

Activity Theory-based Narrative Inquiry of Study-Abroad Program Experiences: A Case Study of Two College Students*

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Kim, Eun-Ju. (2014). Activity theory-based narrative inquiry of study-abroad program experiences: A case study of two college students. *Modern English Education*, 15(3), 1-20.

Utilizing narratives from diaries, this case study explores Korean college students' participation in a short-term study-abroad program from an activity theoretic perspective. In particular, the interest of the study is the participants' construction and reconstruction of their daily experiences centered on their motivation for program participation and its relation with the goals they set. Through the description of the dynamic nature of their experience building, the study identifies the factors influencing and being influenced by the participant's study-abroad experience. Two female college students were the participants of the study. Their diary entries were used as the primary data set. Pre- and post- program interviews and other relevant documents (e.g., program orientation materials, class materials, brochures, etc.) were collected as well. The collected data were coded and categorized through constant comparative methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Findings show that the motivation for program participation substantially influences their program participation behavior and attitude and subsequently the quality of their experience. The findings simultaneously reveal the participants' home stay experience as a major social-environmental factor which contributes greatly to shaping each participant's journey of study-abroad experiences. Based on these findings, the study provides the implications and suggestions for what program designers and college officials should consider when planning a study-abroad program.

**[Short-term study-abroad program/activity theory/diary as narrative/college students
단기해외어학연수/ 활동이론/ 일기 내러티브/ 대학생]**

* This work was supported by Hanyang Women's University Research Grant (2011-2). The early version of this paper was presented at 2013 English Education Research Center Annual Conference in Chung-Ang University.

I. INTRODUCTION

Korean English learners' keen interest in study-abroad programs is not a new educational phenomenon. In recent statistics from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST), 125,119 Korean college students participated in study-abroad programs in 2010 (Yoonseok Na, 2012). As shown by the statistics, having study-abroad experience in an English speaking country seems a must-have learning experience by many Korean college students. The effects of study-abroad program participation have been a constant research interest in the field of foreign language education in the western academia (Allen, 2012; Aveni, 2005; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Magnam & Back, 2007; Martinsen, 2008; Martinsen, Baker, Bown, & Johnson, 2011; Rivers, 1998; Yager, 1998). With the increasing number of Korean students who participate in study-abroad programs, then, Korean English learners' experiences in study-abroad programs have become an emerging study topic among researchers (Miyang Cha & Inyoung Shin, 2013; Hyung-ji Chang & Myeong-hee Seong, 2011; Yoonhee Choe, 2013; Eunsil Lee, 2008; Thompson & Junkyu Lee, 2013; Jin-Suk Yang & Tae-Young Kim, 2011). Given that Korean English learners' study-abroad program participation remains high and research interest in this topic is still at an early stage, more studies are needed to investigate Korean English learners' experiences in study-abroad programs from more diverse perspectives.

As an effort to add a more in-depth and comprehensible learners' voice to study-abroad program research, this study explored two Korean college students' experiences in a month-long English study-abroad program through the activity theoretic framework. Whereas the majority of previous studies were interested in the outcome of study-abroad program participation in terms of linguistic gains or its impact on affective aspects (Allen & Herron, 2003; Miyang Cha & Inyoung Shin, 2013; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Martinsen et al., 2011; Yager, 1998), not many studies have been interested in tracking the processes through which the participants produce the reported outcome (Jin-Suk Yang & Tae-Young Kim, 2011). Being interested in the process, the current study examined study-abroad program participants' diaries. Through their diary entries, the researcher explored the trajectories of two Korean college students' daily lives in an unfamiliar foreign learning context and obtained vivid pictures of their experiences and processes for achieving their goals.

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

1. Studies of Study-Abroad Programs

Foreign language learners' experiences of study-abroad programs have been studied

mainly from two perspectives; the first one focuses on the effects of study-abroad programs on participants (Allen & Herron, 2003; Miyang Cha & Inyoung Shin, 2013; Hyung-ji Chang & Myeong-hee Seong, 2011; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Martinsen, 2008; Martinsen et al., 2011; Rivers, 1998; Yager, 1998; Eunsil Lee, 2008; Thompson & Junkyu Lee, 2013; Jin-Suk Yang & Tae-Young Kim, 2011), and the other about the factors which might potentially influence the learners' language development (Allen, 2012; Aveni, 2005; Magnam & Back, 2007).

