

1-1-2016

Short-Term Study Abroad: Perspectives on Speaking Gains and Language Contact

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Previous studies have shown that study abroad has a positive effect on second language (L2) learning outcomes for students who spend at least a semester abroad. It is unclear, however, whether a short-term experience also has a measurable impact on L2 development. The present study examines the relationship between speaking proficiency gains made by students during a short-term study abroad program and their target language use outside of class in the host environment. To determine the potential relationships between speaking gains and language use, a background information questionnaire, a two-part modified language contact profile (LCP), and a pre-program and post-program simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI) were administered to 20 students in a traditional short-term study abroad program in Spain. Findings indicate that the group did improve their speaking proficiency. At the same time, data taken from the LCP suggest that study abroad learners did not engage in extensive social interaction with native speakers throughout the duration of the program. To improve traditional short-term study abroad programs, the author uses these results to discuss aspects of the programmatic structure that could strengthen the program's linguistic benefits.

Keywords: *language contact, oral proficiency, simulated oral proficiency interview, Spanish, study abroad*

INTRODUCTION

The study abroad experience continues to be a core aspect of undergraduate foreign language (FL) education. Previous studies demonstrate that study abroad has a positive effect on second language (L2) learning outcomes for those students who spend at least a semester abroad (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Collentine, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 2004; Freed, 1995; Hernández, 2010a, 2010b; Isabelli-García, 2006; Magnan & Back, 2007; Lafford, 2004, 2006; Lord, 2009; Marqués-Pascual, 2011; Regan, 2003; Shively, 2011; 2013a, 2013b). It remains uncertain, however, if a short-term study abroad experience can also have a measurable effect on L2 development. With increasing numbers of U.S. undergraduates participating in short-term study abroad programs of eight weeks or fewer (Institute of International Education, 2013), it is essential to examine the linguistic gains students make during a short period abroad and what programs can do to maximize language learning opportunities. The present study focuses on three critical questions about a traditional short-term immersion experience: Do study abroad learners improve their speaking proficiency during short-term study abroad? How much do study abroad learners use the target language outside of class during the short-term study abroad experience? Does a relationship exist between target language use and speaking improvement?

Language Learning During Study Abroad

Previous studies have concluded that study abroad has a positive impact on a wide range of L2 outcomes for students who spend a semester or more abroad. Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have now begun to turn their attention to investigating L2 development during short-term study abroad programs (e.g., Allen & Herron, 2003; Allen, 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Castañeda & Zirger, 2011; Cubillos, 2013; Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008; Ingram, 2005; Martinsen, 2010; Reynolds-Case, 2013). Even though a few researchers have found that study abroad participants can make measurable target language improvement after a few weeks abroad (e.g., Allen & Herron, 2003; Cubillos, 2013; Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan 2008; Martinsen, 2010; Reynolds-Case, 2013), others are skeptical about the linguistics benefits of short-term immersion programs (e.g., Davidson, 2007, 2010; Freed, 1990; Wilkinson, 1998, 2002). Reporting on data from a 25-year longitudinal investigation of L2 outcomes during study abroad in Russia, Davidson (2007) found that short-term study abroad had little measurable impact on L2 development. Allen and Herron (2003), however, reported speaking gains for study abroad learners in a six-week program in France. Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) found that study abroad participants improved listening comprehension after a five-week program abroad, whereas Martinsen (2010) reported speaking gains for most study abroad participants during a short-term study abroad experience in Argentina. Reynolds-Case (2013) found that a group

of students in a four-week study abroad program in Spain made significant progress in their comprehension and production of region-specific linguistic forms.

In sum, although some researchers have questioned whether a short-term study abroad experience can contribute to improved L2 outcomes, others have found that students can make measurable gains during a short-term study abroad program.

Language Contact During Study Abroad

An important factor affecting potential L2 development in both short- and long-term study abroad programs is the amount of exposure students have to the target language (Dufon & Churchill, 2006; Hernández, 2010b; Kinginger, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007; Reynolds-Case, 2013). SLA research has often used a language contact profile (LCP; Freed, Dewey, & Segalowitz, 2004) to measure the relationship between amount of target language use outside of class and language learning outcomes during study abroad. At the same time, research with the LCP has yielded conflicting results (Back, 2013). Some studies have indicated that students with more frequent contact with the target language outside of class outperformed students with less contact (Díaz-Campos, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Hernández, 2010a, 2010b; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Using a modified version of the LCP, Hernández (2010b) discovered a relationship between target language use and speaking improvement for students who participated in a study abroad program in Spain. Shively and Cohen (2008) reported a significant relationship between target language use and more target-like pragmatic performance. Other studies have found no relationship between target language use and linguistic development (Magnan & Back, 2007; Martinsen, 2010; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). Magnan and Back (2007) reported no relationship between target language use and speaking gains in French. After reviewing post-program questionnaires about the study abroad experience in France, the authors concluded that most of the study abroad participants did not invest in social relationships with native speakers of French. Instead, students spent much of their time with American classmates, and this deprived them of the language contact needed for linguistic improvement.

