Representation of the 'Other' in Erasmus Exchange Students' Discourse

Dina Strong
PhD Fellow, University of Latvia

Introduction

In Europe, which "claims to have invented the university eight hundred years ago, it was the norm for centuries that scholars, using Latin as a lingua franca, should learn and teach in several countries" (Coleman, 2006). The tradition of studying abroad continues, only today, it has become a "fast-growing phenomenon, due to the ease of travel, political changes, economic need and cultural interaction" (Byram & Feng, 2006: 1). The statistics shows that in Europe alone over 200,000 young Europeans set on Erasmus exchange programme every year. These numbers are expected to grow considerably over the next decade. As the tertiary institutions open up to crucial international exchanges, student mobility is developing into a richer and more diversified experience. It leads to creation of unique and complex international groups, which have an effect on the host university. What is more, the effects of student mobility reach beyond the students' stay abroad, because as the students return to their places of origin, they arrive "changed in various ways, and bringing change to their own universities" (Byram & Dervin, 2008: 1). These changes are both concealed and obvious, some of them are easy to measure and document, while many are impossible to capture in their full complexity (ibid.).

During their stay abroad, Erasmus students are immersed into the international community of exchange students as well as the host community of the receiving country. To help Erasmus students to come to terms with the sense of strangeness within the international encounters, they often resort to discursive constructions of "national communities", which serve as easy explanations for differences in people's behaviors, decisions, views, etc., as well as allow to contrast one "imaginary community" against an "imaginary other", thus treading on what is potentially a very dangerous realm. Scholars of student mobility note that Erasmus students tend to make acquaintance and create relational networks almost exclusively with other Erasmus students, or their own compatriots – the phenomenon that was referred to as "Erasmus cocoon" (Papatsiba, 2006), implying Erasmus student's marginal status with regard to the host community. Papatsiba warns against the potential dangers of the social isolation within the intercultural encounters of the kind, which can be broken by close social acquaintance with the locals. Therefore, contact with the locals would help to reduce cultural distance and prejudice, while superficial contacts would hinder intercultural learning.

The previous studies showed that even though exchange students rarely got to meet the locals, they still present them "as a single cultural type" with an emphasis on the common traits and features (Papatsiba, 2006). By resorting to generalizations about the "foreign culture", expressing static views of it, exchange students signaled a "distant look at the foreign society" (ibid.). In their accounts, the students attempted "to designate the collective dimension of individuals as totally forged by the culture, students smoothed out all social and interpersonal differences"(112) – indicating their lack of initial preparation for encountering and dealing with

the "different Other". Unsurprisingly, these generalizations resulted in what Dervin (2007) termed as "solidification" or the use of one's national culture/identity in discourse and interaction, or "stereotypical (either positive or negative) views of society" (Papatsiba, 2006). As another illustration of this serves Coleman's (1996) study of exchange students, which confirmed the existence and the tendency towards the proliferation of national stereotypes both preceding and following the stay abroad. Thus, it seems that stereotyping is "normal" and cannot be "deleted" (Dervin, 2007) from the intercultural encounters. Nevertheless, the Erasmus students' awareness of their own stereotypes together with their potential impact may vary, depending on the individual's preparation and/ or previous experience of "strangeness".

In this paper, we wish to complement the previous studies of student mobility by questioning the role that the previous experience of life, study and work abroad plays on the neutrality of Erasmus exchange students' discourse of representation. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis: *Previous experience of living or/and travelling extensively abroad equips Erasmus exchange students with "proteophilic competence" (i.e., appreciation of diversity (cf. Dervin, 2008)), which becomes apparent in the lexico-grammatical choices these exchange students opt for when constructing representations of "Others" in their discourse and sets them apart from exchange students, who are less/in- experienced travelers.* Consequently, we assume that if exchange students had previous experience of living, working or travelling in another country, their perception of strangeness may differ from that of others who had not travelled or lived abroad for an extended period of time, all of which will be reflected in their discourse. Thus, the focus of this paper is on analyzing the ways experienced and inexperienced Erasmus exchange students perceived and dealt with the differences of others, and on the basis of these constructed representations in discourse.