As one of the early studies of study-abroad programs, Yager (1998) examined whether 30 American French learners' speaking skills had increased after a 5-week study-abroad program in France. Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) was adopted to measure their oral skills, and the study found that 22 of the learners significantly improved their speaking ability. In the same year, Rivers's study (1998) reported the language gains of 2,500 American participants of study-abroad programs in Russia. Interestingly, he compared the linguistic gains between homestay group learners and dormitory group learners. According to the result, even though both groups improved their language ability, the homestay group only improved in reading, but was "likely to gain less" (p.31) in listening and speaking than the dormitory group. This result was quite noteworthy in that the homestay group was generally expected to have more speaking and listening advantages with their host families. Based on the result, Rivers argues that being placed with a homestay family is not enough, suggesting that more careful screening or selecting procedures for homestay families are in need for the successful language experience of students in homestay situations.

In a similar vein, Aveni (2005) argues that a host family's behavior and attitude can have a substantial influence on study-abroad program participants as a crucial social-environmental factor or communicative setting (Younhee Choe, 2013). Based on her study, Aveni argues that homestay family can both positively and negatively influences a learner's study-abroad experience. For the participants' successful adoption to the new environment, Aveni mentions, "patient and non-judgmental caretaking" (p. 61) of homestay family members is needed. This patient and non-judgmental caretaking of homestay family members was reported to increase a program participant's sense of security, and subsequently the participant's comfort level.

Not only the social-environmental factors or communicative setting, but learner-internal factors are also pointed out as the important predictors for learners' linguistic gains from a study-abroad program (Aveni, 2005; Martinsen, 2008). Learner-internal factors, such as attitude, anxiety, feeling of competitiveness, and comparison, are also believed to have a significant influence on study-abroad program participants' experiences. In Martinsen's (2008) study which examined 45 American college students who took part in a six-week long study-abroad program in Argentina, learners who had a higher cultural sensitivity were more successful in improving their

speaking skills. That is, having a positive attitude toward the target language culture, and acknowledging differences with readiness to adapt quickly would contribute to the improvement of learners' speaking ability.

Likewise, Eunsil Lee (2008) reported that the students who initially underwent emotional disturbance such as homesickness, loneliness, depression, or a feeling of powerlessness had difficulty in participating in their study-abroad program. She examined three Korean adult students during their five-month-long study-abroad program, and reported that all three participants experienced emotional hardship at the initial stage of the program. Based on the findings, Eunsil Lee argues that rather than taking learners' hardship for granted as a part of the adjustment process in a foreign environment, identifying specific difficulties and developing coping strategies for learners are needed for their successful adjustment to and completion of a study abroad program. Eunsil Lee also identifies that one way to overcome the hardship is learners' empowerment of themselves by "taking opportunities in various social and cultural situations inside and outside the classroom" (p. 145). This shows that learner-internal factors are not purely individual or personal matters, but inter-related with social-environmental factors; that is, through active involvement with the target language learning context by diverse interactions and relationship building, the participants themselves should gain the ability to express themselves.

As a study dealing with both social-environmental and learner-internal factors, Allen (2012) recently compared two American college students in a French study-abroad program. Using activity theory as a theoretical framework, she examined the two college students' six-week-long experience through 10 journal entries and three interviews. Her study found that different motives and goals between the two participants became the sources of different types of participation. Therefore, she argues that the context of learning "is emergent from individuals' language-learning motives and reasons for engaging in a study-abroad program" (p. 452). What the reviewed studies imply is that study-abroad program participants' experiences could be viewed as the interplay of learner-internal factors and social-environmental factors. With the purpose of providing a holistic picture of this interplay of learner-internal factors and social-environmental factors from Korean English learners' study-abroad program experiences, then, this study adopted activity theory as the theoretical and methodological framework.

2. Activity Theory

Like sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), activity theory assumes that all human beings are involved in a series of goal-oriented activities in their lives (Leont'ev, 1981). As agents of these goal-oriented activities, humans utilize various artifacts, or tools to

achieve their goals. The tools range from simple physical tools (e.g., hammer, pen, knife, etc.) to abstract and intangible ones (e.g. language, music, philosophy, etc.). While humans mediate tools to achieve the goal of their activity, internalization or learning is believed to occur. In doing an activity, people also find a novel use of a tool for a goal or set a new goal as well. Therefore, it is important to closely examine people's motivation and goal of certain actions and behaviors along with the process people go through to achieve the goals to understand the people truly. In other words, activity theory argues that it is important to acknowledge “a dialectic link between internal and external factors” (Allen, 2012).

