L2 Spanish apologies development during short-term study abroad

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Abstract

The present study examined the apologies of 18 study abroad (SA) students during a short-term SA experience in Madrid, Spain. Apologies were assessed with a discourse completion task (DCT) consisting of five vignettes that varied across three variables: relative social status of the interlocutor, relative social distance, and seriousness of the offense. Based on performance ratings assigned to them by two native Spanish speakers, the students made significant gains in pragmatic appropriateness from pretest to posttest, on two out of the five individual vignettes, and on the five combined vignettes. Examination of the students' apologies before and after SA further revealed that they increased several strategies during their time abroad. Despite these gains, other aspects of the SA group's performance remained the same or, in some cases, moved in the opposite direction of the target norm. Moreover, the students also demonstrated continued overreliance on routine, formulaic expressions on the posttest DCT while

underusing some important target-like mitigation strategies. Given the study's findings, the researcher offers recommendations for teaching pragmatics before and during the SA experience.

1. Introduction

Second language (L2) pragmatic development has received increasing attention in study abroad (SA) research (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Henery, 2015; Hernández, 2016; Shively, 2010, 2016; Shively & Cohen, 2008). A large body of this research suggests that L2 learners tend to become more target-like after a semester or more abroad (e.g., Churchill & DuFon, 2006; DuFon, 2010; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Shively, 2010, 2016; Shively & Cohen, 2008).

One important feature of pragmatic competence is the knowledge of how to apologize in the target language. L2 learners must have sufficient pragmalinguistic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the specific linguistic resources for apologizing) and sociopragmatic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the contextual and social variables that determine the appropriateness of a pragmalinguistic choice) in order to placate their interlocutor without being perceived as rude or impolite (Thomas, 1983). With the exception of a few studies (Kondo, 1997; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Warga & Scholmberger, 2007), little research exists, however, that examines how SA participants acquire apologies during their time abroad. In addition, no previous studies have reported on the development of L2 apologies in Spanish during short-term SA. Because of the continued increase in enrollment in short-term SA (Institute of International Education, 2016), it is particularly important for the foreign language profession to investigate the L2 pragmatic development of students in these programs.

The present study reports on the L2 apology development of 18 students during a short-term (four weeks) SA program in Spain. Native speaker ratings of students' apology performance on a discourse completion task (DCT) were compared before and after SA. In addition, the participants' apology strategies on the DCT were examined in comparison to a group of native Spanish speakers who completed the same DCT. The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, a brief introduction to the speech act of apologies is provided, followed by a review of the literature on L1 Spanish apologies and the development of L2 apologies. The methods are described, including the SA participants, the SA program, as well as the instrument and procedures for data collection and data analysis. The results of the study are then presented, followed by a discussion of the results, directions for future research, and implications for SA programs.

2. Review of literature

This review of the literature begins with a definition of apologies, followed by an overview of previous studies on L1 Spanish apologies. We then transition to a discussion of the acquisition of L2 apologies and conclude with research concerning the development of L2 apologies in SA contexts.

2.1. Definition of apologies

An apology is a "compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S (the speaker) was causally involved and which is costly to H (the hearer)" (Bergman & Kasper, 1993, p. 82). In Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, an apology is a face-saving speech act for the hearer because it provides support for the hearer's negative face which has been damaged by a violation. Contrastively, an apology represents a face-threatening speech act to the speaker because it damages that person's positive face.

Brown and Levinson (1987) predict that social distance, power, and seriousness of offense determine the nature and amount of redress. The assessments of these three factors varies across

cultures. In turn, this influences the strategies that a speaker may choose to employ to perform the speech act. Moreover, language learners often transfer strategies from their L1 to their L2 (Kondo, 2010). The act of apologizing can therefore be problematic for the L2 learner because he or she must know what represents an offense, understand the seriousness of the offense, and then know which strategies to employ in addressing the interlocutor (Bergman & Kasper, 1993; Kondo, 2010).