Confronting different "others" and at the same time being confronted with "own strangeness" during the stay, Erasmus students inevitably construct representations of themselves by contrast with others they meet as well as reflect and reconstruct their compatriots in the light of the new encounters. Here we understand "representations" as condensed meanings that help people to construe their experiences. Social representations are a sociocognitive practice, which allows one to create sociality, position oneself and assert identities (Howarth 2002: 159). As such, representations are particular presentations of experiences, people, voices, which are reinterpreted and constitute our realities (Howarth 2002: 8). Jovchelovitch (2007: 11) even argues that the reality of the human world is in its entirety made of representations: in fact there is no sense of reality without representation.

Furthermore, in the present climate of mobility and increased intercultural contacts, the issue of identities (e.g., cultural, national, ethnic, religious identities) has become more topical than ever before. The concept of identity, as such is now prevailing in research on interculturality (Dervin, 2008). In fact, identity allows individuals to comprehend their social experiences by relating to various others (e.g., groups or communities). Even though the latter two concepts are imprecise, they help people to "compose and decompose their identities" (Bauman, 2004: 38). In the times of "the crisis of belonging", where national identity is recurrently challenged by other: "global, alternative identities, globalization leads towards pluralization of identities" (Bauman 2004: 20). As a result, some identities "become strengthened as a reaction to the sense of emptiness or loneliness but also as a reaction to threat and uncertainty that globalization can cause" (ibid.). In order to maintain continuity in the times of instability, this was the major cause for the renewal of traditional, cultural and religious practices or even the creation of new identities (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 76). All in all, the creation of boundaries allows "communities

and individuals to develop knowledge about themselves and others, to recognize the history that is handed down by previous generations and give to self an identity, i.e. a coherent narrative that connects events, actions, people, feelings and ideas in a plot" (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 79).

As a result, current understanding of discourse and its relation to identity are founded on the idea that "the selves we present to others are changeable, strategic and jointly constructed" (Johnstone, 2008:155). It has also been argued that "who we are to each other is accomplished, disputed, ascribed, resisted, managed and negotiated in discourse" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006: 4). That is, the ways in which people display their identities include their language use and their interactions with other people. Discourse in this respect is not only a matter of using language in a way that reveals a particular identity, it is also about "a socially-constructed self that people continually co-construct and reconstruct in their interactions with each other" (Cameron, 2001; Paltridge, 2006).

All human identities have been claimed to be "social in nature because identity is about meaning, and meaning is not an essential property of words and things: meaning develops in context-dependent use" (Wodak, 2011: 13). Namely, meanings stand for the result of agreement or disagreement and are "a matter of contention, to some extent shared and always negotiable" (Jenkins, 1996: 4–5), because meanings can be co-constructed (cf. Wodak et al., 1999). Thus, identity is constituted in social interaction via communication and discourse. Consequently, in order to understand identity, the processes of identity formation, construction and change should be analysed.

Here, our choice of social constructionist and anti-essentialist approach towards the relationship between discourse and identity determines our choice of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the most suitable research programme for the present study. Of particular relevance here is the fact that CDA attempts to link both the "micro" and the "macro" contexts, claiming that thorough analysis of discourse entails thorough engagement with the textual product of discourse ("text"), even though the wider discourses in which the text is situated ("discursive practices") should also be considered, as well as the analysis of the context of socio-cultural practices, including production, transmission and consumption (cf. Fairclough, 1995). Thus, it is CDA that offers us the most suitable tools for approaching the analysis of identity in discourses of exchange students, without disregarding the wider socio-political affect of European student mobility on the resulting discourses.

Study design and categories for analysis

Primarily interested in discourse and construction of representations of "other", we drew on the theories offered by CDA (cf. Wodak, 2001) in synergy with CL methodology (cf. Baker et al., 2008), supported by *WordSmith* software, which allows the researcher to focus on concordances, revealing the patterns of language use, based on repetition, inevitably pointing out "the dominant discourses". The study also drew on van Leeuwen's (cf., 1996) model of "Representation of Social Actor". Our primary interest here was to study any discrepancies in representations of "other", particularly "locals" (i.e., Latvians) and "compatriots" in discourses of experienced and inexperienced Erasmus exchange students - travelers, thus to test our hypothesis, which assumes that compared to less experienced student-travelers, more experienced Erasmus exchange students' discourse will bare explicit signs of lexico-grammatical difference as regards the appreciation of diversity.

