Sociocultural analysis of second language learner beliefs: A qualitative case study of two study-abroad ESL learners

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Sociocultural analysis of second language learner beliefs: A qualitative case study of two study-abroad ESL learners

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Abstract

Framed in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind, this paper explores second language (L2) learning beliefs in study-abroad (SA) contexts. Previous research on learner beliefs has relied mostly on survey methods, while regarding belief as a static, internal representation of experience that is resistant to change. Due to the concern regarding the prevalence of a cognitive orientation, this qualitative research examines two L2 learners’ belief changes and their impact on motivated L2 behaviors from an SCT perspective. The data were collected mainly through pre- and post-SA interviews and monthly-collected journals with other triangulating methods such as L2 learning autobiographies and stimulated recall tasks. The findings suggest that 1) a learner’s L2 beliefs are constantly evolving in accordance with their goals and SA experiences, and 2) the learner’s L2 belief changes capture a remediation process that leads to qualitatively different L2 learning actions. This paper challenges the common assumption that L2-rich exposure through SA is the optimal way to improve L2 proficiency. Rather, it shows that the learner’s internalized L2 beliefs aligned with meaningful L2 environments can exert crucial influences on the success of SA learning.

Keywords: Learner beliefs; Vygotskian sociocultural theory; Remediation; Internalization

1. Introduction

Framed in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind (Vygotsky, 1978), this paper explores second language (L2) learning beliefs in study-abroad (SA) contexts. We report two SA learners’ idiosyncratic L2 learning experiences in reference to their L2 belief changes. In the field of second language acquisition, learner beliefs have been studied with a cognitive orientation (Barcelos, 2003). For example, after the seminal work by Horwitz (1987, 1988) in the late 1980s, beliefs were viewed as stable, isolated phenomena that are extractable from learners’ pencil-and-paper responses (e.g., Tanaka and Ellis, 2003). While the previous studies have produced insightful findings on the relationship between learner beliefs and their L2 learning behaviors, this research did not address the possibilities that learner beliefs may change in the context of social interactions and, subsequently, lead to qualitatively different L2 learning.

Due to the concern regarding the prevalence of a cognitive orientation, this study adopted a socially informed perspective where learner beliefs are viewed as emergent in social contexts and (re)shaped through specific instances
of social interaction (Woods, 2003). In particular, we chose SA learners because SA is a powerful experience that can shape and reformulate the learners’ L2 goals as well as their L2 learning motivation (Allen, 2010; Allen and Kim, 2010; Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Kim, 2009, 2011). Methodologically, a longitudinal case study design was used in order to provide in-depth analysis on the belief changes and their impact on L2 learning actions (Barcelos, 2008). By analyzing the multiple qualitative data from two SA learners, it is argued that learners’ belief changes can be seen as their agentive efforts to reconstruct the relationship between the learner and the L2 learning environment.

2. Theoretical framework: SCT and learner beliefs

In this section, we briefly introduce the main concepts underlying Vygotsky’s SCT. Then, by referring to previous studies, we propose the idea that changes in learner beliefs can bring about a qualitative transformation in the relationship between the learner and the environment.

The main focus of SCT is to understand how the development of higher mental functions (e.g., calculating, reasoning, and learning) is related to the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts that an individual lives in (Wertsch, 1998). Viewing the relationship between an individual and the social contexts as reciprocal in nature, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that as we use physical tools and create labor activity in order to change the relationship with the external world, we also use culturally organized symbolic (or psychological) tools to regulate and promote intellectual development. This process is called mediation through mediational tools.

Sociocultural researchers have suggested that cognitive development is in nature dialectical, expansive, and transformative (Engeström, 1999). That is, instead of learning as accumulation of knowledge in an additive way, participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the transformation should be involved in cognitive development. This process, termed remediation, is defined as “a shift in the way that mediating devices regulate coordination with the environment” (Cole and Griffin, 1986: 113). With regard to L2 learning beliefs, we understand that L2 belief changes can promote L2 remediation process because the changes of learner beliefs can invoke a tension between the environments and learner perception, leading to qualitatively different actions.

