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**LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES
OF KAZAKHSTANI STUDENTS IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

Abstract. Since 2012, Zhetysay State University has organized student mobility by establishing cooperation with different European universities. We have already analyzed the experiences and strategies of these pioneer students, who went to Poland, South Korea or China (Seidikenova, 2014), by identifying difficulties encountered by the first generation because of this “improvised” mobility, due mostly to a lack of time and a lack of experience of the various concerned actors (administrative and students, Seidikenova, 2015). The Service of International Relations took into account the difficulties met by these students and organized a more “prepared” mobility, a sort of “framed” mobility, by proposing a few adjustment measures. In this present article, we will analyze, through biographical interviews, the experiences and strategies elaborated by the second-generation students having studied in Hungary, Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia). We will try to distinguish in their testimonials if the obstacles met by the first generation and if the few measures taken by the administration have had some impact (or not) on their linguistic, academic, social, cultural immersion abroad.

Key words: actors of mobility; prepared mobility vs improvised mobility; difficulties and strategies; impact of the experience.

1. Introduction

1.1. A new mobility policy in Kazakhstani universities

Wishing to be open up to Europe and more broadly internationally, Kazakhstan joined the Bologna process in 2010. The Bologna process is not based on an intergovernmental treaty. It is up to each country and its university community is to decide whether to endorse or reject its principles, but again, the decisions of the universities cannot ignore the impact of competition that is developing in the context of globalization. Let’s recall the main objectives of the Bologna Declaration:

- adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- adoption of a system that is essentially based on 2 main cycles, before and after license;
- establishment of a credit system, such as the ECTS system;
- promotion of mobility: free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff;
- promotion of European cooperation in quality assessment;
- promotion of the European dimension in higher education.

Language proficiency does not appear in the general objectives of this Declaration. However, the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff presupposes a minimum of multilingual skills. (Blons-Pierre, 2012: 14). Language, or rather languages, are the forgotten ones of mobility programs [1].

«In Europe there is another system - ECTS (European Credit Transfer’s System) which has arisen as the pilot ERASMUS project and undergone experimental testing within 6 years (from 1989/90 to 1994-95 academic year). In its 145 higher education institutions participated in the countries of Europe. Creation of the European higher education area is defined in the Sorbonne and Bologna declaration. It is directly

specified in the Bologna declaration on creation "the systems of the credit – such as ECTS". Also it is specified: "The credits can be utilized within the education which is not the highest including education during all life on condition of recognition of the appropriate educational programs by the universities"[2].

The adoption of the Bologna Process and the entry into the European Research Area have marked a major step in the opening of Kazakhstan society and have involved the total renovation of its educational and especially academic system to achieve the objectives set by Bologna (Grandet, 2011: 1)[3]. Indeed, the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan has focused on changing the higher education system by promoting international exchanges and by asking universities to offer new courses, especially in English, for the recognition of solvent diplomas in a global labor market. The other objective of implementing these mobility programs was to expand cooperation and cope with competition between higher education institutions.

In March 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science donated money to universities to organize these exchange programs. In response to this demand for internationalization, the universities have urgently implemented an exchange program, seeking partner institutions and signing bilateral agreements, while rethinking the offer of training courses and programs, and certifications with a view of creating joint degrees. In addition, the problem of Kazakhstan universities was to find students who speak a foreign language well and have the IELTS or TOEFL certificate but also who have a little experience abroad. In spite of all these initial handicaps, the universities managed to send in 2012 the first students to study for a long time[4].

1.2. The purpose of our article

These mobilities have proved to be a unique opportunity for Kazakh students to get experience for the first time abroad, to discover other cultural horizons as part of their studies. However, not all the administrative, financial, academic, linguistic conditions, etc. seemed to be able to cope with the difficulties encountered by these students during the long study stay in the partner university. This is what we were able to demonstrate in the analysis of our biographical interviews conducted with the first students of Zhetysay State University on their return. The administration of this university has taken these results into account and has put in place new methods of information and transmission of these first experiences for the following promotions in three forms:

- it changed the eligibility criteria. Only students, who have the IELTS certificate in English (with grade 5,) will be able to enter and participate in the competition.
- the University's International Relations Department has produced newsletters for future mobility applicants;
- the students on their return organized on a voluntary basis seminars to provide information and transmit their experience to the students who wanted to apply and live in their turn this long immersion experience.