At the centre of our analysis here are the exchange students' personal backgrounds (INTs – Inexperienced Exchange Students; EXTs – Experienced Exchange Students), their previous travel experience and their lexico-grammatical choices made in the course of research interviews. For the purposes of data collection in 2010, 22 Erasmus exchange students were interviewed at the University of Latvia, among whom there were 9 what I termed as Experienced Travellers (EXTs) (those who had lived and/or studied abroad on their own for a period of not less than a year) and 13 Inexperienced Travellers (INTs), who had none or very limited experience of travelling abroad. The semi-structured interviews encouraged the respondents to reflect on their everyday life and encounters in the host country. The complete interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed *in verbatim* into a 70,000 word corpus.

Next, for the purposes of our analysis, we split the collected corpus into two small corpora of 30,000 (with 9 EXTs) and 43,000 (with 13 INTs) words respectively, which formed the basis for our analysis. Among EXTs, most students had previous experiences of extensive travel or living abroad on their own and claimed to be "more experienced" than the other exchange students, who may have travelled outside their home country, yet never on their own and not for a period longer than a month. There were only German and Austrian students among the EXTs, while INTs came from a variety of national backgrounds: Polish, German, Austrian, Estonian, Czech and Hungarian. Even though English was not the mother tongue for any of the interviewees, they claimed and appeared to be fluent in English, which has been acknowledged to be the main means of communication among the Erasmus students and is widely used as the primary language of instruction for Erasmus exchange students. However, the fact that the language of the interview (English) was not the mother tongue for the exchange students may have had an effect on the data as well as on our findings.

In our analysis, we focused on Erasmus exchange students' use of personal pronouns and their respective derivatives (we-our-us; they-their-them), as both, linguists and anthropologists alike recognize the importance of pronouns in anchoring language to "specific speakers in specific contexts" and in "signaling the reciprocal changes in the roles of interactants through their performance of, and engagement in communicative acts (Silverstein, 1976:132). That is, at this referential level, linguistic signs identify speakers in terms of how they orient themselves and other social actors to the elements of the speech situation such as "time" and "place". Besides, pronominal use and its referents have implications for "the interpersonal relationships between the speaker and others and the way the receivers are positioned" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006:116).

As far as group identity construction is concerned, pronouns "we" and "they" have a special status. According to Helmbrecht (2002:33), theses pronouns are essentially connected to the establishment of social groups and as the result, are powerful in establishing and reinforcing social identities by marking in-/out-groups. This is particularly relevant here, as "we" may be suggesting the presence of an in-group, while "they" may be suggesting the presence of an "out-group", which in van Dijk's (1997:12) view may be accompanied not only by the features of "polarizing discourse", but also a tendency to attribute positive qualities to "our group", while referring derogatively to "their group".

Consequently, in our analysis, we resort to *WordSmith* concordancer in order to analyse emerging lexical patterns with personal pronouns "we" and "they", as well as their derivatives in our two small corpora. Next, we turn to the analysis of concordances with "Latvian(-s)", as a node, referring to the host community and "X" (replaced by the national communities of the interviewees) as a node. By conducting this analysis, we wished to identify any emergent

patterns, discourses or topoi (cf. Wodak, 2001) appearing in construction of "other" in discourses of Erasmus exchange students of each group (i.e., EXTs and INTs). This stage of research was followed by CDA-informed analysis of longer stretches of text, in order to gain insight into the wider contexts the emergent patterns were used in.

Analysis and discussion of emerging findings

Since we cannot illustrate our in-depth corpus analysis and offer examples from the corpora, here, we wish to give only a necessarily brief overview and illustrate our key findings.

This figure shows the ways EXTs constructed representations for their compatriots, which are used as the node here:

N	Concordance
5	how how… people can be alike, like Austrians and Latvians! I'm grateful that
6	surprised – this wouldn't be allowed in Germany, at least not at my university.
7	England. And I've been studying in Germany for 5 years now. And living…
8	more patriotic than big nations. Yeah… Austrians are more patriotic than
9	No, no it hasn't changed! But all the Germans here, just like in Germany see
10	what's it like for English, but for the German – they don't have conversation
11	course! Yeah… that's 'cause I think Austrians and Latvians are not SO far
12	because 30% of Erasmus students are German and so… it's quite a lot and you

