



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***INTERCULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF GERMANY AND THEIR  
IMPACT ON ACADEMIC MOBILITY***

**CHIN EE WEN**

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**INTERCULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF GERMANY AND  
THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC MOBILITY**

By

**CHIN EE WEN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**April 2017**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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**April 2017**

**Chair: Jürgen Martin Burkhardt, PhD**  
**Faculty: Modern Language and Communication**

There has been a lot of debate among researchers on intercultural activities of cross-border mobility (Dervin, 2011, Henze and Zhu, 2012, Machart and Lim, 2013). Since the word ‘culture’ is used to put people in different categories and create culturally different Others, the question arises whether it can explain all intercultural activities in mobile students’ experiences or do they represent occurrences of “interculturality without culture?” (Dervin 2010). The study of ‘intercultural’ activities should focus on the experiences and interactions between individuals, and cultural identification processes of interculturality should not refer to any kind of static ‘culture’ during the sojourn. According to Dervin & Machart (2015), it is believed that social and personal representations of the Other’s culture impact attitudes and subsequently behaviours. In this study, a liquid intercultural approach is employed to examine how Malaysian students represent themselves, Germany and German speakers, and the impact of this representation on student mobility. Interviews were conducted with students in the B.A German programme in Malaysia who took part in a cross-border academic mobility programme in Germany, as well as with students who did not take part in any mobility programme. Participants were asked on their representations of Germany and German speakers, and their motivation to participate in the mobility programme. Students who have been to Germany were also asked on their ‘intercultural’ encounters in the host country. Using Mixed Intersubjectivity (Dervin,2013), the analysis would entail how participants identified themselves as non-native language learners and how they perceived Germany, the impact of their representations on their motivation to study abroad and how mobile participants faced interculturality when they were in Germany. The focus of the study is on *how* the participants talked instead of *what* they said about themselves, the Other and the encounters they made. This will reveal the power relations between the language learners and the native speakers from the mobile students’ point of view.

Abstrak thesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

## **REPRESENTASI BUDAYA SILANG JERMAN DAN IMPAKNYA ATAS AKADEMIK MOBILITI**

Oleh

**CHIN EE WEN**

**April 2017**

**Pengerusi: Jürgen Martin Burkhardt, PhD**  
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Kebelakangan ini terdapat pelbagai perdebatan antara penyelidik-penyelidik mengenai aktiviti antara budaya dalam konteks mobiliti merentas sempadan (Dervin, 2011, Henze and Zhu, 2012, Machart and Lim, 2013). Oleh kerana istilah “budaya” digunakan untuk membezakan manusia dan mewujudkan pelbagai kebudayaan yang berlainan, mampukah ia menjelaskan kesemua aktiviti antara budaya di kalangan pelajar mobiliti atau adakah aktiviti-aktiviti ini melambangkan situasi “antara budaya tanpa budaya”. (Dervin 2010). Kajian aktiviti “antara budaya” “sepatutnya memberi tumpuan kepada pengalaman dan pergaulan antara individu dan proses mengidentifikasi budaya dalam konteks “interculturality” tidak seharusnya merujuk kepada sebarang budaya statik dalam tempoh penginapan sementara.

Dipercayai bahawa representasi sosial serta representasi individu mempengaruhi sikap dan tabiat seseorang. Dalam kajian, pendekatan yang fleksibel dan luwes antara budaya digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana pelajar Malaysia merepresentasi diri mereka di negara Jerman dan di kalangan penutur asli bahasa Jerman serta kesan terhadap mobiliti mereka. Temuduga dijalankan dengan pelajar Ijazah Bahasa Jerman di Malaysia yang telah mengambil bahagian dalam program pertukaran ke negara Jerman dan pelajar yang tidak terlibat dalam program pertukaran. Peserta-peserta ditemuduga tentang pandangan mereka terhadap Jerman, penutur asli bahasa Jerman dan motivasi penglibatan mereka dalam program pertukaran. Pelajar yang pernah ke Jerman akan disoal mengenai pengalaman antara budaya mereka di sana. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan “Mixed Intersubjectivity” atau “Antara kesubjektifan yang pelbagai” (Dervin, 2013), analisis akan mengkaji bagaimana pelajar mengaitkan diri mereka sebagai seorang pelajar bukan penutur asli dan tanggapan mereka terhadap negara Jerman, kesan daripada representasi mereka berikutan motivasi ingin belajar di seberang laut dan bagaimana mereka berdepan dengan situasi antara budaya ketika berada di sana. Tumpuan bukan terhadap apa yang pelajar-pelajar menceritakan tetapi atas bagaimana mereka menceritakan