Previous research (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, 1989) has identified six strategies involved in making an apology: an explicit Expression of apology (Illocutionary force indicating device, IFID), Acknowledgement of responsibility, Explanation, Offer of repair and Promise of non-recurrence. An apology may also include a strategy to signal intensification (e.g., *I'm very sorry*), which serves to emphasize the speaker's regret (Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007). The speaker uses at least one of these strategies to mitigate the impact of an offense and to reestablish social harmony with the interlocutor. An example of each of these strategies is given below in Spanish with its English translation:

- Expression of apology (IFID): The speaker makes the apology explicit by using formulaic, routinized expressions. *Lo siento* ('I'm sorry').
- Acknowledgement of responsibility: The speaker expresses responsibility for the committed offense in order to placate the offended person. *Fue mi culpa* ('It was my fault').
- Explanation: The speaker provides an explanation or account of the situation and reason for the violation. *Lo siento, es que dejé mi mochila en el autobús* ('Sorry, I left my backpack on the bus').
- Offer of repair: The speaker offers to do something about or pay for the damage caused by the offense. *Te voy a comprar otro libro* ('I am going to buy you a new book').
- Promise of non-recurrence: The speaker promises that the offense will not occur again. *Te prometo que no va a volver a pasar* ('I promise that it won't happen again').
- Intensification: The speaker deems that it is important that the IFID be intensified. *Lo siento mucho* ('I'm very sorry').

Having established the various categories utilized by Western European language speakers to differentiate between forms of apologies, we now turn to the role of apology use by native Spanish speakers.

2.2. L1 Spanish apologies

Several studies have outlined the strategies that native Spanish speakers employ in their apologies (e.g., Gómez, 2008; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Rojo, 2005). Using role-plays, Rojo (2005) found that the most frequently used strategies in Peninsular Spanish were Acknowledgement of responsibility and Offer of repair. Expressions of apology was the least preferred strategy. Similar to Rojo (2005), Gómez (2008) used four role-plays to examine the apology strategy use of Colombian Spanish speakers. Gómez reported that the Colombians employed Acknowledgement of responsibility 100% of the time in all four role-play scenarios, noting that they often use Acknowledgement of responsibility with the impersonal *se*, in expressions such as *se me olvidó nuestra cita* (literally, 'our appointment was forgotten by me') and *se me cayó la gaseosa* (literally, 'the soft drink fell from me'), thus minimizing their responsibility for the committed offense. Similar patterns of Acknowledgement of responsibility usage with the impersonal *se* were observed in Márquez Reiter's (2000) study of Uruguayan Spanish speakers.

Shively and Cohen's (2008) study of the L2 pragmatic development of 67 SA students is also helpful in establishing norms for L1 apologies in Spanish. Evidence from their baseline comparison group of 12 native Spanish speakers (from Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Spain) suggests that native Spanish speakers employ a variety of Expressions of apology (e.g., *lo*

siento ['I'm sorry'], *perdón* ['sorry'], *perdóneme* ['forgive me'], *discúlpeme* ['I'm sorry'], and *qué pena* ['that's too bad']) and Intensifiers (e.g., *lo siento de verdad* ['I'm really sorry'], *lo siento de veras* ['I'm truly sorry'], and *mil disculpas* ['I'm very sorry']). Shively and Cohen also discovered that the native Spanish speakers frequently used the Acknowledgement of responsibility strategy with the impersonal *se* (e.g., *se me cayó,* literally, 'it fell from me') as a way of distancing themselves from the responsibility for the offense while also indicating that it was out of their control. Studies on native Spanish speaker apologies have thus demonstrated the central role of Acknowledgement of responsibility with the impersonal *se* as a tool for mitigation. We now shift to the matter of what previous research has found regarding the developmental path that L2 learners take in their acquisition of apologies.