In addition to previous SLA research that has examined the quantitative relationship between amount of target language use and L2 outcomes, several qualitative studies have focused on describing the nature of social interaction during study abroad (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2010b, 2013; Douglass, 2007; Kinginger, 2008; Wilkinson, 1998). In general, their findings suggest that language contact with native speakers during study abroad is often not so extensive as the FL profession once assumed. Kinginger (2008) found that students often had limited contact with native speakers despite their expressed intention to interact with them during study abroad. Some students discovered that because their own language competence in English was often in demand, native speakers responded to them in English rather than the target language.

While some study abroad participants reported using the target language with their host families to speak about a wide-range of topics, others did not (Kinginger, 2008; Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2002; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004; Rivers, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998, 2002). Although some study abroad students developed large social networks with native speakers, others spent most of their time with L1 peers or connected to home-based communication resources (Allen, 2010a; 2010b; Back, 2013; Hernández, 2010b; Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger, 2008; Magnan & Back, 2007; Mendelson, 2004; Wilkinson, 1998, 2002). Notwithstanding these unsuccessful experiences, the important role of social interaction with native speakers is unequivocal. Hernández (2010b), for example, found that students with higher motivation had more contact with native speakers outside of class and increased language acquisition. Isabelli-García (2006) discovered that students who expanded their social networks with members of the target culture made significant gains in their L2 development.

Concerns about social interaction with native speakers during study abroad are even more striking with regard to the short-term immersion experience, where the short duration of the program and its traditional “sheltered” structure may often prevent students from adequate integration into host communities. Castañeda and Zirger (2011) identified the brief time that students had to develop social relationships with native speakers as an inherent limitation of short-term study abroad. Allen and Herron (2003) found that most of their study abroad participants did not invest enough time in establishing contacts with target culture members during a six-week program in France. Indeed, after the conclusion of the study abroad experience, 25% of their participants expressed disappointment about not having had significant interactions with native speakers of French during their time abroad. Mendelson (2004) reported that her study abroad learners in Spain spent more time with L1 classmates than with native Spanish speakers. Allen (2010a, 2010b) also found that some of her study abroad students did not take full advantage of potential language learning opportunities during study abroad, instead spending most of their time with American peers. When students did use the target language to interact with native speakers, it was often with their host families or during brief service encounter exchanges rather than in longer conversations with members of the host culture.

A review of the literature therefore suggests that despite the linguistic gains documented in some studies, it remains uncertain the extent to which short-term study abroad contributes to L2 development. Of similar concern is the fact that study abroad participants often report having had few opportunities for meaningful target language use with native speakers during their short-term study abroad experience. Some researchers suggest that students in traditional short-term study abroad often experience superficial cultural contact, insufficient language practice, and isolation from the target culture (Allen, 2010a, 2010b; Castañeda & Zirger, 2011; Ingram, 2005; Kinginger, 2008). Davidson (2007) goes so far as to suggest that given the rigid structure of

traditional short-term study abroad, most students will not make significant linguistic gains during a short-term study abroad experience.

To better understand the effect of a traditional short-term study abroad on L2 development and to elucidate the relationship between target language use and L2 learning, the author posed three research questions as the focus of this investigation:

1. Do study abroad learners improve their speaking proficiency during a short-term study abroad experience?
2. How much do study abroad learners use the target language outside of class during a short-term study abroad experience?
3. Does a relationship exist between amount of target language use and speaking proficiency gains made during short-term study abroad?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Study Abroad Participants

The study abroad group consisted of 20 undergraduates (16 females and 4 males) participating in a four-week study abroad program in Madrid, Spain, in the summer of 2011. All were native speakers of English. Most of the study abroad participants had eight semesters of high school Spanish, and an additional four semesters of college Spanish. None of them had previous study abroad experience (see Appendix A for participant information).

The Study Abroad Program

Study abroad participants attended a required two-hour pre-orientation and preparation program at their home institution prior to departure. During the first week of the program, the participants attended a second two-hour orientation at the host institution. This session was given in Spanish. The goal was to introduce students to life as an exchange student, and to language and cultural opportunities available through the program. At the conclusion of the orientation, students were given a placement examination that assigned them to an intermediate or advanced language sequence. Intermediate students took a combination of two three-credit courses: grammar review and practice; oral and written communication; or Spanish culture and civilization. All courses in the intermediate sequence were designed for FL learners. Advanced students chose two three-credit content-based courses in literature, linguistics, or culture. With the exception of the culture course, courses in the advanced sequence were designed for native speakers. Both intermediate and advanced students attended classes for a total of 20 hours per week. Classroom instruction was combined with a series of required academic-cultural excursions. The guide for these activities was a native Spanish instructor from the host institution. All excursions and activities were conducted in Spanish. All 20 of the study abroad participants lived with Spanish host families.