Activity Theory also focuses on the community humans are situated in and functions in, whereby the goals people set and the tools they use influence and are influenced. The community then shares implicit and explicit rules as well as instituting a labor division. In this sense, it can be said that the community influences and constructs people's involvement in a certain activity system, and vice versa. Therefore, according to this theory, when people's engagement in an activity system is examined, it is necessary to explore the community and the people's relation with it. All the elements involved in humans' goal-oriented activities—agents, tools, goals, community, rule, labor of division—are called the activity system and the conditions of the activity system sometimes lead to shifts in human goals and outcomes (Engeström, 1999). Due to this integrated approach to understanding human actions and cognition, activity theory is believed as a powerful descriptive instrument explaining people in various contexts (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2004).

Acknowledging the descriptive power of activity theory, this study adopted activity theory as a theoretic framework to explore two college EFL students' participation in a short-term study-abroad program. By investigating how the two participants, as agents, construct and reconstruct their activity systems of this study-abroad program, how the goals are realized or shifted, and what the influencing factors are during their participatory actions, the study intends to discover the dialectic link between internal and external factors shaping the process of the participants' experiences, and draw meaning of their experiences in relation to language learning. To fulfill the purpose of this study, two research questions were devised as follows:

- 1) How do the two Korean college students construct and reconstruct their daily study-abroad program participation?
- 2) What are the factors influencing the two Korean college students' participation in the study-abroad program?

III. METHOD

1. The Study-Abroad Program

The four-week study-abroad program took place in a college-affiliated English language center in Melbourne, Australia. Upon arriving, 19 program participants, all English majors, took the placement test and were placed into different level classes—1 being the lowest level and 6 the highest one. The program offered two ESL classes, a general (skill-integrated) class and a speaking class. Either in the morning or in the afternoon, the students took one class each day. Each class lasted around four hours per day. The program also offered some extracurricular activities, called workshops, where a group of volunteers participated in extra English speaking and/or listening activities. For self-directed learning, the participants could use language learning programs (e.g., a pronunciation practice software) in the computer lab. All participants lived with Australian host families, and each family sponsored two students from the college. All the participants were the recipients of partial financial supports from their college in Korea. Lastly, a professor, not the researcher of this study, from the department stayed with the program participants as an advisor.

2. Participants

Out of 19 program participants, five students volunteered to participate in the current study. After returning from the program, four students submitted their diary entries to the researcher and had interviews. Among them, due to the limit of space, two students were chosen as the focus of this study. The two participants for this study were Minyoung and Aeri. At the time of data collection, they were both freshmen at a college in Seoul.

1) Minyoung

Minyoung had lived in Argentina as a child for almost 6 years until she returned to Korea to receive elementary school education. Minyoung remembered that she spoke both Spanish and English in Argentina and attended an intentional kindergarten. At the time of the data collection, however, Minyoung admitted that she was hardly able to communicate in Spanish and not good in English either due to language attrition. After the placement test, Minyoung was placed in level 4 general and speaking classes held in the morning.

2) Aeri

Unlike Minyoung, Aeri had no experience in living or traveling overseas, so this was her first experience of visiting a foreign country. At the time of data collection, however, her sister was studying at a language center in California to enter an American college, and this seemed to make her more interested in going to a foreign country. In particular, Aeri had wanted to travel to Australia after watching the Australia episode in a travel program on TV (Pre-program Interview). Aeri mentioned that she had a very high interest in Australia and wanted to enjoy the beautiful nature of the country (Pre-program Interview). Aeri was initially placed in level 4 general and speaking classes, but after the first class she was moved to level 3 classes.

3. Data Collection

The primary data for this study were the diary entries Minyoung and Aeri wrote during their time in the study-abroad program. Many previous studies label diaries as "a rich source of data enabling a focus on personal studies of language learning" (Allen, 2012, p. 455), to which this study agrees. The researcher provided a notebook for each volunteer before they left for Australia. A brief guideline for the diary was provided as well. Minyoung's diary has 28 entries (11,309 words) and Aeri's diary has 29 entries (5,858 words). As observed from the total number of words in each participant's diary, Minyoung wrote much more than Aeri did, providing very detailed descriptions of and reflections on both on-campus and off-campus activities and events. The language option for diary writing was given to the participants, and both wrote most of their diary entries in Korean.

Another data source includes semi-structured pre- and post-program interviews. Before each interview, the researcher prepared several questions, but other relevant topics and issues emerging during the interviews also became part of the interviews. The pre-program interview was performed in the format of a focus group interview where all five volunteering participants met and had an open discussion for 20 minutes about their motivation and goals for participation and what they expected from their participation. Meanwhile, the post-program interviews were individually conducted three weeks after the conclusion of the program. The post-program interview was centered on the contents of participants' diary entries as well as their evaluation of the experience. The researcher read their diaries before the post-program interview and prepared clarifying and further questions for each participant. The researcher's interpretation of some diary entries was checked as well. The post-program interview with Minyoung lasted approximately 70 minutes, and approximately 50 minutes for the interview with Aeri. Interviews were

conducted in Korean. The data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim later, and the part presented in this paper was translated into English. Finally, copies of the documents collected by each participant (e.g., program orientation materials, class materials, brochures, grade sheets, etc.) are included as data.