In the field of applied linguistics, SCT researchers have focused on the function of private speech, gesture, and internet-mediated communication in (re)mediating the L2 learning process (e.g., McCafferty and Stam, 2008; Ohta, 2001; Thorne, 2003). Growing attention has recently been focused on the learner beliefs in mediating cognition. For instance, based on 18 months of longitudinal data, Alanen (2003) investigated how Finnish young L2 learners created language learning beliefs. She showed that all the beliefs represented in learners’ utterances may not clearly reflect their own ideas about language learning. From a similar viewpoint, Kim (2007, 2008) highlighted the dual functions of L2 learner beliefs. Kim’s research shows that even if the belief in the superiority of native English speakers can provide learners with the motivation to pursue L2-rich interaction opportunities, the excessive beliefs may not be satisfied in multilingual communities, resulting in ineffective L2 learning. It should be noted, however, that not all beliefs can function as a remediation tool. As Tudge (1999) reiterated, learner beliefs should be internalized to the extent that the beliefs can regulate and control actions. If not, the beliefs remain as vague ideas crafted from others’ opinions, representing less successful remediation.

From a Vygotskian SCT perspective, a point of interest is to investigate the hidden logic of each learner’s idiosyncratic L2 belief changes and their impact on SA experiences. Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Alanen, 2003; Kim, 2007, 2008; Kim and Yang, 2010), little research has been conducted to empirically examine the learner belief changes and their influence on future L2 learning behaviors, with most of the research being restricted to the theoretical realm. We therefore posit two exploratory research questions:

1. How do SA learners’ L2 beliefs change in the new SA contexts?
2. How can we conceptualize the learners’ belief changes from a sociocultural viewpoint?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

Originally, a total of four SA students studying in ESL language schools were recruited for this study. For in-depth analysis, two of the four ESL learners, Yong and Hye-In (both pseudonyms), are presented in this paper. In
choosing these two core-participants, after initially screening the participants based on the type of SA program and L2 proficiency, the priority was given to those who have socio-historically different goals in SA participation (see Table 1).

Although both learners apparently shared a similar L2 belief that exposure to an L2 environment would be beneficial in developing L2 proficiency, SCT analysis will reveal that the two learners’ motivated L2 behaviors and L2 achievements were qualitatively different in accordance with their belief changes in SA contexts.

3.2. Research data collection and analysis

Research data were collected from four complementary sources: language learning autobiographies, journal entries\(^1\) (once a month during the sojourn period), pre- and post-SA interviews (see Appendix 1 for sample interview questions), and stimulated recall tasks.

Before going abroad, the research participants had an opportunity to retrospectively examine their own L2 learning experiences since early childhood. In particular, we asked them to write about how the previous L2 learning experiences had influenced their SA participation. The participants were interviewed both before and after going abroad. In the pre-SA interview, they were asked about their reasons for going abroad and how they were going to accomplish their goal in order to understand their beliefs about SA participation. The post-SA interview used the same interview questions as that of the pre-SA interview in order to find out whether their perceptions on SA had changed or not. All interviews were conducted in Korean. In addition, a stimulated recall task, in which the participants brought memorable pictures or objects that recalled their SA experience, was conducted during the post-SA interview session.

During the SA period, one of the authors e-mailed each participant on a monthly basis with four or five questions prompting their daily life and L2 learning in SA contexts. The prompts provided to the participants were all different because the questions were derived from their previous reflections on SA learning. When the responses to the same question differed, the journal data and, if necessary, follow-up questions were used to trace the learner’s belief and motivational changes. Because the journal entries and interviews were chosen as the primary data, the other data were used to corroborate the findings.

In this research, guided by Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) grounded theory methodology, the cases of two students who demonstrated contrasting motivational changes were analyzed. First, one of the authors coded the topics related to the SA experiences. Then, for the purpose of selective coding, we refined the relations of initial coding categories. For the final phase, axial coding was elaborated based on the participants’ comments relevant to this paper. After the completion of the coding process, the participants were asked to check the coded themes in order to confirm whether they reflected their sojourn experience and L2 learning beliefs. This process of member-checking with the participants and inter-coding with a second coder who majored in applied linguistics confirmed the validity and transferability of the qualitative data (cf. Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

4. Findings

In this section, we explore the belief changes of two ESL school learners, Yong and Hye-In. After describing the two participants’ general characteristics, we focus on the different L2 learning trajectories triggered by their respective idiosyncratic L2 learning experience and beliefs. Yong’s case is presented first, followed by Hye-In’s.