Data Collection and Assessment

Assessment data were gathered through the use of three instruments: a background information questionnaire, a language contact profile (LCP), and a pre- and post-program simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI).

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Inc. version 21.0) to investigate the LCP, and the pretest and posttest SOPI. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to address the research questions. An alpha level of 0.05 was used for all tests.

Background Information Questionnaire

A background questionnaire was administered to study abroad participants during their on-site orientation in Spain. The questionnaire was given in English. In the first part, students were asked to provide their age, gender, school and academic major, and previous Spanish coursework. In the second part, students described their cultural and linguistic goals for the study abroad experience and discussed what they intended to do to attain those goals.

Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview

To measure speaking proficiency gains made during study abroad, one form of the SOPI was administered to all study abroad participants before their departure for Spain, and another form of the SOPI was administered again during the final week of the four-week program abroad.¹ The SOPI, available from the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL; Stansfield, 1996), is a tape-mediated test of oral proficiency. The SOPI² requires the examinee to listen to 15 speaking tasks on an audio file, and record his or her responses to those tasks on a digital recorder or other recording device. A global rating is assigned to the speech sample by comparing the examinee's responses on the individual tasks with the criteria in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 1999). The speech functions and ACTFL levels of these tasks are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Format of Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview

<i>Speech Function</i>	<i>ACTFL Level</i>
Warm-up	Novice-Intermediate
Asking Questions	Intermediate
Describing Activities	Intermediate
Giving Directions	Intermediate
Narrating in the Present Time	Advanced
Narrating in the Past Time	Advanced
Discussing Personal Activities	Intermediate
Explain a Process	Advanced
Stating Advantages and Disadvantages	Advanced
Supporting an Opinion	Superior
Hypothesizing on an Impersonal Topic	Superior
Speaking with Tact	Advanced
Speaking to Persuade Someone	Superior
Proposing and Defending a Course of Action	Superior
Giving a Talk	Superior
Giving Advice	Advanced

Using the *Multimedia Rater Training Program (MRTP): Spanish Version* (CAL, 2006), two trained raters scored all pre-program and post-program SOPI tests. The raters agreed on 33 out of the 40 scores. There was disagreement on seven of the tests. The second rater reviewed the individual task ratings on these tests against the criteria in the ACTFL Guidelines in order to understand the discrepancies between the two raters, and thereupon adjusted the scores. The percentage of absolute agreement was high (83%), and the correlation between the two raters was also high (0.94).

Language Contact Profile

To measure language contact, a two-part modified LCP (Freed et al., 2004) was administered to students four times during the study abroad experience. The first part of the LCP (Appendix B) asked study abroad participants to estimate the number of hours per week they spent engaging in speaking, reading, writing, and listening activities in Spanish outside of class. Unlike the LCP used in most studies, which is administered at the end of the SA experience, the current LCP was given to study abroad participants at the end of each week of their time abroad with the intent of yielding a more accurate estimate of their language use. In the second part of the LCP (Appendix C), study abroad learners were asked to describe the nature of their specific interactions with native and non-native speakers.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Do study abroad learners improve their speaking proficiency during a short-term study abroad experience?

Pre- and post-program SOPI scores are shown in Table 2. Pre-program speaking scores ranged from Novice High to Advanced Low. Three (15%) out of the 20 SA students received a pre-program SOPI rating of Novice High, seven students (35%) a rating of Intermediate Low, six students (30%) a rating of Intermediate Mid, three students (15%) a rating of Intermediate High, and one student (5%) was rated Advanced Low.

Table 2
Pre-Program and Post-Program SOPI Scores

~Student	Pre-Program SOPI	Post-Program SOPI	Gain
1	Novice High	Intermediate Low	+1
2	Novice High	Intermediate Low	+1
3	Novice High	Intermediate Low	+1
4	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid	+1
5	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	+2
6	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	+2
7	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	+2
8	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	+2
9	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	+2
10	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	+2
11	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid	+0
12	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid	+0
13	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	+1
14	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	+1
15	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	+1
16	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	+1
17	Intermediate High	Intermediate High	+0
18	Intermediate High	Intermediate High	+0
19	Intermediate High	Advanced Low	+1
20	Advanced Low	Advanced Low	+0

Post-program speaking scores ranged from Intermediate Low to Advanced Low. Three students (15%) received a post-program rating of Intermediate Low, three students (15%) a rating of Intermediate Mid, 12 students (60%) a rating of Intermediate High, and two students (10%) were rated Advanced Low.

