In Part II we examined narratives from students involved in a variety of study abroad programmes, including a 10-day secondary school exchange, credit-bearing overseas semesters for university students and independently organized long-term university education. Within these categories of study abroad we can identify several dimensions of variation which have the potential to affect participants’ outcomes. These include the duration of the programme, participant educational level, programme organization, level of integration and interaction with host nationals, and the purpose or goals of participation.

In this chapter we examine narratives from students who participated in two different programme types. The first narrative reports on Phoebe’s participation in a 16-week university student exchange programme. The second recounts Catherine’s involvement in a 10-day student exchange for secondary school students. When reading Phoebe and Catherine’s narratives, the following questions may act as a guide to understanding the effects of the respective study abroad programme on their second language identity.

- What are the similarities and differences between Phoebe and Catherine’s study abroad programmes and experiences?
- What effect do you think the following programme features may have had on the outcomes of their study abroad:
  - the duration and organization of the programme?
  - the level of integration and interaction with host nationals during the programme?
- Are the outcomes of their study abroad mainly explained by the programme type or by the individuals’ preparation and engagement?

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Phoebe’s story

Phoebe is an undergraduate student of English language education studying in Hong Kong who joined in a 16-week student exchange programme in Australia. Phoebe’s background in learning English is, she says, like that of most local Hong Kong students. Her schools from kindergarten through primary to secondary all used Cantonese as the medium of instruction. Therefore, much of her English learning occurred in specialist classes conducted by an English-speaking local teacher. She recalls most vividly reading comprehension lessons, doing dictations which were memorized in the days before the test, and completing writing drills. Unlike so many of her peers, Phoebe never sought or had the opportunity to attend English tutorial lessons after school. She did not feel the need for the support of an English tutor because her English results were good. However, she did take the initiative in her early teens to start reading the local English newspaper every day as a way to learn new vocabulary and to help her English reading fluency and understanding. She recalls adopting the strategy of looking up unknown words up in a dictionary and writing down the translation to help with understanding, and then re-reading the article out loud. Regularly watching English movies with Cantonese subtitles also helped her knowledge of English language and culture.

Phoebe considers herself to be a reasonably fluent user of English and someone who grabs every opportunity to use it in her daily life. She enjoys surfing the Internet, chatting in English and sending emails using proper English written form. However, despite her initiative and opportunistic nature, she assesses her knowledge of English language as fair and her oral skills as only satisfactory for everyday communication. For her, being able to communicate in English on different levels is important. She believes English is the world language, which makes it more significant than Cantonese, her mother tongue, which has limited use outside southern China and Hong Kong. She considers Cantonese to be closer to her, as more ‘intimate’, because using it in Hong Kong gives her ‘sense of belonging, of being a Hong Kong person’.

Before her exchange, Phoebe had enjoyed previous family trips to Beijing and Singapore. These trips provided opportunities to learn about her family’s Chinese heritage, and to practise her Mandarin and English language skills while on tours and shopping. These trips and experiences in Hong Kong with native English speakers highlighted and reinforced how much she needed to learn if she were to be an effective user of English. She found that native speakers of English spoke