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\(^1\) Occasionally, interviews via Skype\(^\text{TM}\) were used for Yong. In such cases, the interviews were recorded with prior consent and transcribed verbatim. Also, based on the established coding category, the interview data were coded as well.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender (Age)</th>
<th>L2 proficiency</th>
<th>SA region and duration</th>
<th>Goal for SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yong</td>
<td>Male (27)</td>
<td>TOEIC 650(^a)</td>
<td>Utah, the U.S. 9 months</td>
<td>Employment (Increasing communicative ability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hye-In</td>
<td>Female (32)</td>
<td>TOEIC 620 (out of 990)</td>
<td>Cebu, the Philippines 5 months</td>
<td>Graduate studies (Increasing communicative ability)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) According to TOEIC (2011) score descriptors, a score around 600 indicates a low intermediate level of L2 reading and listening skills.
4.1. A loner in Utah: Yong’s SA experience in the U.S.

Yong was a 27-year-old, four-year university student majoring in electronics in Korea. At the time of the pre-SA interview, he expressed a strong desire to develop fluent L2 communication skills. In 2009, Yong was an active participant in Our Vision for Asian Leadership (OVAL) club, a university-level association of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students for enhancing mutual understandings on cultural and economic relations. As the president of the public relations department in the OVAL community, Yong stated that he had had abundant chances to experience English as a communication medium.

Based on the OVAL community participation, Yong had aspired to work at an industrial company in an international environment. Even though Yong perceived that his L2 communication skills were enough to be salient among OVAL members, he thought that a SA experience would provide him with better employment opportunities in international companies in Korea. Thus, Yong came to think of SA with the help of a close friend who was fluent in English. Among the myriad of SA places, Yong chose a college-level language school located in a suburban area of Utah in order to maximize the amount of L2 input from L2 speakers. As shown in Excerpt 1, Yong understood that numerous interactions are important to increase L2 fluency.

**Excerpt 1: Pre-SA interview (February, 2010)**

Yong (Y): My OVAL friends said that SA experience is beneficial to develop L2 speaking proficiency. I agree with that point. **I think talking with many native speakers seems necessary to become fluent in expressing my ideas in front of others.** I am not interested in increasing my TOEIC score.

However, in the post-SA interview it was found that contrary to his pre-SA L2 belief, Yong no longer considered SA participation to be valuable for his L2 learning. At the same time, Yong’s SA learning goal had regressed into increasing his TOEIC score, which differed from his stated intention before going abroad. Since TOEIC assesses L2 proficiency based on receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading), it appeared that Yong’s SA goal of increasing L2 fluency had waned during his sojourn period.

Determining the hidden logic and motivation behind L2 learners’ belief changes and behaviors is an important goal of SCT researchers (cf. Kim, 2010, 2011). Therefore, in the next section we trace Yong’s SA trajectories by focusing on his L2 belief changes. Since beliefs are situated in social contexts and formed through specific instances of social interactions (Woods, 2003), it would be illuminating to investigate the process of Yong’s belief changes in reference with his SA experiences.

4.1.1. L2 participation changes and belief fluctuations

According to Yong, at the beginning of SA, he wanted to maximize his L2 interaction opportunities as much as he could by participating in various social clubs, such as international housewarming parties, and by talking with Korean ESL peers in English. Also, Yong chose to share his room with an English-speaking roommate in order to have informal L2 conversations with him. As stated above, Yong understood that such abundant interaction opportunities would be helpful in developing his fluency.

However, as shown in Excerpt 2, Yong became increasingly suspicious of developing L2 fluency based on abundant interaction with L2 native speakers. In fact, Yong wanted to live with an English-speaking roommate because Yong thought that he would receive plenty of L2 corrective feedback which is necessary for enhancing L2 fluency. Nonetheless, when his roommate did not show much interest in Yong’s linguistic development, Yong began to question the role of interaction in developing L2 speaking skills.