In comparing pre-and post-program scores, Table 2 shows that 15 of the 20 participants made a SOPI gain of at least +1 on the ACTFL scale during their time in Madrid. Six students made a gain of +2, and another nine students made a gain of +1. A total of five study abroad participants did not improve their scores during the study abroad program. In order to examine whether the

group's gain scores were significant, and to compare them to those in previous studies, the researcher adopted the conversion procedures used in Magnan and Back (2007) and Hernández (2010a, 2010b). Both authors used the following conversion scores: 3 = Novice High, 4 = Intermediate Low, 5 = Intermediate Mid, 6 = Intermediate High, and 7 = Advanced Low. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test found that the difference between the group's pre- and post-program scores was significant: $Z = -3.520, p = 0.000$ ($\alpha = 0.05$), thus confirming that the study abroad group improved their speaking proficiency during the short-term program.

Although the difference between pre- and posttest SOPI scores was significant for the study abroad group, it is important to note that those differences were not consistent for all students. Students with lower pre-program scores made more substantial gains than students with higher pre-program scores (see Figure 1), a matter that will be further addressed in the discussion about research question one.

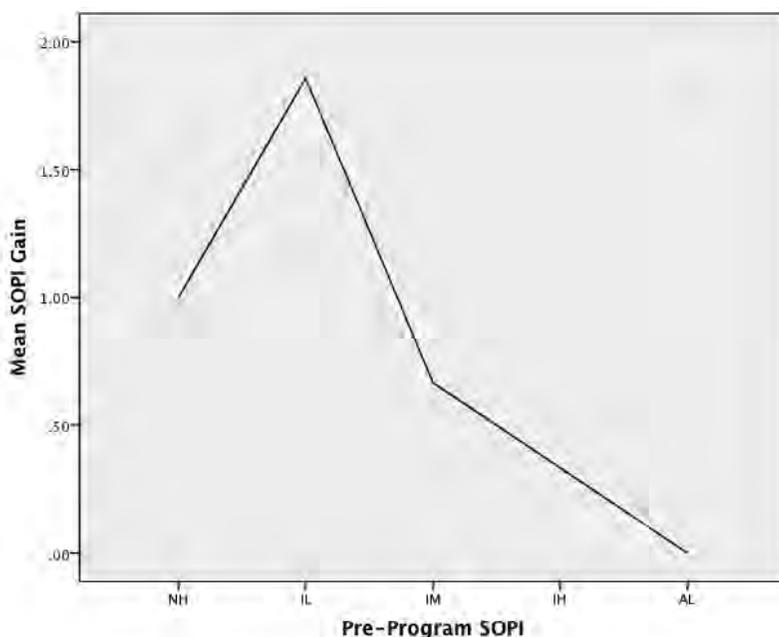


Figure 1
Relationship Between Pre-Program SOPI Scores and Mean SOPI Gains

Research Question 2: How much do study abroad learners use the target language outside of class during a short-term study abroad experience?

A two-part LCP was administered to students four times during the study abroad experience. The first part of the LCP consisted of 10 items depicting the average number of hours per week students spent in speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities in Spanish outside of class.

Table 3
Language Contact Profile

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Speaking	11.46	3.03	6.13	16.75
Listening	11.51	2.69	7.63	20.63
Writing	6.82	1.99	2.88	11.25
Reading	7.47	1.42	4.75	10.00
Combined LCP Score	37.26	5.20	28.00	50.14

LCP mean scores represent the overall average number of hours of language use per week. For example, since the LCP was administered four times during the study abroad experience, the LCP mean score of 11.46 for speaking indicates that students engaged in speaking activities for an average of 11.46 hours per week during their time in Spain.

As Table 3 shows, students spent more hours per week engaged in speaking and listening activities than in writing and reading activities. Standard deviations were low compared to mean scores across all language use activities. In the case of the amount of speaking per week, for instance, the standard deviation of 3.03 hours, compared to the mean score of 11.46, indicated that there was not a significant amount of variation in how much time the group spent speaking outside of class. With regard to listening, the standard deviation of 2.69 hours per week was also low compared to the mean score of 11.51.