pengalaman mereka, orang lain dan orang yang ditemui. Ini akan menjelaskan hubungan mengenai kuasa antara pelajar Bahasa Jerman dengan penutur asli daripada pandangan pelajar mobiliti.



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Last but not least, thanks to my family members for their support and encouragement during my study. This support and encouragement are the things who make me able to complete this study.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 3 April 2017 to conduct the final examination of Chin Ee Wen on his thesis entitled "Intercultural Representations of Germany and their Impact on Academic Mobility" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Arts.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SJTU	Shanghai Jiao Tong University
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
LT	Long-term Mobility
ST	Short-term Mobility
NM	Not Participated in Mobility
INT	Interviewer
MIN	Mixed Intersubjectivity
TN	Transnational Paradigm
MN	Methodological Nationalism



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Academic mobility trends are not a new thing in Malaysia and one of the purposes is to internationalize higher education. Academic mobility is for study or teaching purposes and involves the participation of students or teachers in higher education who move within their own country or they cross borders for a limited period of time (long-term/short-term). Short-term academic mobility usually refers to academic mobility that involves less than six months and long-term mobility is for more than six months. In this study, the focus is on the student mobility.

The internationalization of higher education has prompted some universities (local and foreign) to set up branch campuses, twinning programmes, etc. abroad that encourage student involvement, thus promoting intercultural activities among universities. Global university rankings such as the Shanghai Jiao Tong (SJTU) and the Times Higher Education World Rankings have been created for comparative purposes and also as a stimulation for universities to ‘compete’ with each other in order to become a well-known education institution (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007; Bornmann & Mutz, 2013; Hazelkorn, 2015) and one of the criteria to achieve this is based on the number of foreign students in the institution. This internationalization trend shows that mobile students form an important group in academic mobility in order to achieve the objective of promoting intercultural activities among countries. The term *mobile student* does not only refer to the student who studies abroad or cross border (Dervin, 2009; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011; Souto-Otero, et al., 2013) but also the student who studies locally but under a foreign education system, such as a Malaysian student who studies in Monash University with an Australia curriculum. This will be explained further in the literature review.

Malaysian students studying abroad have increased from 58,963 in 2009 to 89,686 in 2011. It will be interesting to study the motivation for students to participate or not participate in academic mobility. Motivation is someone’s desire to be interested in something or to make an effort to achieve a goal that is stimulated by either internal or external factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; González, Mesanza, & Mariel, 2011; Lim, Yap, & Lee, 2011). However, the question is: Are these factors which have been already grouped into categories such as to improve language skill, opportunity to be exposed to other cultures, etc. by certain scholars transparent enough to show the impact of the differences of student motivation in academic mobility? There is a need to understand that every student is different (such as way of thinking, social network, living style, etc.) and this difference creates a representation which forms at a deeper level in the discourse of the student and later influences his motivation (Ladegaard, 2000; Dervin, 2012; Härkönen & Dervin, 2016; Machart, 2016). The representation is spread in many types of discourses: religious (Raday, 2003; Beyer & Beaman, 2007), political (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992; Denzin, 2003), media (Emmerson, 2016; Blitvich, 2009), etc. This representation is often hidden within the



discourse and can be analysed by using discourse analysis which will later be shown in this study.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Germany has been recognized as one of the major players in the academic mobility world (Benson, et al., 2013; Härkönen & Dervin, 2016; Santoro, Sosu, & Fassetta, 2016). The number of mobile students in Germany has increased throughout the years to reach 301,305 between 2013 and 2014 (Bessey, 2012; OECD Indicators, 2014). Yet, little has been researched on the motivation of students from this part of the world (Malaysia) for going to Germany.