4. Data Analysis

The constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) was adopted to analyze the data. First, through careful readings of each participant's diary entries, initial open coding was conducted line by line. Multiple readings of the diaries then lead to axial coding. For example, from Aeri's diary, the sentences, "I didn't say a word to the person next to me, after telling that I couldn't speak English," and "I gradually became isolated in the class" were meaning units and initially coded as "level 4 class" and later categorized as "negative class experiences" in axial coding. When axial codings were finished, checking the categorization was conducted, and, at this phase, the categories were interpreted from an Activity Theory perspective. Relevant categories were interpreted being linked to agents, goals, tools, community, rule, and division of labor. In addition to the analysis of each individual participant, two participants' data were also cross-checked. The findings are arrayed based on cross-checking of two data sets in this study.

Member check process with the participants was conducted during the post-interview sessions regarding both the researcher's interpretations of the diary contents and specific meanings of several sentences in the diaries. As a peer-debriefing session, the researcher's interpretation was presented to and reviewed by colleagues in an academic conference. Feedback from the peer-debriefing is reflected in this paper. Lastly, English translation of the diary entries in this study was reviewed by an English native speaker who is also quite fluent in Korean.

IV. FINDINGS

The results of the data analysis show that much of Minyoung's and Aeri's experience in the study-abroad program reflected their 'adjustment' process to the new environment. That is, while adjusting themselves to the new environment, both Minyoung and Aeri experienced diverse encounters and incidents, and their perception of these and actions proceeded in different directions. In this section, each participant's adjustment experiences are presented showing the close relation of human behavior and cognition in a goal-oriented activity.

1. Minyoung's Story of Adjustment: A Journey of Making a New Family

When asked her motivation for the study-abroad participation during the pre-program interview, Minyoung said, “My real goal is that I want—once I get there, I want to make many foreign friends so I can use English in everyday life” (Pre-program Interview). Here, Minyoung states two goals for the program participation: making friends and using English while spending time with them. Her goal might have been influenced by her learning experience in Argentina; she remembered that she learned a lot of Spanish and English from the interaction with her local friends (Pre-program Interview).

In her first day diary entry, Minyoung set another goal for the program. After sharing an episode of getting lost on her way back home, Minyoung mentioned that she should have been more active in using English (e.g., asking questions):

<Excerpt 1>

What I realized today is that, on no condition, **I am going to speak a lot while staying here.** I am going to throw away the fear of speaking in English and become a person who speaks (English) confidently. (Diary Entry # 1, June 26)

Minyoung’s determination to speak more and be more active led to her active participation in the classroom and positive attitude toward the classes. During four weeks, Minyoung never missed a class and was late for a class only once. In her diary entries, Minyoung showed her high motivation and active participation by mentioning how much she enjoyed the class activities and time with teachers as well as classmates. With a positive attitude toward the program, for instance, she tried to find the positive aspect of each course she took;

<Excerpt 2>

The activity was completing handout Lucy gave us, and I did the similar activity so many times back in Korea. I felt futile. **However, there was still difference. In Korea, even though a teacher was a native speaker, I mostly spoke in Korean because all of my classmates were Koreans. Here, however, it is natural to speak in English because classmates are not all Koreans...**This was a very good experience to me as well. (Diary Entry # 4, June 29)

Although Minyoung was initially disappointed when the classroom activity itself was not novel to her, she identified the difference in the communicative setting of the classroom and did her best in completing the task. She especially enjoyed the speaking class as written in the fifth day diary entry:

<Excerpt 3>

[I] did different activities and **all of them were interesting**. One minute face-to-face talking especially is my favorite. **I can't wait for tomorrow's class.**"
(Diary Entry # 5, June 30)

Minyoung's attitude toward the courses remained positive until the end of the program:

<Excerpt 4>

When I entered the room, Jane told me that I carry some good fragrance. I felt good. I chatted with Skippy and told Tony about Kevin's visiting to my home stay. Tony told me that it's very fun. **Class starts with free talking as usual. It is really fun to do.** My last partner was Jane and she summarized very well. Then, we learned English expressions used in the hospital situation after an hospital appointment is made. We also did a role play. Nanyoung became my partner and she was very entertaining. (Diary Entry # 20, July 15)