The second part of the LCP asked students to describe specific interactions with native and non-native speakers. Students reported that most of their target language contact with native speakers took place with members of their host families. In most cases, their interlocutor was their host mother. When asked if their host families contributed to their language and cultural learning, 14 of the 20 study abroad learners gave an affirmative response. Several participants observed that host mothers were more patient and understanding of their Spanish language skills than other native speakers. One student commented that she liked knowing that her host mother was available to speak with her at all times. Study abroad learners were also appreciative that host mothers often took on a teacher-like role by speaking slower with them, engaging them in discussion about language and culture, explaining the meaning of Spanish words or expressions, and providing them with feedback about their language use. When asked to describe their most memorable or successful exchanges, six students, all of whom made speaking gains of at least +1 on the ACTFL scale during the study abroad experience, cited long dinner conversations with their

host families about politics, current events in Spain and the United States, cultural differences between the two countries, sports, or American pop culture.

Although most of the students reported positive experiences with their host families, a few did not. For various reasons, some study abroad participants found it difficult to develop a strong relationship with their host families. One student, for example, lamented that it took her longer than she had expected to develop a sense of trust in conversing with her host mother. Four study abroad participants acknowledged that their own lack of self-confidence about their Spanish made it difficult to make meaningful contributions to dinner conversations. Five students identified the rigid time constraints of the study abroad program as an obstacle to allowing them to spend more time with their host families. One student, who did not improve her SOPI score, commented that her host mother seemed disinterested in her experience. She stated that her conversations with her host mother were often brief and superficial. Along the same lines, two students remarked that their host mothers became impatient when asked to elaborate or explain something again in Spanish.

In addition to interactions with host families, service encounters were also reported as an important source of language and cultural learning. Students mentioned using Spanish to go shopping at department stores and markets, order food and drinks in restaurants and bars, buy tickets at bus and train stations, purchase movie tickets, rent bikes, and obtain other goods and services. Five students identified service encounters as their most memorable or successful language exchanges during the study abroad experience. Furthermore, a number of participants took pride in describing how their L2 performance in these service encounter exchanges improved during their time abroad.

Notwithstanding the time spent with host families and during service encounters, students otherwise reported little contact with native speakers. Whereas on the pre-program questionnaire students expressed their intention to meet native speakers as a means of improving their Spanish, most found it difficult to do so once they were in Spain. In fact, 16 out of the 20 study abroad participants were dissatisfied with this aspect of their study abroad experience. Eight students were critical of the study abroad program structure, mentioning that their time spent together as a large American peer group interfered with meaningful interactions with native speakers. Four students made explicit reference to the program's frequent excursions and activities as contributing to their isolation from the host culture. Two students remarked that the goal of the program seemed more focused on seeing places and landmarks in Spain than on linguistic and cultural development. Three students expressed their frustration that during some service encounter exchanges native speakers would respond in English to questions posed to them in Spanish.

Research Question 3: Does a relationship exist between amount of target language use and speaking proficiency gains made during short-term study abroad?

Descriptive statistics were calculated in order to examine the relationship between target language use and SOPI gain scores. As shown in Table 4, mean LCP scores and standard deviations were similar for students regardless of their speaking gains.

Table 4
Relationship Between Language Contact Profile Scores and SOPI Gains

<i>SOPI Gain Score</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>LCP Mean Score</i>	<i>LCP SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
0	5	36.55	5.10	28.00	39.88
1	9	36.76	6.28	30.75	50.14
2	6	38.61	3.97	31.76	42.51

A univariate ANOVA using a General Linear Model was performed to measure the relationship between the three groups of SOPI gain scores and the LCP scores. The ANOVA confirmed that the differences between these groups were not significant: $F(2, 17) = 0.268, p = 0.768$ (alpha = 0.05). These results affirm that there was no quantitative relationship between amount of target language use outside of class and speaking proficiency gains made during the short-term study abroad experience.

DISCUSSION

In response to the first research question, the results demonstrated that most of the study abroad participants improved their SOPI scores. Fifteen of the 20 students made a gain of at least +1 on the ACTFL scale. This means that this short-term study abroad did indeed have a positive, measurable effect on improving speaking proficiency. Furthermore, the results suggest an inverse relationship between pre-program speaking scores and SOPI gain scores. Students with pretest SOPI scores of Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid made stronger gains than those students with pretest scores of Intermediate High and Advanced Low. Cubillos (2013) also found a clear inverse relationship between pre-program speaking scores and gains made during study abroad. Taken together, these findings suggest that it may be more difficult for more advanced students to make measurable speaking proficiency gains on the ACTFL scale during a short-term study abroad program than for novice and intermediate language users. Previous studies support this same conclusion (Davidson, 2010; Magnan & Back, 2007; Mendelson, 2004). Whereas some SLA researchers would suggest that the expanding nature of the ACTFL scale itself may not be a sensitive enough instrument to measure the linguistic progress of more advanced students during study abroad (e.g., Collentine, 2004; Lafford & Collentine, 2006), other researchers would argue that the structure of

the traditional short-term study abroad does not give the more advanced students sufficient opportunities to practice using ACTFL advanced and superior language functions. As other studies (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2010b; Martinsen, 2010; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004) suggest, the conversations that students experience with host families and other native speakers are often short and formulaic, and might not help the development of advanced language proficiency.