After asking about the consequences of the organization of an "improvised" mobility experienced by students and administrators in the rush, this time we are interested in a departure abroad that seems better "prepared", even more "framed". In this article, we will focus more specifically on the experience of the second shift of students sent in 2013-2014 by Zhetysay State University and their respective stay in Poland, Spain, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Spain. In Slovakia.

2. MULTIPLE MOBILITY AND MOBILITY CAPITAL: A NEW PARADIGM

What is important to note is that the "democratization" of student mobility has profoundly changed academic institutional practices and personal student practices.

As far as academic mobility is concerned, the emphasis is on movement but also on the changes, it induces. Thus, the mobility stay is both an issue and a means to increase Personal Capital and resources, to increase the professional opportunities of individuals in the international as well as national labor market. These mobilizations also have an educational objective, by facilitating the access of candidates to international resources, acquiring of other disciplinary knowledge and academic knowledge, while giving them the opportunity to practice foreign languages acquired and the learning of others, to be sensitized to different socio-cultural practices, to build an awareness of diversity, etc.

For Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2003), mobility is not only a geographical process but also a linguistic, social, psychological, professional and cultural mobility experienced at the individual level

(Murphy-Lajevans, *op.cit.*:16), a source of personal enrichment[5]. This is the version of the optimistic mobility. But mobility is also the loss of a place of origin, of a familiar socio-cultural environment in which one has grown up and in which one finds himself, precisely, "rooted", protected. The feeling of uprooting is particularly strong among migrant workers coming from regions with low levels of industrialization or a strong rural tradition. Nevertheless, it was noted with surprise that this loss of reference points could be shared by students in a mobility situation and could destabilize or even handicap them. Thus, for Mathilde Anquetil (2006), student mobility is not only a promise of intercultural contacts; it can also lead to alienation, uprooting, and passive adaptation to modern conditions of "flexibility", in the service of a globalized economy. This is the pessimistic version of mobility[6].

For his part, Murphy-Lajevans (*op.cit.*), inspired by Georg Simmel (1999), developed the concept of "mobility capital", which, according to her, consists of four main components: family and personal history; previous experiences of mobility; previous language skills ; experiences of adaptation; and some personality traits. Taken together, these different dimensions of mobility make it possible to identify the capital of mobility before departure and return and to perceive the various types of transformations (linguistic, social, academic, cultural, identity, etc.) through the experience of displacement [7].

These stages of the stay (before during and after) and the different dimensions of this experience in total immersion over the long term participate in the construction of new mobile practices which will subsequently have a significant impact on the path, the choices and the possible bifurcations of the individual.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: CORPUS AND OBJECTIVES

The Zhetysay State University sent, during the autumn semester 2012, 11 students constituting the first group, who made their stay at the University of Warsaw in Poland and 3 students at the Technical University of Riga in Latvia. In 2013-2014, 20 Master's students and 24 Bachelor's students, constituting the second group, studied at the University of Cadiz in Spain (4), at the Agro-Technical University of Prague in the Czech Republic (17), at the University of Warsaw in Poland (8), at the University of Lodz in Poland (11), at the University of Zilina in Slovakia (2), at Corvinus University in Budapest (2).

To conduct our qualitative survey in 2013 with the first promotion of students after their return and the second survey in 2015 with the second promotion also after their return, we chose the semi-structured interview of a biographical nature that we described as biographical interview. Our thematic analyses revolved around the similar questions that we asked those students of the 2nd and 1st groups on:

- Reasons for leaving;
- Pre-departure language and cultural capital;
- Their previous experiences of mobility;
- Their representations of the country of study before departure and during the stay;
- Their first experiences and difficulties;
- The strategies developed in response to these difficulties;
- The perceptions of this stay abroad, the benefits, negatives, positives, etc.;
- The reinvestment (or not) of their achievements (linguistic, social, cultural, academic, disciplinary, etc.) after their return.

The objectives of these surveys of the two successive promotions of students were not only to identify after their return to their country their perceptions of their academic and daily experience and the strategies implemented to face the difficulties but also to identify in their testimonies the factors (baggage, administrative background, previous experiences, strategies developed on the spot, etc.) that could have contributed to the fact that they had or had not experienced this first experience of mobility for all[8].

