. The overall impression of participants’ sense of self is of dynamism and continuing development, with hardly anyone rejecting the experience overall as a negative one, or failing to acknowledge elements of personal growth. Other research has illustrated the lasting impact of temporary mobility on participants’ life course; for example, Janson, Schomburg and Teichler (2009) show that post-sojourners are more likely to work abroad, to have a foreign spouse, and to be interested in further study. The evidence presented in this study, at the very least, does not contradict such positive longer term ‘intercultural’ expectations.

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*Table 1: Participants and their placement*

<insert table 1 around here>

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| --- | --- |
| Language teaching assistants | 101, 105, 106, 109, 110, 111, 114, 115, 117, 119, 120, 122, 123,   127 |
| Exchange students | 104, 107, 108, 112, 118, 121, 126, 129 |
| Workplace interns | 100, 102, 116, 124, 125, 128 |