As for the second research question, the results of the first part of the LCP indicated that students used the target language outside of class for an average of 37.26 hours per week. The low standard deviation of 5.20 compared to the mean score of 37.26 suggests that as a group there was not much variation in their target language use. The low means and standard deviations on the LCP might reflect an inherent limitation of the traditional short-term study abroad experience, which often promotes American group cohesion at the expense of linguistic immersion and interactions with native speakers. As seen in previous studies (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2010b), the rigid structure of the traditional “sheltered” short-term study abroad program, where students often take 20 or more hours of coursework per week with American peers, form strong friendships with those same peers, socialize among themselves, and participate in frequent group academic-cultural excursions in a short, intense time period has the unintended consequence of encouraging students to remain in their L1 peer group without deeper integration and assimilation into the surrounding target language culture.

To corroborate whether extensive social interaction with native speakers took place during this short-term study abroad experience, the second part of the LCP asked students to describe their interactions with native and non-native speakers during their time abroad. As in previous studies, some students identified the time spent with their host families as an important contributor to their study abroad experience, whereas others did not find this to be the case (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2010b; Hernández, 2010b; Kinginger, 2008; Magnan & Back, 2007; Wilkinson, 1998, 2002). Although some students reported positive experiences with their host families, it appears that the study abroad experience was too short for most to have developed strong, personal relationships with their host families. In some cases, host families might not have understood how to best contribute to their guest’s L2 development or did not see it as their explicit role to do so. In other cases, it could be that some learners did not invest enough time in nurturing relationships with members of their host families. Regardless, the intense nature of the study abroad program left little time for students to spend with their host families.

Students have reported infrequent contact with native speakers during their study abroad experience (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2010b; Hernández, 2010b; Kinginger, 2008; Magnan & Back, 2007; Mendelson, 2004; Wilkinson, 1998, 2000). Findings from the second part of the LCP found that this was also true for this group of students. Aside from some time spent with their host families, students did not develop extensive social networks with other native speakers. It could be that the brief time abroad was not sufficient to foster friendships with

native speakers. Indeed, the fact that most of the study abroad learners reported spending most of their time with American study abroad peers calls into question once again the extent to which the structure of the traditional short-term study abroad program can support extensive social interaction with native speakers.

Students reported that service encounters were a valuable source of language learning. Kinginger (2009) argues that service encounters often stand out to learners as important language use activities because of their real life consequences. As in previous studies (Shively, 2013b), students reported a strong sense of empowerment after experiencing success obtaining products and services through their exchanges with native speakers. Shively (2013a, 2013b) noted that service encounters, although brief at times, provide study abroad learners with important opportunities for social interaction and target language use. In requiring students to engage in task-oriented L2 comprehension and production, service encounters encourage students to notice and process target language forms (Schmidt, 2001), test their hypotheses about the target language, and receive crucial feedback about their linguistic performance (Swain, 2000).

Regarding the third research question, no significant relationships were found between LCP scores and SOPI gains. Although this finding is consistent with several previous studies (e.g., Magnan & Back, 2007; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), it also contradicts research that has identified a strong quantitative relationship between amount of target language exposure and L2 development (e.g., Hernández, 2010b). Further, the low mean scores of 11.46 hours per week for speaking and 11.51 hours per week for listening suggest that the study abroad group had little interactive contact with native speakers of Spanish. The second part of the LCP appears to substantiate this finding in that the students described spending most of their time with American peers, despite their stated intent on the pre-program background questionnaire to do their best to interact with native speakers at all times and forgo extensive contact with their peers. Whereas it is certain that some students did not invest sufficient time in social relationships with their host families and with other native speakers, the quantitative and qualitative data from the LCP support the contention that the structure of this short-term experience did not provide most students with frequent and targeted opportunities to practice using advanced- and superior-level language functions in conversations with native speakers.

IMPLICATIONS

Programs can do much to improve L2 learning during short-term study abroad. Several possibilities such as the following seven are worth considering. First, the findings suggest that colleges and universities might consider a two-tiered approach to study abroad. Students with beginning and intermediate coursework could be advised to participate in a short-term program, whereas it might be advantageous for those students with more advanced coursework or more advanced language competence to participate in a semester or longer program. Although service encounter exchanges might be sufficient for lower-

level language users to make linguistic progress during a short-term immersion experience, more advanced students must be provided with opportunities for extensive interaction with native speakers.