From 2009 to 2011, there was an increase in the number of international students involved in academic mobility in Germany. However, between 2009 and 2011 the number Malaysian student study abroad to Germany decreased from 847 to 654. It would be interesting to find out the reason for this phenomenon. The number of students participating in study programmes abroad should rather increase or at least remain the same since mobility is encouraged in educational and political discourses - and there exists the policy of internationalisation of Universities in Malaysia.

Two universities in Malaysia, namely Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Malaya (UM) offer a degree programme in the German language. . Every language student, including German language students, is expected to participate in a study abroad programme in Germany in order to 'improve' their knowledge in German. yet only 10 students, which is a limited number. have participated in the academic mobility programme to Germany in the last 5 years.

Since the creation of academic mobility programmes in many countries, several studies on academic mobility have emerged. The most discussed topic is the intercultural experiences of international students (Paige, 2009; Sigalas, 2010; Salajan & Chiper, 2012; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Carlson, 2012; Wolcott, 2013; Mapp, 2013; Wong, 2004). Most of the studies use a solid approach to analyse mobile students' intercultural experiences (Gu et al., 2010; King & Skeldon, 2010; King et al., 2011; Yang, Webster, & Prosser, 2011; Hardy, Prince, & Worsley, 2013). 'Culture' plays a role in the process of academic mobility. The 'culture' here might refer to a group of people, a category of motivation, a standard interaction way, a similar attitude, etc. This approach cannot provide a full image of the students' motivation to study abroad, as it categorises people into boxes and creates a problematic Us vs. Them. It cannot satisfactorily answer questions on interculturality/ discursive construction of identities (Dervin, , 2016). Scholars claim that, in order to have a transparent answer with respect to students' academic mobility, there is a need to move away from solid approaches to a liquid approach to be less discriminatory (Phillips, 2007; Bhatia & Ram, 2009; Dervin, 2011) and less stereotypical. Liquid approach means identifying the process of interaction between individuals instead of interaction between cultures (a static and imagined picture of a group of people) (Bauman, 2000; Abdallah-Pretceille, 2013; Dervin, 2016). It is

important to understand the 'real' motivation of students in detail by analyzing their discourse in the context of their representation. The word 'real' that has been used here means the motivation that is not fixed in itself but might be subjective according to different individuals because there is no pure 'real' involved with the representation. Last but not least, this 'real' motivation is shifting and changing within time and space. Representation is a portrayal of an image towards someone or something which exists in 'reality' and this 'reality' of the world is interrelated with representation. The purpose of this study is to examine the discourse of B.A German language students when they express themselves regarding anything related to the language they are learning (for example Germany and German speakers) .to see the appearance of the imagined cultures (Dervin, 2007a).

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The word 'intercultural' in student motivation in academic mobility has not been clearly explained until recent times. For most students, this word refers to interaction between 'cultures' (Cadman & Song, 2012; Machart, 2016). This is a type of representation on culture, whereby a group of people has been represented as a 'culture'. Several studies showed that students are motivated to participate in academic mobility because they seek for interaction with a different culture (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Goldstein & Keller, 2015), but how can there be interaction between cultures (everyone has been generalised and put in boxes) since every individual is different? This raises an issue that if the word 'culture' is not carefully defined to students prior to their study abroad, a sheer opposition of Us vs. Them may emerge unconsciously in their mind and later impact their academic mobility experiences creating two groups which may become antagonistic. The dichotomy may become discriminatory. In order to minimise this problem, there is a need to discover the different types of representation (How the students represent the host country) and the impact on their behavior or motivation in academic mobility. The function of representation is to make "something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar" (Moscovici, 2000) that will deliver the polished information/images to students. It is everywhere and it allows people to understand sociality and helps in the interaction between individuals (Gillespie, 2006; Salazar & Graburn, 2014) and it often replaces reality. The role of a representation could limit the students' view towards the host country and influence the students' interest to participate or not participate in academic mobility (Ladegaard, 2000).