**Excerpt 2: During-SA interview (August, 2010)**

Y: I heard that talking with people is the way to develop speaking skills, but I don’t feel that I am learning English when I talk with him [Yong’s roommate]. I don’t think it helped me a lot.

At the same time, according to the journals, Yong’s relationship with the L2 community appeared to be limited to the ESL language school because he did not take part in constant extracurricular activities. Likewise, the parsimonious L2 interaction opportunities in and out of the language school did not enable Yong to perceive his L2 learning behavior as effective for his speaking development.
Moreover, Yong’s close contact with Korean OVAL friends was one of the collaborating factors that attenuated his L2 beliefs. When Yong’s previous SA belief was betrayed by his growing suspicion with the new SA community, Yong began to make close contact with them via the internet in order to obtain informative L2 learning resources as well as emotional support. While talking with his OVAL friend via the internet, Yong heard that one of his OVAL friends had not gained employment due to his low TOEIC score. Because Yong believed that a high level of L2 fluency would be the most important skill in the job market, his friend’s unemployment changed Yong’s L2 speaking-related goals. As a result, Yong’s SA goal began to move toward increasing his TOEIC score. Since TOEIC only assesses receptive L2 skills (i.e., listening and reading), the mismatch between Yong’s new L2 goals and the SA context did not provide Yong with motivational force to search for L2 interaction opportunities.

Over time, Yong began to stand aloof from making L2 conversational partners that he had appreciated before. In August 2010, the room contract that Yong had signed with his native L2 roommate expired and Yong lost one of his important L2 interaction partners. If Yong had still prioritized the value of communication in developing L2 fluency, he would have searched for another roommate in order to maintain the casual L2 interaction opportunities. Compared to Excerpt 2 above, however, Excerpt 3 indicates Yong’s changed attitudes in making L2 interaction opportunities.

Excerpt 3: During-SA interview (October, 2010)

Interviewer (I): Did he move out? Well, so how long have you stayed alone?
Y: Yeah, for about two days.
I: Um, are you going to find a new roommate?
Y: Hum…well, I don’t think so. Now I’m alone, and I can make a phone call to my girlfriend without worrying about others, which is good.

Moreover, his TOEIC-oriented SA goal did not fully function in his SA environment because Yong himself perceived an L2-rich environment as inappropriate to develop receptive skills. Even if he sometimes mentioned that he wanted to raise his communicative ability, Yong did not specify speaking-oriented L2 learning actions because his L2 beliefs were not affirmed in his SA experience and, as a result, did not provoke Yong to sustain his motive for SA participation.

4.1.2. Belief changes and unsatisfactory L2 achievement

Yong ended his SA experience by spending most of his time calling his girlfriend in Korea or going shopping with his Korean ESL peers. Whereas at the beginning of his SA, Yong understood that an L2-rich environment is important to increase L2 speaking proficiency, after returning home, Yong no longer appreciated the abundant L2 interaction opportunities in an SA context. Instead, he now understood that intensive L2 instruction in Korea, not the SA environment, would have been facilitative in developing L2 communication skills.

As soon as he returned home, Yong took the TOEIC exam in January 2011 and gained a score of 730. Compared to his pre-SA TOEIC score of 690, Yong did not show remarkable L2 improvement through SA participation. When asked to explain the unsatisfactory SA outcome, he replied, “Well, I guess I expected too much” (Post-SA interview, January, 2011). What he obtained from the nine months of SA was a small improvement in the TOEIC score, which would have been possible by studying TOEIC in Korea.2

To summarize, Yong had understood that studying English in the SA context would be beneficial in enhancing his L2 fluency. However, as his L2 beliefs were not assured by his initial SA learning experiences, he no longer appreciated his L2-rich context. When he began to doubt the effectiveness of SA participation in developing L2 communication skills, the L2 learning environment did not play a facilitative role in developing his L2 fluency skills. These observations suggest that Yong’s L2 beliefs on the effectiveness of SA environments were not fully appropriated in his own SA experiences, resulting in the ineffective functioning of the SA community participation.