Second, in order to make short-term study abroad more efficient, programs might begin with deliberate, planned pre-departure tasks and activities to support language and cultural learning. During pre-departure orientation, study abroad staff could collaborate with students to establish realistic expectations about their study abroad experience and language acquisition. As Allen (2010a) noted, forging friendships with target language peers is often more the exception than the rule. Students must understand this, and therefore invest more time in developing the appropriate contexts to interact with native speakers. Some might attend a cooking class, register for dance lessons, take part in a conversation exchange, participate in a book club, join a sports team, or undertake service-learning work for a non-profit group. To be sure, in short-term study abroad where students do not have the time to develop extensive social networks for themselves, study abroad staff should work with students to locate these opportunities and coordinate their participation in them.

Third, empowering students to make more informed choices is all the more essential in short-term study abroad where the structure and time limitations of the program often encourage students to remain in their American study abroad peer group rather than seek contact with native speakers. Programs should therefore support students in creating personalized goals for language and cultural learning and work with them to develop explicit strategies for how to attain those goals. While abroad, participants should be asked to engage in ongoing reflection about their experiences as a language learner. The study abroad director, for example, could provide feedback and assistance to students about their linguistic development, discuss and reformulate goal statements, and examine strategic approaches to language learning (Allen, 2013).

Fourth, students must also understand that language learning during study abroad is not automatic, and requires them to take a proactive role in their own learning. In order for study abroad participants to be able to do so, however, programs must support them with strategies for maximizing target language use and development before, during, and after the study abroad experience. It is here that the pre-departure orientation, whether delivered online or in a traditional classroom format, has the potential to take on new importance in contributing to L2 development during short-term study abroad. During pre-departure, study abroad staff should guide students in developing appropriate target language communicative and cultural strategies (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2006), and then provide them with reflection sessions during and after the study abroad experience to increase awareness of language learning and use (Kinginger, 2008).

Fifth, given the importance of social interaction in L2 development and the inherent challenge of establishing social networks outside the home during traditional short-term study abroad, pre-departure tasks and activities should support students in developing relationships with native speakers prior, during, and after the experience abroad. During pre-departure, study abroad staff should

use telecollaboration to foster social interaction between study abroad students and native speakers in the host culture. During the study abroad experience, programs might provide students with structured opportunities (e.g., language exchange program, sports, clubs, social events) for students to meet age peers from the target culture (Hernández, 2010b; Shively, 2013a). After returning from study abroad, students could use social media to maintain their friendships with native speakers.

Acknowledging the fact that it can take significant time for students to develop a strong relationship with their host families, programs should also seek to increase communication between study abroad participants and their families prior to study abroad. Using email or video chat, students could discuss their likes and dislikes, hobbies, personal and academic interests, and goals for their time abroad. Students might then ask questions to become more acquainted with their host families and the target culture in general.

Sixth, because host families might be unaware of the importance of their role in the study abroad experience or how to best contribute to an L2 learner's language development, study abroad staff must create clear expectations and guidelines for host families working with students. Castañeda and Zirger (2011) discuss how study abroad programs can be more effective through better communication with and expectations for host families during pre-departure. Vande Berg et al. (2009) suggest that study abroad programs should give training to host families on how to engage students in meaningful conversational exchanges. Students, for their part, should be encouraged to take the initiative to seek as much interaction as possible with their host families. Meanwhile, in order to facilitate interaction, Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2010) suggest incorporating task-based assignments into the study abroad curriculum that would require students to gather information from their host families and then discuss their findings in class.

Seventh, better integration of the at home institution language curriculum with the overseas experience is required so that students can make significant and sustained L2 development during their time abroad. As one example of integrating the two educational experiences, language educators must devote significant attention to the development of advanced language competence throughout the undergraduate curriculum. Attention to this matter must begin with the at home language curriculum and continue with pre-departure so that study abroad participants can maximize their L2 learning once abroad. During the study abroad experience, for example, students should have frequent opportunities to practice using the advanced- and superior-level language functions identified in the ACTFL Guidelines (1999). In order to do so, some researchers suggest that programs incorporate targeted task-based language activities (Cadd, 2012) or service encounters (Shively, 2010) into the study abroad curriculum that require students to engage in conversations with native speakers. Study abroad staff could then engage students in guided reflection and feedback about their experiences.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are at least three limitations of this research. First, as a self-report instrument, one might question whether LCP scores were an accurate depiction of how much students used the target language outside of class during their study abroad experience. At the same time, however, it might be argued that the current modified LCP was more reliable than those versions used in previous studies (e.g., Hernández, 2010a, 2010b; Magnan & Back, 2007). The current LCP was given to students four times during the study abroad program with the expectation that the more frequent reflection about language use would produce richer and more reliable data. Second, there was no control group. To better understand the true impact of short-term study abroad, it would be valuable to compare the L2 development of a study abroad cohort with a group of at home students taking language courses during a summer program in the United States. Third, some SLA researchers have questioned whether the SOPI and other assessment instruments using the ACTFL Guidelines are sensitive enough to measure the speaking gains of more advanced students during study abroad (Collentine, 2004; Davidson, 2010; Di Silvio et al., 2014; Lafford & Collentine, 2006; Magnan & Back, 2007). In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic progress advanced language users make during study abroad, SLA researchers should consider expanding and triangulating their methods of data collection and assessment within the same research design.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that a traditional short-term study abroad experience can indeed have a measurable impact on L2 development. Findings indicated that most study abroad participants improved their speaking proficiency during the short-term study abroad experience. With regard to the LCP, the findings indicated that study abroad learners, however, did not engage in extensive social interaction. Further, whereas some students identified their time spent with host families as an important aspect of their study abroad experience, others did not find that this was true for them. Given that this was a traditional “sheltered” short-term study abroad program, in which students took 20 hours of coursework per week with American study abroad peers and participated in frequent group academic-cultural excursions, it is not surprising that students were by and large unsuccessful at developing strong relationships with their host families or accessing social networks in the surrounding target language culture.