3.1. The experience of mobility and its contributions: the transformation of oneself

The students say that, despite the difficulties encountered - or perhaps because of them?-They have increased their linguistic knowledge, have discovered other values, other cultural practices; they have appropriated another way of living and working which they consider to be more effective and more interesting. One of them, on her return, would have even changed her way of life and made this experience of Exile her profession.

Studying abroad is highly beneficial, personally, academically and socially. In contact with another country, the student has the opportunity to develop his or her capacities for adaptation, intercultural

communication, as well as his or her European knowledge. It also benefits from a major advantage in terms of Occupational integration. Mobility gives the opportunity to develop the capacity to adapt to another country, to know another way of life, to adjust to it, to know how to live with others, to develop self-education, to live with difference the confrontation. Having lived in another society and another culture one can (re) define him/her, (re) discover (Papatsiba, 2003: 107-108)[9].

4. PERCEPTIONS OF MOBILITY BY SECOND GENERATION STUDENTS ON THEIR RETURN

For this analysis, we will take the testimonies of five students out of 15 who agreed to come to the interview. Our interviewees present the following university profiles:

- Aslan, (M) 25 years old: Master in Economics, 2nd year, University of Corvinus in Budapest, Hungary;
- Zhuldyz, (F) 23 years old: Bachelor of Law, 2nd year, Spain, University of Cadiz, Spain;
- Anastasya, (F) 23 years old: Bachelor in Translation, 3rd year, University of Zilina, Slovakia
- Gulnur, (F) 23 years old: Master in Law, 2nd year, University of Cadiz, Spain;
- Gulzhan, (F) 23 years old: Bachelor in Economics, third year, Agro-Technical University of Prague, Czech Republic.

4.1. What languages are at stake in mobility?

To speak the language of the host country is to discover that it is necessary to integrate the registers of a language, which no longer has anything to do with the representation of learning based on the dictionary and the fixed rules of an "acceptable" grammar[10]. However, in our case, there are two languages: the language of the country and the language of communication at the university, English, that our interlocutors have been confronted with.

Aslan, Budapest

"In principle, most Hungarians speak English".

Anastasya, Zilina

"I didn't have any linguistic difficulties. For me as a native of Russian, I did not have any problems understanding the language of the country I came to. But knowledge of English and German can greatly simplify communication".

Gulnur, Cadiz

"At first there were linguistic difficulties, but after three months we got used to it and started to understand and learn Spanish words. And it was a pleasure to learn Spanish and to teach them to speak kazakh".

Zhuldyz, Cadiz

"During the first few weeks it was difficult to adapt, because the courses were given in English too quickly and included a very large amount of information for a pupil who does not know this language as his mother tongue very well".

As the students of the first Class, those of the 2nd Class encountered difficulties in understanding the courses at the University in a language of scientific communication that is not their own, in particular "because the courses were given in English too quickly and included a very large amount of information" explains Zhuldyz. Over time, however, they have been able to adapt, which means that the selection criteria established by the administration to certify a sufficient level of English or a certificate have played a significant role in this adaptability.

On the other hand, unlike the students of the 1st generation, those of this generation have been able to develop strategies of "linguistic tinkering": either by reinvesting languages learned, or by relying on language-gateways (Russian, German), or by learning the local language allowing daily communication[11].

4.2. Networking strategies: successful social integration?

The students, leaving their familiar environment, also leave their family and friendly environment as well as a set of stable ties built up over the years. The need to create a new environment, to interact with others, is then felt and prompts newcomers to seek new partners in existing networks and to create new networks of sociability.

Zhuldyz, Cadix

"During the first few week, it was difficult to adapt to because the courses were given in English too quickly and included a very large amount of information for a pupil who does not know this language as his mother tongue very well. What was interesting was to discuss with a large number of students from different countries and nationalities in English and to confront all kinds of cultures".

Aslan, Budapest

"I did not have any adjustment difficulties, we were well aware in advance of all the specificities of Europe. In addition, we were able to obtain e-cards on the Internet and so we were able to adapt perfectly. As a stranger, we did not feel this way because we immediately became friends with our group and roommates. People are kind and always ready to be useful. Speaking English helps to build relationships with them and make new friends. The only problem was with our real estate agency in Budapest. We had to deal with a negligent employee, he worked too slowly. We have asked that he be replaced. The new employee could answer our questions now."