2.3. Development of L2 apologies

Studies on the acquisition of apologies have identified four major developmental patterns for L2 learners as they become more proficient in the target language. First, less proficient learners often demonstrate an overreliance on routine expressions, such as *I'm sorry* and *excuse me*, because of their ease of use (Rose, 2000; Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Trosborg, 2003). Second, L2 learners decrease their L1 transfer as proficiency increases (Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Ross, 1996; Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007). A third observation is that more proficient L2 learners use a wider range of apology strategies than less proficient learners (Rose, 2000; Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007). For example, Sabaté i Dalmau and Curell i Gotor (2007) compared the apologies of 78 Catalan learners of English at three different proficiency levels (proficiency having been determined by scores on the university's placement exam). Their findings suggest that the more proficient L2 learners employed a greater number of different strategies and used fewer nontarget-like expressions than the less proficient learners. Even the more advanced students had not acquired sufficient sociolinguistic competence, however, to know which specific strategies were most appropriate for a given context. Meanwhile, the lower proficiency learners overused or even repeated what the authors described as transparent IFIDs or pre-patterned chunks such as *I'm sorry* and *excuse me* to avoid employing more complex strategies while still ensuring that they performed the apology.

The fourth and final developmental pattern is that some advanced L2 learners acquire the ability to intensify their apologies (e.g., *I'm very sorry*). Researchers suggest, however, that target-like intensification strategies are one of the most difficult apology features to acquire (Márquez Reiter, 2001; Mir, 1992; Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Trosborg, 1995). While Trosborg (1995) found that three groups of Danish learners of English did not use as many intensifiers as the native English speakers did, she did find that there was a relationship between higher language proficiency and more target-like intensification. Similarly, although Sabaté i Dalmau and Curell i Gotor's (2007) most advanced students employed intensification more frequently than the other students, they did not attain native-like command of intensifiers. Rather, the students overused a very finite set of expressions. Now that we are aware of the developmental patterns that L2 learners take in their acquisition of apologies, we now consider the development of this speech act in SA contexts.

2.4. Development of L2 apologies during study abroad

Previous research suggests that SA has a positive effect on the development of apologies for students who spend at least a semester or more abroad (Kondo, 1997; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Warga & Scholmberger, 2007). Kondo (1997) administered a DCT to Japanese high school students both before and after their academic year in the United States. The findings indicated that the students became

more target-like after SA, shifting from overreliance on Expressions of Apology (e.g., *sorry*) to more frequent use of Explanations (e.g., *I was late because there was an accident*). Shively and Cohen (2008) reported on the acquisition of apologies for 67 SA participants who spent a semester in a Spanish-speaking country. Posttest performance ratings on a DCT consisting of five vignettes were higher than pretest performance ratings. The authors attributed the group's improvement to their increased use of several strategies on the posttest. In addition, whereas the students overused the routine formula *lo siento* ('I'm sorry') on the pretest, most expanded their selection of target-like formulae, employing such IFIDs as *perdón* ('pardon'), *perdóneme* ('forgive me'), and *discúlpeme* ('I'm sorry') on the posttests. In their use of Acknowledgement of responsibility, some students also began to produce the impersonal *se* or agentless construction (e.g., *se me perdió*, literally, 'it was lost from me') on the posttest to indicate that the infraction was not their fault (Gómez, 2008).

Evidence from SA research indicates that L2 pragmatic development does not always occur in a linear fashion, as Warga and Scholmberger's (2007) study of seven Austrian learners of French who studied for ten months in Quebec demonstrated. Their learners completed a four-item DCT six times at two-month intervals. The authors identified three major developmental patterns. First, the students became more target-like over time by decreasing their use of Excuses with *malheureusement* ('unfortunately') and Justifications. The second development was a shift away from the Quebecois target norm (e.g., increase in the use of two upgraders in one IFID, increase in the use of *très* ['very'] and a corresponding decrease in the use of *vraiment* ['really']). Third, some aspects of the students' performance remained unchanged (e.g., frequency of use of IFIDs). Regarding the participants' overuse of *malheureusement* before SA, Warga and Scholmberger suggest that they had transferred this strategy from their L1. At data collection times 2 and 3, the students decreased their use of *malheureusement* and replaced it with target language chunks. By time 4, participants had begun to replace these target-like chunks with a more controlled and creative pragmatic performance. At this stage, the students had combined target-like strategies with elements from their L1 to form a pragmatic interlanguage. The authors concluded that at the final stage of acquisition, the L2 learners would have target-like control of this feature.