Excerpt 4 also shows that Minyoung was having active interaction with her classmates as well as her teacher (Jane). Her diary entries frequently introduced an episode of meeting and talking with her classmate on the bus or the tram, let alone in class. As such, Minyoung's positive attitude toward the courses and her active participation seem to contribute to her satisfaction with the study-abroad program participation. As an agent of the activity system (study-abroad program), Minyoung internalizes the tool (e.g. active class participation, good relationship with her community members, etc.) to achieve the goals she stated. When asked whether her goals and expectations she had for the study-abroad program were met, not surprisingly, Minyoung expressed her high satisfaction as follows:

<Excerpt 5>

If I can express how much of my expectations are met in terms of stars, **I would give 4.5 out of 5. [It was] almost perfect- very satisfying and really the best....**I made friends- well - something like cultural exchange - talking with people- I wanted it in a natural setting, and I believe that I succeeded [in it] to a certain extent.
(Post-program Interview)

Minyoung believes that the goals she set were virtually obtained. The outcome of her study-abroad program participation was Minyoung's increased confidence in using English: "Before the program, I had I used to avoid It's shameful but (when a

foreigner talked to me) I used to think “why does the foreigner talk to me?” **But now I often think “Why does the foreigner not talk to me?”** (Post-program Interview).

In achieving the goals, the courses she took and people she met in the classrooms, as community members, seemed to play important roles. More than her classmates and people she met on campus, however, Minyoung’s primary adjustment occurred in her relationship with her homestay family. Unlike her classmates from school who were placed together with another classmate with one homestay family, Minyoung was placed alone. Minyoung’s host family consisted of Sally, homestay mom; Jim, homestay dad; and John, their son. Minyoung also had 6 housemates, three of whom were Korean males and the other three were from China, Thailand, and the Netherlands. For the first several days, Minyoung had a difficult time adapting to the family due to her awkward relationship with the housemates, unfamiliar conversation topics at the dinner table, and the lack of ability to express herself:

<Excerpt 6>

Dinner menu was spaghetti. I just sat at a table but soon was asked to move. **I felt embarrassed.** While having dinner, everybody talked and **I felt really uncomfortable with these men. Everybody spoke in English but the topic was not familiar. I was almost crazy. In fact, tears almost flew.** (Diary Entry # 2, June 27)

Later, during the post-program interview, Minyoung further described this situation more in detail:

<Excerpt 7>

During dinner at dinner table, (home stay) family talked most. Sally talked about things, Korean boys talked a lot **everything in English. In English**– but to me, because **I was new everything was unfamiliar and puzzling.** And (they) spoke too fast topic was not understandable- I couldn’t get what they talked about When I sometimes understood, I guessed the topic. **I wished that the dinner time passed really fast. Because I was not supposed to leave until others finish....**Anyhow, early on **I felt really uncomfortable.** (Post-program Interview)

In particular, she felt most uncomfortable with the Korean housemates who had talked to her in English, which caused a tension between agent (Minyoung) and community member (Korean housemates). Although she had decided to speak in English a lot, Minyoung felt distressed by the Korean housemates’ English, and her distress accumulated for several days until she finally burst into tears in front of them:

<Excerpt 8>

I was watching TV and Myungho, Hyun and Jintae got home. Myungho asked how my day was in English. **He asked if it was good and I answered ‘no’ and began talking about my uncomfortable feeling. I burst into tears in spite of myself.** They got embarrassed and told me there was misunderstanding...I found that we misunderstood one another. **I felt much better after the talk.** (Diary Entry # 5, June 30)

The tension between her and her Korean housemates was resolved, and afterwards they kept a good relationship; Jintae helped with her school assignment (Diary Entry # 20, July 5) and Minyoung sometimes taught piano to Hyun (Diary Entries 15 & 26, July 10 & 21). She also maintained a good relationship with the other international housemates; they watched sports games on TV together and played pocketball. As such, Minyoung’s involvement with her housemates (community members) played positive roles in making her goals of study-abroad program realized.