We see that whether the students did not encounter major difficulties during their study stay. It is important to underline Aslan's remarks: *"I did not have any adjustment difficulties, we were well aware in advance of all the specificities of Europe"* which suggest that there was information and preparation of the students before their departure, allowing an "awareness" of the specificities of the European country of destination. The newsletter distributed by the SRI and the meeting with the first students undoubtedly played a significant role.

They also did not encounter any difficulties in routine communication. Problems may have arisen in the management of daily life: for example, renting an apartment is not easy in a foreign context, and difficulties may be caused by interpersonal, linguistic or cultural misunderstandings.

The positive aspect that emerges from these testimonies is that they have had networking strategies: either by colocation or by establishing links with young foreigners in the same situation, as they were, English being the obvious language of socialization. They created or joined social networks that became networks of solidarity and friendship. Every day they made new social and cultural discoveries and gradually adapted without experiencing the sense of loneliness, even isolation, of the first promotion.

4.3. Mirror references between the host university and the Home University

Raymonde Carroll (1987) reminds us that before we can understand the culture of the other, we must become aware of our own grid of values and references, its cultural pre-constructs, its implicit interpretations and its «invisible evidences» [12]. Here we have a grid of references of the host university under stressed by another grid, buried, that of the University of origin.

This is what our students say:

Aslan, Budapest

"The education system is no different. Personally, I have noticed that, as in our country, everything depends on the professor. If the teacher wants, he can organize the interesting lesson and give good knowledge. In Budapest, we were confronted with these modes of operation. While some teachers taught a lesson at a very high level, there were others who left bad impressions."

Anastasia, Zilina

"There are not many differences in the education system. Just it is necessary to note that, at the University of Zilina, one does not put the notes every week, one puts only during the control, in my opinion it is more rational".

Gulshan, Prague

"The Czech education system gives students the opportunity to choose the subject they want to learn. However, the learning process is very dependent on the teacher of a particular discipline. The teacher chooses the method specific to his field. Basically, he always organizes lectures and seminars. Groups of students came from a variety of countries, which contributed to the exchange of experiences between international students."

Zhuldyz, Cadix

"The student has the chance to build on his calendar. The course content is already on Moodle. Just print them out and you can attend the lecture, listen to the professor and ask him questions at the end of the lecture. Students must pass the exams and they are quite complex. Students do not have a clear idea of

independent study. There are many possibilities for learning a foreign language, such as English and other languages: German, Spanish. The Department of international relations actively assists international students, offering additional course opportunities, excursions and leisure activities."

In this mirror comparison between the host university and the home university, students highlight similarities and differences in practice based on their implicit reference system. They evaluate the two university systems through the organization of programs, courses, examination procedures, etc. And especially through the behavior of teachers. In this sense, it is interesting to note that for three of them, who lived in ex-socialist countries, vertical authority relations between teachers and pupils still dominate, which in fact do not differ from the relations existing in Kazakhstan. However, if we compare the statements of the first generation of students who made their stay in Poland, we do not find these types of distant and authoritarian ties. Several hypotheses are possible, but the one that comes to mind is that Poland is the first ex-socialist country to have joined the EU and therefore to have adopted the Bologna system since the early 2000s. It has, therefore, had time to introduce different pedagogical practices[13, 14].

Students also perceive great differences in the organization of administrative services, including that of reception and follow-up of mobility students who seem to have acquired in these foreign countries, especially in Spain, a certain tradition, by offering various linguistic and cultural activities helping students in their social integration, which does not exist (yet) in their own institution. Students developed a critical view of their own system both in the second and first years[15].

4.4. Benefits: this experience of mobility: "the door to the future"

Our students tell us that they have increased their linguistic knowledge, discovered other values, other cultural practices, an international network of friends, and other ways of life.

Zhuldyz, Cadix

"Being a mobility student was a great opportunity for me. I studied the interesting things I really wanted to participate in academic mobility program. The learning process was very well organized and most practical. I met students from different countries. I made many friends. In my memory, there are many positive aspects. I have known life within Spain. I am very happy because I enjoyed my stay."

Anastasya, Zilina

"This program allows students not only to acquire new knowledge and improve their language skills; it also gives us the opportunity to gain valuable experience." Participation in this program has given me a lot. After having spent a semester at a foreign university, not only did I acquire knowledge of my chosen subjects, but I also learned to overcome difficulties encountered with people from all over the world and received a lot of pleasure from the time spent in Slovakia. Of course, this trip changed my worldview; I became a more open person. I learned to overcome difficulties, despite everything became more confident. I made many friends, not just with the same foreign students like me but with the local students as well. It's very important to me."