Figure 1: EXTs: Compatriots

The extract reveals the pattern where the speakers make comparisons between the national groups by homogenizing them and making generalizations in order to draw conclusions, like in line 9: *Austrians are more patriotic than Germans*; or in line 67:. *People are more laid back in Austria*. The comparison is made between the speaker's home country and the host country (Latvia) or the other country the speaker is familiar with. The comparisons are mostly based around the following categories: "acceptable" and "inacceptable behavioral traits" and "positive/acceptable" and "negative/unacceptable traits". Surprisingly, most labels attributed to the speakers' compatriots in this corpus carry negative evaluation, such as *in Germany it's less fun; people will complain if you don't follow the plan strictly* (line18); *they are always stressed out...; they are not being able to relax* (line 194). With only few cases where positive labels are attributed to the speakers' compatriots, like the reference to the open and accessible academic community (line 122): *we have big variety of courses... where we meet different people,* as opposed to the host academic community, that, according to the speaker is difficult to gain the entry to. This observation, where the compatriots are represented positively is also supported in line 35 *people (in Latvia) are not so friendly as in Germany*.

Having conducted a further sort with determiners (this, that, these, those) and pronouns (they, them, their) as nodes, there appears a pattern where *EXTs: use anaphora for the explanation of national/social/cultural/behavioral or other differences between the locals and others.*

N	Concordance
19	People here seem to be very busy – they have no time to meet. All the time
20	quite funny, because the Ecuadorians they sound a little bit like Latvians when
21	children and a little bit higher, helping them to do their homework and
22	They are in a group. I can't approach them so easily. In Germany it's not so
23	and sometimes I cannot explain to them exactly what exactly I want. And if
24	be getting. It's my chance of getting them individually and telling them:
25	I wouldn't even go to class.... But hey – they do! And now I have a feeling that if
26	in general outside the class. Yeah, but they are just the swear words no (no) but
27	they would complain and here they don't complain, just do it (laughs).
28	from my teaching. And of course I have them, I have some but they were for me
29	Japanese being even more organised, they showed all of those stereotypes to
30	that I'm trying to explain something to them.! And it's just... But all in all it's a
31	studying. Also I live very far away from them and far from the city centre. with
32	standing in line, for example. When they wouldn't stand in line in Germany,
33	it like for English, but for the German – they don't have conversation courses,
34	so I said what do you need from me so they said anyway it's nearly the end of
35	a little closed but when you get to know them they are really friendly and kind

Figure 2: EXTs on the locals

Here, our analysis is centered solely on the examples where the context indicated the pronouns "they", "them" and "their" with an explicit reference to the locals. In the extract from the corpus, the sort reveals the pattern of comparison predominantly used as anaphora "they" to refer to the locals, as in: *in Germany the students aren't as closed as they are here*; *in Germany they would complain, but here they just do it*; *I wouldn't even go to class, but they do*, etc. Pronoun "they" is used to emphasize the differences between the speaker and their home country and the host country, where a positive feature characteristic of one country is compared and contrasted against a similar feature (either positive or negative) of another country, characteristic of polarizing discourse. Besides, the use of generic "they" here seems to fulfill the function of distancing the speaker from their claims about the locals, partially withdrawing the responsibility for the claim.

All in all, the representations constructed here tend to involve justification of the differences centered around the personal appraisement, such as the behavioral traits (maybe *that's their mentality, not as closed as they are here*) or general evaluatives (*people aren't so friendly as in Germany; people here seem to be very busy*) of the locals and compatriots or even the speaker him/herself. Also, the locals and others are mostly referred to by means of classification based on their provenance (i.e., Germans, Latvians, Austrians, etc.) that is used as the primary basis for distinction between various groups that is also indicated by recurrent use of spatial deixis to refer to the locals, when their provenance is not mentioned.

Furthermore, the speakers tend to construct the locals as a closed out-group that they have little contact with: *with Latvians it's quite difficult… maybe it's their mentality…; they are in a group; I can't approach them so easily; they seem a little closed; people here seem to be very busy*; etc. These arguments are used to serve as justifications or as explanatory accounts for EXTs' lack of contact with the locals: such personal appraisement as not only being *closed*, but also *busy* or *having such mentality* are just few examples of the explanations these students offer for the lack of contacts with the locals.

A closer qualitative analysis, informed by Wodak's (2001) DHA (Discourse-Historical Approach) to CDA revealed that EXTs frequently resorted to represented speech (intertextuality) when they attributed positive features to the locals and supported their point of view by represented direct speech, where they reenacted their conversations with them or even

impersonated the voices of the host community. EXTs' representations were positive, yet contradictory with regard to some of the previous claims.