Most of all, however, Sally, Minyoung’s homestay mom, was a prominent and constant supporter during her study-abroad program. Sally was an English language tutor (Diary Entries # 5 & 7, June 30 & July 2), a friend who shared a secret and a beautiful sunset (Diary Entries # 4, 13 & 14, June 29, July 8 & 9), and, lastly, a mother who folded her laundry (Diary Entry # 10, July 5), took care of her when Minyoung was sick (Diary Entry # 13, July 8), and always prepared delicious meals:

<Excerpt 9>

Sally welcomed me today too. **I showed what I learned at school and she corrected some of my work.** I was not sure where I should sit at dinner table and told Sally my concern. She wrote my name on a piece of paper gave it to me and told me to put it where I wanted. I quickly placed the name tag next to Sally’s seat. (Diary Entry # 5, June 30)

<Excerpt 10>

I was lying on bed in my room, and soon Sally came in with medicine and water. She told me either to skip the class or go there late...Sally kissed my cheek twice and left room saying that I should take care. **She is a truly warmhearted person.** (Diary Entry # 23, July 8)

<Excerpt 11>

When I got home, Sally gave me a hearty welcome as usual. I went to my room, took a thank you note and chocolate I prepared, and gave them to her. Then, **I burst**

into tears again. Sally hugged me tight, kissed me, and patted my back telling that she understood how I felt. (Diary Entry # 28, July 23)

In fact, Sally's name was one of the words mentioned most frequently in Minyoung's diary, and this implies that Sally was at the center of Minyoung's mediation and a core community member in her activity system of the study-abroad program. In the post-program interview, Minyoung acknowledged that she regards Sally as mom in Australia:

<Excerpt 12>

She was and is - **I feel that she's my mom.** Like my real mom, she helped me and encouraged me. Without her, I guess that my life in Australia must have been very tough...Yes! **She is a real mom.** (Post-program Interview)

When Minyoung was asked about her most impressive memory during the study-abroad program, she mentions, "I was most happy when I was with my host family members"(Post-program Interview). Starting as a total stranger in her home stay community, in fact, Minyoung gradually moved from the periphery to the center of homestay family life. Through her shouting, "dinner is ready," to the whole family (Diary Entry # 27, July 22), Minyoung showed her true comfort as a member of the home stay family. The last sentence of her last diary entry supports this; "I feel that I have my family left in Australia. I really miss them and want to go there again" (Diary Entry # 28, July 23).

2. Aeri's Story of Adjustment: A Journey of Building Friendship

Aeri's motivation for study-abroad participation is somewhat different from Minyoung's motivation. Aeri stated, "For me I want travelling only. I don't want to return (to Korea). Anyhow, I want to have a great time. I want to travel" (Pre-program Interview). That is, while in Australia, Aeri was mostly interested in having various experiences through sightseeing. Reflecting her stated motivation, on the first page of her diary, she wrote the following 12 activities she wanted to do while in Australia: visiting Great Ocean Road, trekking along the seashore, meeting with wild animals, visiting Federation Square, visiting Uluru & Kata Tjuta, visiting the Queen Victoria Building, going bungee jumping, visiting the Gold Coast in Brisbane, visiting the Royal Zoo in Melbourne, visiting the Opera House and Harbor Bridge, visiting Sovereign Hill, going on a city tour in a tram (Diary Entry # 1, June 23). As such, as a person who had no previous international travel experience, Aeri was very excited and had very high

expectations for her fun days in Melbourne (Diary Entry # 2, June 25).

Thus, for Aeri, the most unforgettable memory during the study-abroad program was related to sightseeing. When asked her most impressive memory during the program participation, Aeri answered:

<Excerpt 13>

It was Great Ocean Great Ocean [Was it most impressive to you?] Yes! It was really awesome. Really. (Post-program Interview)

In Aeri's diary, in fact, the strongly positive adjectives such as 'fun,' 'grateful,' 'awesome,' 'unforgettable,' and 'beautiful' (Diary Entries # 3, 7, 19, 20, & 24, June 26, 30, July 3, 14, 17) appeared in the diary entries when she either went shopping, on a (city) tour, or on a field trip. Alternately, adjectives such as 'poor' (Diary Entry # 7, June 30), 'boring' (Diary Entries # 13, 14, & 26, July 6, 7 & 19), 'annoyed' (Diary Entry # 14, July 7), 'so-so' (Diary Entry # 15, July 8), and 'no fun' (Diary Entry # 26, July 19) appeared when Aeri described one of the classes in the program:

<Excerpt 14>

The class was terrible. I did the activity of filling out blanks with connectors such as *but, so, because*. I am not a middle school student. (Diary Entry # 7, June 30)

<Excerpt 15>

The class was so boring. At the end of the class, the instructor of the class asked me whether the class was fun and I lied to him saying it was fun. **But it was really boring.** (Diary Entry # 13, July 6)

Unlike Minyoung, however, Aeri rarely wrote in detail about what activities she did in classes, even though she said that the speaking class was fun (Diary Entry # 24, July 17). In the post program interview, Aeri mentioned, "I like invigorating class atmosphere but the (general English class) teacher- His class was boring. No fun but just lecture" (Post-program Interview). Aeri's statement somewhat reflects what types of class she prefers and why she prefers the speaking class rather than the teacher-fronted general class. As an agent of her activity system of the study-abroad program, Aeri seemed to negatively mediate the classroom learning to achieve her goal which was to have fun.