Taken together, these findings suggest that although a traditional short-term study abroad experience can have a measurable effect on L2 development, programs should continue to consider how to best maximize the potential of the study abroad environment to improve L2 learning for all study abroad participants.

NOTES

1. The SOPI was administered after the conclusion of the spring semester, about two months prior to the first week of the study abroad program, so that all students would be available to take the tests at the same time. In addition, the researcher believed that having a longer time period between the pretest and posttest would limit potential practice effects. Although this lag might raise the question of whether or not the students had practiced their Spanish during the two-month period, this was not the case. In order to confirm that students had not used Spanish before arriving in Spain, the author included a specific question about Spanish language use during the two months before the program. Results affirmed that students did not use Spanish during the intervening period. In order to further minimize practice effects, two different versions of the SOPI were used for the pretest and posttest.
2. Stansfield and Kenyon (1992) reported high correlations between the SOPI and OPI. See also Kuo and Jiang (1997) for further discussion on the similarities and differences between the SOPI and OPI.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Information

<i>Student</i>	<i>Previous Spanish</i>	<i>Pretest SOPI</i>	<i>Posttest SOPI</i>	<i>LCP</i>
1	College = 2 HS = 2	Novice High	Intermediate Low	30.75
2	College = 2 HS = 6	Novice High	Intermediate Low	30.76
3	College = 2 HS = 8	Novice High	Intermediate Low	39.88
4	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid	34.75
5	College = 4 HS = 6	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	41.38
6	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	42.51
7	College = 6 HS = 8	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	37.39
8	College = 3 HS = 8	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	31.76
9	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	37.51
10	College = 4 HS = 6	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High	41.13
11	College = 1 HS = 2	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid	28.00
12	College = 3 HS = 8	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate Mid	35.63
13	College = 4 HS = 6	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	33.51
14	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	36.38
15	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	41.75
16	College = 3 HS = 8	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	50.14
17	College = 3 HS = 8	Intermediate High	Intermediate High	39.50
18	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate High	Intermediate High	39.88
19	College = 4 HS = 8	Intermediate High	Advanced Low	32.88
20	College = 4 HS = 8	Advanced Low	Advanced Low	39.76

APPENDIX B**Language Contact Profile Part 1**

1. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week speaking in Spanish outside of class with native or fluent Spanish speakers.
2. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week reading Spanish language newspapers outside of class.
3. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week reading novels, books, or textbooks in Spanish outside of class.
4. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week reading Spanish language magazines outside of class.
5. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week reading e-mail in Spanish or in reading other Internet websites in Spanish outside of class.
6. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week listening to Spanish language television and radio outside of class.
7. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week listening to Spanish language movies or videos outside of class.
8. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week listening to Spanish language music outside of class.
9. Indicate the average number of hours you spent this week writing homework assignments in Spanish outside of class.
10. Indicate the average number of hours you spent writing e-mail, using Facebook, or doing other Internet activities in Spanish outside of class.

APPENDIX C

Sample Questions from Language Contact Profile Part 2

1. With whom did you spend your time this week? Did you speak Spanish or English during your interactions with them? Give specific examples and explain as best as you can.
2. Did your host family contribute to your language and cultural learning during your study abroad experience? Give specific examples and explain as best as you can.
3. Are you satisfied with the amount of Spanish you spoke with native speakers during your study abroad experience? Give specific examples and explain as best as you can.
4. Did you learn as much Spanish during your study abroad experience as you thought you would? Give specific examples and explain as best as you can.
5. If you are not satisfied with your language learning during study abroad, what challenges or obstacles did you encounter that made it difficult for you to attain your goals?

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