Ul.:

I like it here the…in my opinion, the… Latvian kinda mentality, it's all laid back, it's all kinda "it's gonna happen! and maybe "we're going to improvise!" and it's all like "good things happen anyway, and bad things happen anyway too, so we just have to take it as it comes!". That's your kinda thinking… I think people in countries like Germany and Austria, Austria is almost like Germany, in general. I think people in Germany are… are not being able to relax, they… they are always stressed out, and everything has to be on time and you have to be on time, and everything is like, like this, and orderly! Like everything is in a system and here there is no big system, and it's just… things just happen and it's good! Yeah, it's really good!

The speaker asserts the positive traits that she ascribes to the lifestyle of the locals predicated by spatial reference *here*, to identify her point of departure/perspectivation, where she positions herself as speaking from a fixed location: *I like it here the…in my opinion, the… Latvian kinda mentality, it's all laid back, it's all kinda "it's gonna happen! and "maybe we're going to improvise!",* where all references are made to a material processes and, therefore, are agentless *good things happen*, *bad things happen*, where the actors do not exert control/power over the events/actions, rather being on the receiving end of the ongoing processes: *take it as it comes*.

Of particular interest in this extract are the pronominal shifts. The repeated use of the personal pronoun *we* in the represented speech as the speaker voices the whole nation, unifying it by means of the collective pronoun *we*, thus providing support for their argument from a metaphysical collectivity of voices, and backgrounding her own bias. The following noun phrase including the pronoun *your* in *that's your kinda thinking* indicates that *you* has a dual reference: the locals and the addressee (interviewer). Such elements as the mitigating particles: *so*, *like*, *maybe*, together with the mitigating formulations, hedges: *kinda*, *in my opinion,* serve to signal the speaker's uncertainty about the claim. The speaker makes a juxtaposition between the *laid-back Latvian kinda way* and equally generalizing commonly stereotypical features of German and Austrian society. Though Austria and Austrians are backgrounded in this account, such stereotypical characteristics as "order", "discipline" and "control", which the speaker attributes negative connotations to (*not being able to relax*), as opposed to the emphatic (*really good*) positive features pertaining to the Latvians that are restated at the end of the statement. The speaker's positive portrayal of Latvians is further reflected in the choice of personal reference: repeated use of the vague personal pronoun *they* to show disapproval and distancing from the third national group (here: *Germans*). One more overgeneralization is made here with the reference to the speaker's home country (Austria), which is vaguely compared and equaled to Germany, the country the speaker is familiar with. The use of an overgeneralization in the form of a simile here *Austria is almost like Germany*, in general, though mitigated by adverbs *almost* and *in general* undermines the speaker's authority, thus eliminating the speaker's partial responsibility for making the statements.

Next, in the INTs group, the most prominent discourse prosody is the speakers' tendency to make generalizations about the co-nationals, frequently mentioning the homogeneous groups and not the individuals, create static national portraits: *the Polish people* (line 68, 185, 282), *Hungarian society is …* (line 210), *in Turkey, everyone is*…(line 344); *Ukrainians are*…(line 521); *Germans don't really have problems*…(line 264) (alphabetic sort with the main sort L3, L2 and L1).

N Concordance
282 speaks English, I know that the Polish people are even friendlier to the
283 country. Yeah, because I know that in Poland, my experience, for example

N Concordance
549 think that the normal way to behave. In Hungary, we are laughing a lot and

N Concordance
561 so much. People in Turkey are more polite. Here they are so rude with you,

N Concordance
575 want to be here, they want to leave Latvia. Of course in Italy people are not

Figure 3: Extracts from INTs' corpora compatriots

The speakers incline towards the discourse prosody of confidence and expertise when proliferating the auto-stereotypes: *I know that*…(lines 282-283), *of course, in Italy, people are*…(line 575, alphabetic sort L3,2,1). Also, the discourse on compatriots reveals the differences between the co-nationals and others: frequent use of comparative and superlative forms (line 521) *warmer* and *the most* are a prominent feature of discourse prosody suggesting the speakers' (INTs) tendency to make generalizations about the co-nationals, frequently mentioning the homogeneous groups and not the individuals, create static national portraits: *the Polish people* (line 68, 185, 282), *Hungarian society is* … (line 210), *in Turkey, everyone is*…(line 344); *Ukrainians are*…(line 521). Also, the discourse on compatriots reveals the differences between the co-nationals and others: frequent use of comparative forms (line 521*) warmer and friendlier*, *richer* (line 348), *happier than* (line 210), indicate the presence of a subset of evaluative adjectives, which broadly relate to personality and behavior. This feature corresponds to identification by categorization and appraisement in van Leeuwen's (1996) typology.