2 It may be possible to assume that his oral skills for daily communication may have increased, but these were not tested through other English proficiency tests including speaking and writing. It was only the TOEIC, which includes listening and reading comprehension subsections, that Yong took once coming back to Korea.
4.2. Goal-driven L2 participation: Hye-In’s SA experience in the Philippines

Hye-In was a 32-year-old female learner who had majored in special education in Korea. While working as a full-time teacher for the physically challenged, Hye-In decided to pursue a graduate degree in educational psychology. While searching for possible ways to develop her communication skills, the relatively low expenses and the level-based curriculum in the Philippines attracted Hye-In to leave for SA. In the pre-SA interview, she stated that a substantial amount of feedback from L2 teachers is needed in order to develop L2 writing skills. Hye-In understood that through the process of receiving feedback from native L2 teachers, she could achieve a desired level of L2 writing skills. However, the post-SA interview revealed that Hye-In actually focused on developing and maintaining a constant relationship with various L2 people during her SA period. Furthermore, unlike Yong, who showed goal inconsistencies, Hye-In’s goal for pursuing graduate degrees persisted throughout her sojourn period.

In the next section, we address how Hye-In was able to maintain her L2 SA goals by addressing her L2 belief changes.

4.2.1. Interpersonal mediation and Hye-In’s belief changes

In March 2010, Hye-In began her SA in the Philippines, anticipating that various interaction opportunities would be freely available at her disposal. However, she encountered unexpected situations in and out of the language school. According to her journal, in April 2010, two Korean ESL learners were robbed near the language school and one of them was seriously injured. Due to this unfortunate incident, the language school policy was revised so that all Korean ESL students’ outdoor activities were restricted only to weekdays. With regard to her classroom environment, it seemed difficult to have abundant L2 classroom-talk with other ESL peers because most of the L2 learners in her class were Korean. Furthermore, Hye-In was given a private dormitory room which lacked casual L2 conversations with other native or non-native speakers. In that sense, despite being in an L2 environment, her immediate L2 learning environment did not differ greatly from a foreign language learning context.

Therefore, Hye-In enrolled in extra language classes in order to maximize the interaction opportunities and receive corrective L2 feedback from an L2 teacher. Given that Hye-In’s primary purpose of SA was to increase her writing skills for graduate studies in the U.S, taking an intensive tutoring class was one of the available options for Hye-In. In the class, Hye-In was able to satisfy her linguistic needs by receiving meticulous L2 feedback from the L2 teacher. In addition, over time, the emotional rapport based on daily contact with the L2 teacher helped Hye-In to recognize the value of building close relationships with L2 people. As shown in Excerpt 4, the active engagement in instructionally productive, intimate relationship with the L2 teacher triggered the motivational changes in L2 community participation.

Excerpt 4: During-SA journal (April, 2010)

*Question (Q):* How are you doing with your study?

*Hye-In’s (H):* Yesterday I wrote about a place where I like and that was the first time that I felt confident in writing. I already talked about it with her [Hye-In’s L2 tutor] and visited there a couple of times… *I think sharing the experience with another person is good to develop writing skills as well as to express my ideas.*

At first, Hye-In thought that she could increase her L2 writing skills by receiving sufficient feedback from L2 experts such as teachers. However, once Hye-In appreciated the value of the L2 community contribution with the congenial cooperation from her L2 teacher, her L2 learning beliefs were reoriented to the establishment of constant relationships with various people in the SA context.

4.2.2. The role of changed L2 beliefs in SA participation

While Hye-In was gaining constant interactions with English native teachers in the language school and small talks with local L2 speakers, the nature of her L2 learning motivation changed. Previously, she had mostly relied on her L2 teacher’s linguistic feedback for taking the qualifying exams to attend a U.S. graduate school in the near future. However, as her belief became oriented to recognizing the importance of L2 community participation, Hye-In tried to develop solid relationships with various people, including the L2 staff working at the language school. Excerpt 5 clearly demonstrates Hye-In’s conscious efforts to find L2 conversation partners outside the language school.
Excerpt 5: During-SA journal (June, 2010)

Q: What kind of efforts do you make in order to accomplish your L2 goal?