In sum, this review of literature has described the relative importance of the speech act of apologizing. We explored what scholars have noted regarding native Spanish speakers, as well as L2 learners, and the conclusions reached on the matter of the acquisition and use of apologies during SA. We can now consider the effect of short-term SA on the development of L2 apologies in Spanish.

3. Research questions

Previous studies suggest that SA has a positive effect on the development of apologies for students who spend a semester or more abroad. No studies exist, however, that have investigated the development of students' L2 Spanish apologies during short-term SA. The present study thus aims to address an important gap in the SA literature. Our research questions are:

1. How do native Spanish speakers rate the apologies of Spanish L2 learners before and after short-term SA?
2. How do Spanish L2 learners' apologies develop during short-term SA?

4. Methodology

4.1. The study abroad participants

Eighteen (18) undergraduate students (14 females, 4 males) participated in a four-week SA program in Madrid, Spain, during the summer of 2011. All were adult L2 learners of Spanish, between the ages of 19 and 22 years old. English was their L1 and there were no heritage speakers of Spanish. Participants had completed between four to six semesters (or equivalent) of college Spanish prior to the program. The students' oral proficiency levels[1] ranged from Novice high to Advanced low on the ACTFL Proficiency Scale (ACTFL, 1999). None of them had previous SA experience (see Appendix for further participant information).

4.2. The study abroad program

At the on-site orientation in Madrid, the students were assigned to intermediate or advanced courses based on the host institution's placement examination. Students attended two classes (taught in Spanish) for 20 hours of coursework per week. The intermediate students chose two three-credit courses: grammar, conversation, or Spanish culture. L2 Spanish learners from several US and foreign institutions were also enrolled in the intermediate sections. Students in the advanced track chose two three-credit courses: literature, advanced conversation, or Spanish culture. Advanced students attended classes with both native Spanish speakers (literature) and other L2 Spanish learners (advanced conversation and Spanish culture). Coursework was combined with a series of academiccultural excursions conducted in Spanish. All participants lived with host families.

4.3. Data collection and assessment

The present study had a pretest-posttest design. The students completed the same written DCT (adapted from Shively & Cohen, 2008) three weeks prior to their departure for SA and again at the conclusion of the four-week program. The DCT consisted of five vignettes designed to represent social and situational variation across three variables: social status, social distance, and seriousness of offense. For each vignette, the students completed a dialogue that included several responses from an interlocutor. The five vignettes appear in Table 1 (see Shively & Cohen, 2008 for further information).

Table 1 Description of the vignettes on the DCT (Shively & Cohen, 2008)

Vignette	Relative social distance	Social status of hearer	Seriousness of offense
Spill wine	Equal/high	High	Low
Friend's book	Equal	Mid	High
Babysitting spill	Low	Mid	High
Meeting friend	Equal	Low	Low
Meeting professor	High	Mid	High

Fifteen (*N* = 15) native Spanish speakers from Madrid also completed the DCT in order to provide a baseline comparison with the SA students' data. All 15 Spanish speakers, whose ages ranged from 22 to 35 years old, were living in Madrid at the time of the data collection.

Two native Spanish speakers rated the students' responses on the DCT. Both raters (one male; one female) were 22-year-old exchange students from Madrid. Both had been living in the United States for three months at the time of their participation in the rating sessions. Prior to rating, the researcher

described to them the goals of the research project, the research instrument, and the evaluation criteria. Examples of native Spanish speaker and L2 learner responses were given to the raters in order for them to become familiar with the DCT. The researcher and the two raters then scored a practice test together. Ratings were compared and discussed.