Thus, we turn to the further analysis of the concordances with the Latvian* as a node, with the aim to establish any further patterns to the labeling of the locals. As the following extracts show, the speakers tend to attribute either positive or negative labels to the locals by distancing themselves and resorting to the locals by generic collective nouns, such as *people* or vague personal pronoun *they*:

N Concordance 63
you get invited. They are always very polite and very friendly people, so it"s
N Concordance 9
people are not very friendly with foreigners and they are afraid or not afraid but angry that we a
N Concordance 37
's really different, but if you are at the market, they are really polite and maybe it depends on wh
N Concordance 383
that people are a little bit rude or not so polite and like the old women who push
N Concordance
105 closed, the doors are closed between the Latvians and Erasmus students – I have
N Concordance
119 it's hard to find a connection on daily basis with Latvians. You are going in the same building
N Concordance
309 hard to get to know people, it's like because the Latvians they don't' say like: "Hello, I didn't
N Concordance
535 It's hard to think of something, to go to an average Latvian and start talking to him or her. Because
N Concordance

574 through reception, so they see us but I want to meet Latvians and not only the Erasmus students,

Figure 4: INTs locals

While the negative labels are toned down by INTs, the positive characteristics attributed to the locals are normally intensified (e.g., *very friendly*, *always very polite, really polite*) by degree adverb *very* and modifying adverb *really*. The collocation analysis reveals a tendency of the speakers to issue criticism (i.e., negative labels), which is often modified by mitigating adverb premodifying the evaluative adjective, as in *a little bit rude* by weakening the epistemic status of the proposition, as well as in *not so polite*, *not very friendly* or as in the use of the repair, as *in afraid, or not afraid, but angry.*

Besides, the students' interpretation of their relations/ contacts with the locals shown here is marked by negative discourse prosody of *closed* and *hard*, which figures in the justifications the speakers construct for the absence or the lack of contacts with the locals throughout this extract.

On the one hand, the figurative and literal *closed doors* that exist between the locals and the exchange students represent the divide between the host community and the exchange students that prevent interaction between these groups, as well as the obstacles (repeated use of *hard*: *hard to think of something, hard to find a connection*, *hard to get to know people*) confronted by the exchange students in meeting the locals. Another perspective that is apparent here represents the stance of the locals, as epistemically constructed by the speakers who are not locals themselves. The locals are seen as having the power of granting the possibility of entry into their group, as in *so they see us*, or their reticence to *the new contacts*, as they are *already comfortable* and do not wish to address (as in: *Latvians don't say like: Hello!* (line 309) – thus the exchange students are constructed here as the others (i.e., foreigners, strangers) or the out-group. Once again Latvians here are constructed and even ventriloquated in and through the discourse of exchange students as a single homogeneous group (e.g. line 535: *an average Latvian*).

The next extract reveals the topos of sameness and difference, which is reflected by the use of constructive as well as justificatory strategies. First of all, the speaker constructs three groups in her account: the locals (Latvians), the generic foreigners and the Poles (her compatriots), presupposing the intra-national similarity and homogeneity and constructing "the imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). The speaker constructs a negative presentation of the locals, as being xenophobic - not very friendly with foreigners, afraid, angry, while portraying the Poles as xenophilic, by means of an emphatic comparative: *even friendlier to the foreigners than to the locals*. Having built two out-groups, referenced by the de-toponymical labels*: the Latvians* and *the Poles,* marked by vague personal pronoun *they* the speaker distances herself from both groups by constructing an in-group of foreigners, which she identifies with by using the pronoun *we* (speaker-inclusive): *I don't know whether I can say about it, but Latvians, they show that they are not very friendly with foreigners and they are afraid or angry that we are from another country.*

Here, the topos of *foreignness*, is marked not only by another country of origin than that of the host community, as third-country nationals (Wodak, 2001), but also to their linguistic resource, the affiliation to English (an international lingua franca). "Foreigners" as a group are backgrounded and portrayed as beneficiaries, not as actors, since all the roles are chosen for them by the locals (the majority).