Gulnur, Cadix

"Academic mobility has given me the opportunity to recognize people, see the world, learn the culture of different countries with their own traditions and customs, they are as diverse and unique as two identical cultures, especially the life of the Spaniards, and I hope that this newly acquired knowledge and skills will open the door to the future for me".

According to their testimony, the study abroad experience has been beneficial on all levels- linguistic, academic, disciplinary, relational, cultural, etc. As our students say it is in line with the remark of Jacques Verger (1991) that if the travelling students are sometimes birds of passage, they are also studious and attentive listeners[16]. According to him, they bring back to the country the books and knowledge acquired at the University. In their teaching, if they in turn become teachers, or in their professional practices (lawyers, secretaries, doctors), they will implement, adapting them to local conditions, the concepts and models that had been taught to them during their studies[17].

5. CONCLUSION

First generation students experienced many difficulties because they had no previous experience of mobility, no language level or useful language skills on the ground, no prior knowledge of the host country or the university system, and no preparation for mobility. They were sent to the unknown land

without any means of support. Despite all the obstacles they encountered, they adjusted and took advantage of their stay willingly or unwillingly. Their experience seems to have been a real source of information for students in the next class. The second generation encountered fewer difficulties than the first, as if students had become more aware of the various issues involved in studying abroad and had benefited from the pioneering experience of their elders.

We agree with Patricia Kohler-Bally (2001), who postulates that, despite the principles and guidelines governing exchanges, the student who leaves for a study visit is poor and feels uneasy about the difficulties he or she has in decoding the culture of the host country because he or she is not prepared for the visit. Immersion and the exchange program cannot really be conceived without the component of guided learning for Intercultural communication, which serves as a dynamic for building linguistic competence and acquiring new language skills [18].

The experience of the first promotion has shown that, in order to be able to speak of adaptation, one must have language skills, already in the language of academic communication, that is, English. Students are now thinking about their mobility in their first year of study: they are now preparing for the IELTS test and know that without a certificate they will not have access to the mobility program. While the administration had already taken a major step in proposing adjustment measures that was not enough. These testimonies of the 2nd generation inform us that it is essential to prepare our students for the foreign language (foreign languages) but also for the educational system of the countries where they will go. As we have seen, knowledge of one or more foreign languages explicitly or even implicitly facilitates access to and understanding of other socio-cultural codes and practices. This is one of the major keys to the success of their stay.

If you want to understand how the world works today, you have to go and live in another country. A temporary break from home is necessary. You can have a different way of thinking, of looking at things. In short, to know as much as possible about a country, it allows us to open our eyes and understand better where we come from, who we are." [19]. We saw this break with their familiar environment, even sometimes painful, was beneficial for the students of both classes. In other words, they have acquired forms of autonomy, which is not at all a value expected or sustained in their own society, but which will serve them later without other systems and in other countries [20].

However, the residence of an individual in a community in which he or she has not been socialized is not sufficient to guarantee knowledge of that community. The change of scenery does not in itself lead to positive representations of this country; the geographical shift is not enough to transform initially negative representations into positive representations. The knowledge accumulated on a given culture is not always proportional to the duration of the stay. These observable principles lead to relativizing the scope of the mechanisms generally implemented on a large scale for a discovery of the other and for a better understanding of the other. Geographic mobility is therefore not a systematic factor in understanding the other and controlling ethnocentric effects [20].

Their testimonies also invite us to introduce them to anthropological reading tools of the sociocultural codes of the country of destination and socio-academic practices of the host university, while developing knowledge of their own references and practices. It seems important to acquire, both in the University of origin and in the University of reception, "keys of understanding" to open the doors of this "new world" and to reinvest their experiential gains on their return. These approaches could enable developing with them gradually to build a real *habitus mobilis*.

What we must take from these comparative analyses is that the transmission of this experience is crucial, that it should not be the subject of training conducted solely by administrative staff or even by highly experienced and well trained teachers in the field of mobility, but should also include in a dialogic form those students of previous promotions who are ready to come and collaborate in the training. We must therefore remain vigilant and continue our efforts of interactive preparation for this long immersion experience of future candidates for mobility.

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