The pragmatic appropriateness of the apologies on the DCTs was evaluated as an "overall success" score. This score was based on the native speaker's intuitions about how he or she would react to the student's responses in each vignette (see Shively & Cohen, 2008 for further information). Overall success ratings were scored on a 5-point Likert scale:

5 = I would feel quite satisfied with this response.
4 = I would feel satisfied with this response.
3 = I would feel somewhat satisfied with this response.
2 = I would feel unsatisfied with this response.
1 = Unacceptable response.

The students' written responses were entered into an excel spreadsheet and randomized so that the raters would not know whether a given response was from the pre- or posttest. Students' responses were also assigned a unique code number that was unknown to the raters.

Both raters scored each vignette for each student. When there was disagreement between the two raters of more than one point on the same vignette, they discussed their scores with the researcher and then assigned new ratings. In addition to assigning numerical ratings, the raters were also asked to explain their rationale for each rating. An inter-rater reliability analysis was performed on the raters' scores. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be high for the pretest (.89) and for the posttest (.92).

Finally, in order to create one final score for each vignette for each student's pretest and posttest, the two raters' scores were averaged. Each student also received a composite score on the pretest and posttest which represented his or her combined performance on all five of the vignettes.

In addition to the performance ratings, the researcher and a research assistant coded the use of apology strategies in the SA group and native Spanish speaker baseline data using the Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project Coding Manual (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Apologies were coded for six categories. To ensure inter-coder reliability, the data were coded independently by the researcher and the research assistant. The agreement was high (90%). The remaining 10% of the cases were discussed and coding was agreed upon. Examples of responses from the SA students are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 Examples of responses on DCT from SA students

Apology strategy	Example
Expression of apology (IFID)	*Lo siento, pero he perdido el libro en el autobús ayer.* ('I'm sorry, but I lost your book yesterday on the bus.') (Student 1 posttest: Friend's book)
Acknowledgement of responsibility	*Se me olvidó completamente nuestra cita. Lo siento.* ('I completely forgot about our meeting. I'm sorry.') (Student 18 posttest: Meeting professor)
Explanation	*Lo siento, Sofía. Estaba en una cita para hablar con mi profe sobre el examen.* ('I'm sorry, Sofía. I had an appointment with my professor to talk about the exam.') (Student 9 Posttest: Meeting friend)
Offer of repair	*Lo siento, Marta. Te puedo comprar otro libro.* ('I'm sorry, Marta. I can buy you another book.') (Student 15 posttest: Friend's book)
Promise of non-recurrence	*No se me olvidará en el futuro.* ('I won't forget about it again.') (Student 11 posttest: Meeting professor)
Intensification	*Lo siento mucho.* ('I'm very sorry.') (Student 10 pretest: Spilled wine)

5. Results

5.1 Research question 1

How do native Spanish speakers rate the apologies of Spanish L2 learners before and after short-term SA?

The first research question examined the question whether native Spanish speakers rated the students' apologies as more appropriate after the SA experience. Table 3 provides the students' pre- and posttest scores on the five individual vignettes and on the five combined vignettes (composite).

Table 3 Paired samples *t* tests for pretest and posttest performance ratings on the DCT

	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
Spill wine					
Pretest	3.44	0.54	-1.528	17	.145
Posttest	3.72	0.65			
Friend's book					
Pretest	3.28	0.62	-3.335	17	.004
Posttest	3.89	0.87			
Babysitting spill					
Pretest	3.56	0.87	-0.809	17	.430
Posttest	3.67	0.75			
Meeting friend					
Pretest	3.39	0.95	-1.713	17	.105
Posttest	3.78	0.75			
Meeting professor					
Pretest	3.17	0.66	-2.766	17	.013
Posttest	3.67	0.82			
Composite score (five vignettes combined)					
Pretest	16.83	2.77	-4.154	17	.001
Posttest	18.72	2.59			

Posttest mean scores were higher than pretest mean scores on all five vignettes and on the composite. Paired samples *t* tests using the Holm-Bonferonni method to adjust for inflated alphas were performed to measure differences in pre-posttest performance ratings. Significant differences were observed on two out of the five vignettes (Friend's book and Meeting professor) and also on the composite. Significant differences were not observed on Spill wine, Babysitting spill, and Meeting friend.