There is a need to understand that the relationship between representations and motivation are interrelated (Ladegaard, 2000). Students' motivation to study or not to study abroad has been categorised into common categories such as financial, personal consideration and social influence. Yet the representation of 'culture' of students on study abroad usually has not been analysed further. This further analysis is to explore how this representation plays a role in the students' motivation and decision to study abroad. Is the interaction of students in the language course and study abroad being influenced by their representation? Does the representation influence their self-positioning and how is their view on nationality in terms of superiority vs. inferiority? Self-positioning refers to how the students position themselves (superior or inferior) in the representation(s).

### **1.3 Aim of Study**

The purpose of this study is to find out students' representation with regards to the German language or 'culture' and the implication of this representation on their motivation in participating in academic mobility programmes in Germany. For this study, the discourses of students of the German language in a Malaysian university were analysed.

First, I analysed their study experiences in their German programme in Malaysia. Here, I intended to find out the element(s) which form the students' representation and types of representation they have regarding 'German'. There is a need to understand that they might have representations that are different from each other.

Secondly, by using mixed intersubjectivity (Dervin, 2013) to analyse their experiences, I intended to find out students' self-positioning while they talk about their representation. This concept will be explained in the methodology section. Following this, I analysed their representation that developed their motivation in academic mobility and their interaction in their study in Malaysia or study abroad.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The representations among students in the German B.A programmes was examined. In addition, the self-positioning of the participants in the representation in the interview process was investigated. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How do participants represent Germany and the German speakers?
- 2) How do they identify themselves as non-native learners of German?
- 3) How do participants engage in an intercultural experience with Germans?
- 4) What is the impact of these representations on their motivation to study abroad?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study aims to fill in the gap in the Malaysian academic mobility research area. The gap here refers to the lack of research on the motivation of students going to Germany from this part of world (Malaysia). Besides that, most of the academic mobility studies in Malaysia that focus on the motivation of students in studying abroad programmes provided a general image without any detailed information (Zeeshan, Sabbar, Bashir, & Hussain, 2013; Jauhar, Ghani, & Islam, 2016). This study which uses an intercultural discourse approach provides extra information to this research area by adding detailed information on students' academic mobility motivation. Furthermore, it aims to not only to provide some suggestions to foreign language instructors on the way to convey information from books, audios, videos, internet sources, etc. to students but also to impart the importance of preventing students from falling into the trap of the representation of 'culture' in the language. Besides the language instructors, this study could also serve as a guide to language students and other interested readers to have a greater understanding of

representation while learning a new language and the implication for motivation to study abroad.

## **1.6 Limitation of this Study**

This study chooses participants from a B.A German language programme in Malaysia<sup>1</sup>. The B.A German language programme is only offered in two public universities which are Universiti Malaya and Universiti Putra Malaysia. This study selected three types of participants, which are 1) students who went for a long-term academic programme, 2) students who went for a short-term mobility programme, and 3) students who did not participate in a study abroad programme. This selection aims to gain rich information from different aspects. When the process of selecting participants was carried out, it was surprising to note that some of the students who had the requirements to study abroad did not enroll in the academic mobility programme. The number of BA German programme students in each batch approximates between 17 and 18. By using 100% to represent the number of students, the percentage of students who went for academic mobility is 27 % and 73 % would be students who did not participate in academic mobility, and this is more than half of the total number of students in the B.A programme. In order to balance the number of the three types of participants, participants are not only selected from only one semester but from different semesters and even from graduated students.

The way participants expressed themselves is different from one another. Some of them could express themselves freely and provided information more than expected but some did not express much in the answer they provided. Among the 13 participants in this study, 2 participants who did not study abroad only answered the interview questions without elaborating even though the interviewer tried to guide them by using several W-questions such as 'why', 'how' and 'what you mean by that'. This situation is understandable since participants have the right to decide how they want to express themselves, and this has to be taken into consideration while doing the data analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on programme cannot be more specific for reasons of confidentiality.

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