In Aeri's diary, instead of class activities or classmates, Sunhee, her schoolmate, appeared a lot. Sunhee appeared in 26 entries out of 29 entries in Aeri's diary, revealing that Sunhee was an important community member in Aeri's activity system of the study-abroad program. Specifically, Aeri mediated her relationship with Sunhee to

obtain the goals she set; having fun through sightseeing.; after school, they visited shopping centers or markets in the city, and spent time shopping, eating snacks, and/or drinking beverages. Although Aeri often worried about her spending, she did not stop going shopping and subsequently shopping was one of the major topics in her diary. When asked the meaning of shopping to her during the program, Aerie expressed her excitement about shopping mall visits as follows:

<Excerpt 16>

To me, shopping was a fun thing to do. [The shopping mall] was huge and had lots of luxury brands we don't have in Korea. Because it is huge and has so many amazing stuff, [I] kept going there and still **found new things everyday.** (Post-program Interview)

Aeri was placed in a host family which consisted of Amy, the host mom, and two daughters. Aeri shared a room with Haeji, who was another participant in the same study-abroad program. From the beginning, Aeri did not enjoy the dishes prepared by Amy; she did not like having cereal as breakfast (Diary Entries # 4 & 5, June 27 & 28); the food Amy prepared was plain, greasy or not cooked enough. (Diary Entries # 3, 9, 16, & 22, June 26, July 2, 9, & 15):

<Excerpt 17>

Dinner was drumsticks and fried rice, but they were too salty...Water smells like tap water. (Diary Entry #9, July 2)

Based on her mention of food, it is possible to assume that food was very important for Aeri's adjustment in the program, but her home stay did not satisfy her expectations. Aeri could not adjust to her homestay mom's cooking, so she started purchasing and eating Korean instant noodles and rice, and subsequently she often did not finish the food prepared at her homestay house. Also, Aeri compared her host mom with Sunhee's and envied Sunhee because her homestay mom seemed kinder and cooked better (Diary, Entries # 5 & 21, June 28 & July 14). Aeri's dissatisfactions with her homestay family seemed to partially come from her low cultural sensitivity as well. In the post-program interview, Aeri mentioned:

<Excerpt 18>

At first, they [home stay families] seemed nice. **But, they were somewhat cheap about food.** If they have something to eat- would't it be good to share with me? but **they ate the food themselves.** I think it is too cheap. I shared my food with

them but (Post-program Interview)

Being used to the Korean culture of food sharing, that is, Aeri did not understand the homestay family's not sharing food and thus she became upset about it. Not being allowed to eat her host family's food without permission, Aeri sometimes had to suppress her desire for some food in the refrigerator (Diary Entry #23, July 16). By violating the homestay rule (rule of community), one day, she brought Sunhee to her homestay house without her homestay mom's permission (Diary Entry #26, July 19). All these incidents made Aeri feel uncomfortable with her homestay family as the study-abroad program came closer to an end. Here, Aeri's homestay family, as a tool for goal achievement, was negatively mediated in Aeri's goal achievement in the activity system of study-abroad program.

Showing these conflicts, Aeri concluded that her study-abroad program experience could have been perfect without her homestay family. When asked how much satisfied she was with the program participation, Aeri stated as follows:

<Excerpt 19>

It is 100%... Yes. **It was really satisfying except the home stay family.**
(Post-program Interview)

Her relationship with host family was negative. Aeri was, however, very satisfied with the study-abroad program because she had fun with Sunhee as well as built a solid friendship with her during the program participation in Australia:

<Excerpt 20>

I believe that I made a friend who happened to be a really good person...People say that friends you meet at college are not genuine friends. Since I believe this I've thought that they are friends only on campus. So, I haven't treated my classmates as sincere friends who I can continue hearty meeting. But, **while hanging around with Sunhee, her personality is so cool** in fact, she is the one who told me that the stereotype I had is wrong. (Post-program Interview)

V. DISCUSSION

Viewed from an Activity Theory perspective, the findings can be summarized as follows; Minyoung, as an agent, set the goal to speak a lot during her participation in the study-abroad program with a motivation of improving her English proficiency as well as making friends. First, Minyoung mediated the relationship with her classmates and

teachers in addition to classroom instruction. In particular, the off-campus communicative setting, home stay family, emerged as the main social environmental factor activating her to use English in a natural setting. Although there was an initial contradiction between her (agent) and her Korean housemates (community members), the communicative setting Minyoung was situated in was overall positively perceived and realized, resulting that she did not experience a shift in goal or behavior toward her goal achievement. By observing the rules of the study-abroad program community, Minyoung attended most classes regularly, enjoyed the classes with a positive attitude, and did her best to follow both the program and homestay rules.