In turning to the two vignettes that were found to be significant, the students' mean scores increased from 3.28 on the pretest to 3.89 on the posttest (p = .004) in Friend's book, and from 3.17 to 3.67 in Meeting professor (p = .013). Composite mean scores increased from 16.83 on the pretest to 18.72 on the posttest (p = .001). Effect size measures using Cohen's *d* (1988; d = .20 as a small effect, d = .50 as a medium effect, and d = .80 as a large effect) suggested that there was a large effect size for Friend's book (d = .79) and a medium effect for Meeting professor (d = .65). A very large effect was found for the composite score (d = .98). These results indicate that the native Spanish speakers rated the students' apologies as more appropriate after SA than before.

5.2. Research question 2
How do Spanish L2 learners' apologies develop during short-term SA?

To answer this second research question, the researcher examined the students' apology strategies on the pre- and posttest DCT. The SA group's strategies were then compared to those of the 15 native Spanish speakers who completed the same DCT. Table 4 provides the strategies used by the students prior to and after SA as well as those used by the native speakers.

Table 4 Comparison of apologies strategy between SA students and native Spanish speakers

	Study abroad students		Native Spanish speakers
	Pretest N (%)	Posttest N (%)	N (%)
Spill wine			
Expression of apology	16 (89%)	18 (100%)	8 (53%)
Acknowledgement of responsibility	7 (39%)	10 (56%)	9 (60%)
Explanation	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)
Offer of repair	18 (100%)	18 (100%)	15 (100%)
Promise of non-recurrence	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)
Intensification	7 (39%)	3 (17%)	14 (93%)
Friends' book			
Expression of apology	16 (89%)	14 (78%)	9 (60%)
Acknowledgement of responsibility	13 (72%)	16 (89%)	14 (93%)
Explanation	7 (33%)	9 (50%)	7 (47%)
Offer of repair	15 (83%)	16 (89%)	15 (100%)
Promise of non-recurrence	1 (6%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)
Intensification	6 (33%)	8 (44%)	11 (73%)
Babysitting spill			
Expression of apology	18 (100%)	14 (78%)	8 (53%)
Acknowledgement of responsibility	12 (67%)	15 (83%)	13 (87%)
Explanation	1 (6%)	2 (11%)	4 (27%)
Offer of repair	15 (83%)	17 (94%)	15 (100%)
Promise of non-recurrence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Intensification	8 (44%)	4 (22%)	9 (60%)
Meeting friend			
Expression of apology	17 (94%)	17 (94%)	14 (93%)
Acknowledgement of responsibility	6 (33%)	8 (44%)	12 (80%)
Explanation	13 (72%)	15 (83%)	13 (87%)
Offer of repair	15 (83%)	12 (67%)	12 (80%)
Promise of non-recurrence	1 (6%)	5 (28%)	4 (27%)
Intensification	3 (17%)	2 (11%)	6 (40%)
Meeting professor			
Expression of apology	15 (83%)	12 (67%)	9 (60%)
Acknowledgement of responsibility	13 (72%)	17 (94%)	13 (87%)
Explanation	8 (44%)	15 (83%)	13 (87%)
Offer of repair	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Promise of non-recurrence	13 (72%)	16 (89%)	15 (100%)
Intensification	5 (28%)	10 (56%)	12 (80%)

Descriptive statistics were employed to investigate the differences from pretest to posttest, and also between the SA group and the native Spanish speakers. In order to determine whether a given difference was notable, a cutoff score of 15% was used for differences in pre- and posttest scores as well as for differences between the SA group and the native Spanish speakers (NSSs).