H: I happened to have a chance to meet a staff member at a local coffee shop. Because she was very interested in Korean culture, we decided to teach our own mother tongue to each other on a weekly basis. Also I got to know about the owner of a local Filipino grocery store. Sometimes I dropped by there even if I did not have anything to buy, and had small talk with her.

After returning home, Hye-In took the TOEFL exam and obtained a score of 80, which is equivalent to a TOEIC score of 770 (TEPS, 2010). Compared to her pre-SA TOEIC score of 650, Hye-In’s post-SA score was improved to a greater extent than Yong’s more modest improvement (from 690 to 730). This difference can be attributable to the belief changes on SA participation. As aforementioned, Yong’s belief attenuation on the effectiveness on L2 communication undermined his initial SA goal and led to his SA non-participation. In contrast, mediated by her SA belief, Hye-In was able to find various L2 learning contexts in and out of the language school. In that process, her beliefs successfully assured the value of SA participation in developing L2 productive skills.

To summarize, Hye-In understood that feedback from L2 teachers is the most desirable way for developing her L2 writing skills. Limited L2 experiences at the initial stage of SA did not provide any meaningful support for Hye-In’s belief internalization. However, mediated by an effective L2 tutor, she was gradually able to search for her own L2 learning contexts in and out of the language school. In that process, her beliefs were changed and successfully scaffolded her SA participation throughout her sojourn period. Viewed in that regard, Hye-In’s internalized L2 beliefs about the effectiveness of the SA environment functioned effectively during her sojourn experience in the Philippines.

5. Discussion

In this section, we discuss Yong’s and Hye-In’s belief changes in SA learning experiences. As described above, although at the time of the pre-SA interview both believed in the effectiveness of SA in developing L2 proficiency, the post-SA interview revealed that Yong’s SA beliefs had waned, whereas Hye-in still attached strong importance to an SA learning environment in L2 development. In addition, Hye-In maintained her L2 goal and motivation after her SA experience, whereas Yong’s L2 speaking-oriented motivated behavior seemed to have regressed into increasing receptive skills required for TOEIC.

In understanding the differences between these two SA experiences, we refer to the notion of remediation in SCT. As Lektorsky (2009) stated, remediation is the creation of a new relationship between an agent (i.e., L2 learner) and an object (i.e., L2 learning). In the process, changing meditational tools is a way of achieving remediation in L2 learning. With regard to the present study, it can be understood that SA is a learner’s volitional efforts to achieve remediation (i.e., a higher level of L2 proficiency) by changing the mediation context. From the SCT perspective, however, a mere changing of the L2 learning context does not necessarily invoke remediation (i.e., efficacious L2 learning) in SA participation. As Tobach (1995: 53) pointed out, remediation “is not the simple mirroring of matter/energy, but the result of interdependent processes of sensation (perception) and activity”. That is, even if an L2 learner decides to go abroad based on the L2 sojourn experiences of others, SA participation per se does not guarantee a high level of personal L2 success unless the learner aligns his or her L2 learning beliefs with the L2 learning environment.

It should be noted that Yong’s and Hye-In’s remediation processes were qualitatively different. As noted in sociocultural research, the degree of internalization of learner beliefs bears critical importance because only appropriated learner beliefs can be used as an effective mediational tool that enables learners to sustain motivated L2 learning (Alanen, 2003; Kim, 2007, 2008; Kim and Yang, 2010). As shown above, Yong came to participate in an SA program based on the experiences of other OVAL community members; his frequent mention of OVAL members can be interpreted as an indication of less successful remediation because his beliefs were hinged on others’ prior experiences throughout SA learning. This less-internalized learner belief does not function as an effective remediation tool with sufficient regulatory power to maintain SA goals in the face of any adversity.