Unlike Minyoung, Aeri participated in the study-abroad program with the identity of a traveler. Taking the language courses and putting effort into her classes was not the major concern to Aeri. Rather than practicing English in the language courses provided on campus, Aeri chose to conduct off campus activities mostly with Sunhee. As a way to achieve her goal of having fun, that is, Aeri visited local shopping centers almost every day and spent most afternoons there. In contrast with Minyoung, Aeri's mediation of her host family became negative as time went by. She made little effort to understand her stay home family's life style (e.g. food sharing). As such, Aeri's low cultural sensitivity gradually made her dissatisfied with her homestay family, and she spent more time out of her homestay house, which is different from the experience of Minyoung who spent much more time with her homestay family and housemates. Despite the fact that she was in a foreign country, Aeri's diary showed that Aeri was not really interested in adjusting herself to the new setting. Instead, Aeri kept the identity of traveler she brought from Korea and maintained her Korean-ness during her study-abroad program participation. This was the choice Aeri made as an agent of her activity system and it was definitely influenced by her motivation for the study-abroad program participation (Allen, 2012).

Similar to the participants in the previous studies (Aveni, 2005, Eunsil Lee, 2008), emotion also played an important role in both participants' adjustment processes. Minyoung initially felt a sense of insecurity, but it was soon resolved by her supportive host family members and housemates. Aeri, on the other hand, resolved her growing tension with her homestay family through avoiding the situation; then, she established the close association with Sunhee. Given that active involvement in the target community is an effective way to overcome emotional crisis and furthermore to be successful in a study-abroad program (Eunsil Lee, 2008), Aeri's avoidance of more active interaction with the host family might have influenced the quality of her experience of study-abroad program. Aeri's case also shows that low cultural sensitivity could result in reduced opportunity to interact with local people in the target language and develop the language skill (Martinsen, 2008).

VI. CONCLUSION

Through the narratives of two college students in a study-abroad program, this case study explored how both learner-internal factors (i.e., motivation, goal, attitude, etc.) and social-environmental factors (i.e., relationship with homestay family, classmates, and housemates) simultaneously function in constructing the daily experiences of study-abroad program participants. Being complexly interwoven, several factors influenced and were influenced by the daily actions and reflections of Minyoung and Aeri. Most of all, however, their motivation and goals for the study-abroad program participation turned out to play a pivotal role in constructing their perception of and actions in the study-abroad program. As an effective descriptive tool, then, activity theory has made it possible to describe and identify the interplay of these factors in this study.

Given the dialectic relationship between learner-internal factors and social-environmental factors, however, it is impossible to predict how each participant's experience would be constructed if they had been situated in different communicative settings (i.e., different classes or different homestay families) during their participation. Therefore, it is too early to generalize the findings from these two cases to the other studies interested in the learners' adjustment process in study-abroad programs. More in-depth case studies introducing other cases are still needed to enrich the understanding of Korean students' daily experiences in their study-abroad programs. Also, for future research, adding perspectives of host family regarding Korean participants would provide valuable insights for improving students' cultural sensitivity and even more successful experience in study-abroad programs.

From an activity theory perspective, this study highlights the important roles of motivation and goal the participants set for their program participation. At the same time, however, activity theory also makes it possible to consider goals and motivation can be transformed depending on social-environmental factors. Therefore, the study suggests that college officials concerned need to design the systematic orientation sessions for study-abroad programs, where the participants could have chances to reflect upon their goals and expectations. By sharing and discussing the goals of a study-abroad program with others, students might have the chance to reflect and adjust their goals, expectations, and/or attitude. Lastly, both Minyoung and Aeri perceived their study-abroad program participation as a success but, as the study shows, the quality of experience was somewhat different between them. From an educational perspective, thus, it is recommend that tasks (e.g., writing reflective English diary) that could provide the participants with opportunities to practice the target language and/or reflect upon their learning process in foreign contexts can be given to make learners' experiences more constructive and meaningful in terms of language learning and teaching.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Language: English

Applicable Level: Tertiary

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Received 14 June 2014

Revised 4 August 2014

Accepted 20 August 2014