Several notable trends were observed in the two vignettes that had significant pretest to posttest performance ratings. Each trend represented a shift toward the target norm. In Friend's book, the students increased their use of two strategies: Acknowledgement of responsibility (pretest = 72%; posttest = 89%; NSSs = 93%) and Explanation (pretest = 33%; posttest = 50%; NSSs = 47%). In Meeting professor, the students increased their use of four strategies: Acknowledgement of responsibility (pretest = 72%; posttest = 94%; NSSs = 87%), Explanation (pretest = 44%; posttest = 83%; NSSs = 87%), Promise of non-recurrence (pretest = 72%; posttest = 89%; NSSs = 100%), and Intensification (pretest = 28%; posttest = 56%; NSSs = 80%). Finally, the SA group also decreased their use of Expression of

apology (pretest = 83%; posttest = 67%; NSSs = 60%) in this vignette as well. Regarding the remaining vignettes, three notable shifts toward more target-like pragmatic performance were also observed. First, in Spill wine, the students increased their use of Acknowledgement of responsibility from 39% on the pretest to 56% on the posttest (NSSs = 60%). Second, in Meeting friend, a greater percentage of students used Promise of non-recurrence on the posttest (28%) than on the pretest (6%) (NSSs = 27%). Finally, in Babysitting spill, the students decreased their use of Expression of apology from 100% to 78% on the posttest (NSSs = 53%).

The SA group's performance also included several changes that were indicative of movement in the opposite direction of the target norm. The students reduced their use of Intensification in Spill wine (pretest = 39%; posttest = 17%; NSSs = 93%) and Babysitting spill (pretest = 44%; posttest = 22%; NSSs = 60%). Similarly, the participants' less frequent use of Offer of repair from pretest (83%) to posttest (67%) in the Meeting friend vignette was also suggestive of a shift away from the target norm (NSSs = 80%).

In addition, two more general differences were also observed between the students' pre- and posttest strategies and those of the NSSs. The students' use of Expression of apology was much more frequent on the pre- and posttest than that of the native speakers in three vignettes (Spill wine, Babysitting spill, and Friend's book). The second notable difference was the students' underuse of Intensification across all five vignettes. In Spill wine, the SA group's infrequent use of Intensification (pretest = 39%; posttest = 17%) stood in stark contrast to the native Spanish speakers, who used intensifiers 93% of the time.

Examination of the content of the students' strategies further generated four noteworthy findings. First, participants demonstrated a strong preference for the routine expression *lo siento* ('I'm sorry') as an Expression of apology both before and after SA. It was only the more advanced L2 learners who by the time of the posttest began to incorporate more target-like lexical expressions into their IFID repertoire, such as *perdón* ('forgive me'), *perdóname* ('forgive me'), *disculpa* ('sorry'), and *discúlpame* ('I'm sorry'). Second, evidence from three vignettes (Friend's book, Meeting friend, and Meeting professor) revealed that the students gained better control of appropriate address terms (*tú* versus *Ud.*) on the posttests. Third, although the students increased their use of Acknowledgement of responsibility from pretest to posttest, they did not use the impersonal *se* (e.g., *se me pasó la hora*, 'I lost track of time'), a structure that the native Spanish speakers used very frequently. Finally, the students used a reduced number of intensifiers (e.g., *lo siento mucho*, 'I'm very sorry') compared to the native speakers, who employed a variety of expressions to intensify their apologies, such as *lo siento de verdad* ('I'm very sorry') and *lo siento de veras* ('I'm so sorry').

5.3. Summary of results

In conclusion, the students improved their performance ratings during their time abroad on two vignettes as well as on the five combined vignettes. In some cases, as in Friend's book and Meeting professor, the students became more target-like in their apologies through more frequent use of several strategies (e.g., Acknowledgement of responsibility, Explanation, and Promise of non-recurrence). At the same time, however, there were also instances in which the SA group's performance shifted away from the target norm. We see this in the students' less frequent use of Intensification from pre- to posttest in both Spill wine and Babysitting spill. Similarly, in Meeting friend, fewer students used Offer of repair on the posttest than the pretest. Finally, the group's overuse of Expressions of apology with a concurrent underuse of Intensification were also important findings.