Table 2 is the summary of Yong and Hye-In’s belief changes in their pre-SA, during-SA, and post-SA periods. Framed in the notion of remediation, this study has focused on the role of learner beliefs in remediating the SA experience. The results showed that that even if learners perceived a discrepancy between their current L2 performance and the ideal, high L2 proficiency, it may not trigger further actions to reduce such incongruity as long as the
extant L2 beliefs continue to conflict with the L2 experiences. When the learners had internalized the beneficial role of SA participation for L2 development, the beliefs acted as a mediating tool to sustain the SA-related L2 goals. In that sense, the study has shown that the coordination of learner beliefs and meaningful L2 learning environment is critical in sustaining the flow of L2 remediation (van Lier, 2004).

6. Summary and implications

In this research we have attempted to diversify the perspectives on learner beliefs by drawing upon a Vygotskian SCT perspective. The research findings are summarized as follows:

1. Learner beliefs are constantly (re)shaped in accordance with L2 goals and in the context of social interaction.
2. From an SCT perspective, belief changes represent a remediation process between the learner and the L2 learning environment, showing the learner’s agentive efforts to maintain (or abandon) L2 goals.

The following implications can be drawn from the study findings. First, from an SCT perspective, this study has endeavored to reconceptualize the role of belief changes in SA experiences. L2 belief changes can be seen as learners’ agentive efforts to remediate their L2 learning process. In the process, less-internalized L2 beliefs impede the remediation flow of L2 learning in SA contexts, thereby leading to changes in L2 goals. Secondly, this study challenges the prevalent assumptions that an L2 input-rich SA context is essential for improving L2 proficiency (cf. Freed, 1995). This study suggests that unless learners personalize the importance of SA learning based on their L2 beliefs and L2 goals, they may not necessarily enjoy a high level of personal success in the L2. Thus, before going abroad, learners need to recognize the need to become volitionally engaged with the L2 community on the basis of clear L2 goals in order to attain satisfactory SA experiences.

This paper has demonstrated the role of learner beliefs through data triangulation. Nonetheless, two issues remain to be resolved. First, the two learners’ different gender may have influenced their willingness to participate in the L2 communities because gender has been reported to exert a considerable influence on learners’ L2 motivation (Kissau, 2006). In addition, the regional variation in SA need to be considered in future research. Depending on the idiosyncratic atmosphere of SA places, learners may show different levels of volitional engagement in different SA communities. Therefore, based on these considerations, future research is warranted to understand the dynamically evolving L2 beliefs of L2 learners in SA contexts.

Appendix 1. Sample Interview Questions

I. Background information
1. When did you visit the country? How did you choose the target country?
2. What was the purpose of the study-abroad? (Do you have any specific plans?) Have you reached your goal?
3. What did you expect before going abroad? How did you prepare for your L2 learning?
4. What things come to your mind when someone mentions the target country?
5. Briefly summarize your sojourn experience.

Table 2
Summary of two participants’ belief changes in SA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-SA</th>
<th>During-SA</th>
<th>Post-SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yong</td>
<td>The quantity of interaction would bring communicative fluency.</td>
<td>Limited relationship with L2 community</td>
<td>The quality of interaction is important for developing L2 fluency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The fluency is needed for career development.</td>
<td>Constant contact with Korean friends</td>
<td>TOEIC score seems more important for my future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>⇒ Mismatch between belief and learner goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hye-In</td>
<td>The feedback from L2 experts would enhance writing skills.</td>
<td>Interpersonal mediation and various community participation</td>
<td>The active participation of various communities is crucial for developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>⇒ Coordination of beliefs and learner goals</td>
<td>L2 productive skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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II. Study-abroad L2 learning experience
1. How was your daily routine there?
2. How were your relations with other people? Did you get along well with other Korean ESL students/L2 local students?
3. In terms of L2 learning, when was the most challenging/happiest moment during the sojourn period?
4. In terms of relations with other people, when was the most challenging/happiest moment during the sojourn period?

III. L2 beliefs, attitudes toward L2 communities, and L2 motivation
1. Are you satisfied with the L2 outcomes you achieved?
2. What kinds of effort did you make for your English learning?
3. What do you think is needed for successful study-abroad L2 learning?

IV. Picture-cued stimulated recall
1. Why did you bring this picture? In what way is it important to your L2 learning?
2. Please describe this picture in detail.

References


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