Kar.:
I don't know whether I can say about it, but Latvians, they show that they are not very friendly with foreigners and they are afraid or angry that we are from another country. Yeah, because I know that in Poland, from my experience, for example when someone speaks English, I know that the Poles are even friendlier to the foreign persons than they are to the Polish person… I don't know why it is so… We very often talk about it with other Erasmus students, that the attitude to people who speak English is really terrible.

The speaker justifies her initial claim by alluding to *other Erasmus students*, who support this stance of the locals with regard to the out-group (i.e., *foreigners: people who speak English*). The passage is characterized by frequent use of disclaimers (*I don't know whether I can say about it*, *from my experience*) hedges, mitigating particles and modifiers (e.g., *not very*), which stress the speaker's subjectivity with regard to the positions expressed, as well as constructs an apologetic utterance which bares the influence from the presence of the interviewer and the awareness of this presence on behalf of the interviewee ("the observer's paradox").

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that exchange students (primarily INTs) may be inclined (intentionally or not) in their discourse to construct negative representations on the locals, based on the construction of "generalizations of differences in their application to whole groups", or, in other words, "stereotyping" (Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2007:7). It appears that generalizations in both, INTs and EXTs corpora inevitably revealed (negative or positive) stereotypical views of various national groups, despite the frequent indication on behalf of EXTs of their awareness of the potential pitfalls of stereotyping, their previous experience of mobility did not automatically ensure the presence of "proteophilic competence" (i.e., did not demonstrate in/through the discursive choices their ability to appreciate diversity (cf. Dervin, 2008)). Nevertheless, the abundance in representations in discourses of both, EXTs and INTs on locals and students' compatriots may be the outcome of in-/out-group categorization as determined by the context of the stay abroad, during which the students were distanced from their compatriots and marginalized from the locals, which allowed them to construct representations on both groups, by adopting a distant/ "foreign" stance.

Locals as well as EXTs' compatriots were described as homogeneous groups, and thus differences between them were discursively constructed. Locals were attributed a mixture of positive and negative labels in EXTs' accounts, while EXTs resorted to a variety of linguistic strategies to intensify the positive claims and mitigate the criticism directed at the host community. Also, notably, the speakers in this group resorted to justification strategies to explicate EXTs lack of contact with the locals, which they held themselves accountable for.

As regards INTs' compatriots, with the exception of rare criticism, mostly they were praised and ascribed positive labels, while in INTs discourse on the locals, the negative discourse prosody tended to dominate. In their representations of the locals, INTs were hesitant in their accounts and the stances they took towards the locals (by means of mitigation strategies, markers of subjectivity, contradictory remarks).

In general, EXTs took an "expert stance", drawing on their previous experience of mobility as an advantage, based on which they created representations for others in their discourses. Also, while EXTs tended to issue praise (i.e., positive discourse prosody) when referring to the locals, INTs heavily mitigated frequent negative predicates, while intensifying

the rare positive ones, whenever they created representations of the locals, making their discourse sound apologetic. This may be due to the subjective and unstable nature of discourse (Fairclough, 1992), particularly, the discourse of representation, where the speakers are prone to construct different representations with different interlocutors and whenever entering different contexts. Thus, such a tentative INTs' stance may be explained by the presence of the interviewer (a Latvian and a member of the university staff), while EXTs' choice of "expert stance" and positive labelling of the locals may have been motivated by their wish to demonstrate familiarity with the local community and their general expertise in dealing with what appeared to be "strange" and "unfamiliar".

Finally, it appears that our initial hypothesis is only partly true, as our findings point out that the main "discursive difference" between EXTs and INTs was the stance taken towards the claims (assertive/ hesitant; distant/ involved; expert/novice) the speakers made and their stance towards the Other (positive/negative) present in their discourse. EXTs emphasised their advantageous status as experienced travellers and asserted the "expert stance", as they strived for generalisations and the use of intensification strategies when drawing "portraits" (Papatsiba, 2006) of various national groups they were familiar with, which served as a vantage point for the comparisons. In contrast, INTs issued multiple labels and made contrasting comparisons only between their compatriots and the locals, resorting to nationality as heavily mitigated explanation for the group's behavioural patterns (i.e., auto-/heterostereotyping).

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