6. Discussion

The present study examined the development of students' apologies during a four-week SA experience. Results suggest that the students improved some aspects of their pragmatic performance over the course of their time abroad, even as other features remained unchanged. This section discusses the findings from the students' performance ratings on the DCT (Research question 1) and then transitions to an examination of the strategies students used before and after SA (Research question 2).

Paired samples *t* tests indicated that for the five combined vignettes, the students increased their performance ratings from pretest to posttest. In addition, the students made significant gains on two (Friend's book and Meeting professor) out of the five individual vignettes. These findings are similar to Shively and Cohen (2008), whose students also made significant improvements in pragmatic appropriateness on the same five combined vignettes after a semester abroad. Meanwhile, their students' significant gains on the individual vignettes were also limited to two vignettes (Friend's book and Babysitting spill).

We now consider the students' use of strategies on the pre- and posttest to better understand what specific features of their apologies did or did not develop during their time abroad. Our examination of students' strategies on the DCT suggests that at least two aspects were responsible for the higher performance ratings on the posttests. The first area that may have contributed to the higher ratings was the students' increased use of several strategies on the posttests. In four out of the five vignettes (Spill wine, Friend's book, Babysitting spill, and Meeting professor), more students used Acknowledgement of responsibility on the posttest than the pretest. The SA group also employed Explanation more frequently on the posttest in both Friend's book and Meeting professor. In addition, the students increased their use of Promise of non-recurrence in Meeting friend and Meeting professor; and Intensification in Meeting professor. The second area that may have produced higher performance ratings after SA was the participants' better control of address forms (*tú* versus *Ud.*) on the posttests. Previous research in interlanguage pragmatics has determined that L2 learners are often insensitive to situational variation, suggesting that less proficient learners sometimes adopt a single address term in the target language and overuse it, even when it is inappropriate for a given social context (Churchill & DuFon, 2006; DuFon, 2010; Hassall, 2013). The present study's participants demonstrated more control of address forms on the posttests in three vignettes (Friend's book, Meeting friend, and Meeting professor). In Meeting professor, for example, several students addressed the professor with the *tú* form on the pretest when *Ud.* was more appropriate. In examining the raters' comments, both agreed that *Ud.* was the correct address form because of the seriousness of the offense, and more so because the students were speaking to a higher status interlocutor. In the DCTs, the NSSs were indeed unanimous in their adoption of the *Ud.* address form in this vignette. By the time of the posttest, most of our students also began to address the professor using *Ud*. A similar pattern occurred in Friend's book and Meeting friend. In these vignettes, a number of the participants addressed their interlocutors with the formal *Ud.* form at the time of the pretest. Both raters noted that it would have been more appropriate for them to have used the informal *tú*, because these vignettes involved equal status interlocutors (two friends). By the time of the posttests, the students did indeed speak to their interlocutors with the most appropriate address form for the given context.

While the SA group became more target-like through their more frequent use of several strategies and demonstrated better control of address forms on the posttest, their use of Expression of apology was non-target-like before and after SA when compared to the NSSs – both in terms of their frequency of use of

IFIDs and their lexical choices. This finding affirms those of previous researchers (e.g., Sabaté i Dalmau & Currell i Gotor, 2007; Shively & Cohen, 2008), who have determined that lower proficiency learners often overuse formulaic, pre-patterned expressions such as *lo siento* ('I'm sorry') as an Expression of apology. Despite the numerous options available in Spanish, the present study's participants demonstrated their preference for this same particular transparent chunk. Indeed, both raters commented that several students also used *lo siento* several times within the same vignette – a phenomenon that was more evident on the pretests than on the posttests. Trosborg (2003) suggests that L2 learners often rely on those expressions which are easiest to retrieve and are frequently employed during classroom instruction. As learners become more proficient, their repertoire of strategies expands and becomes more native-like. Indeed, in this study, the researcher found that only the most proficient L2 learners used other forms of an Expression of apology. Participant 6, an Intermediate high speaker at the time of the pretest and Advanced low speaker after the posttest, used *disculpa* ('sorry') and *discúlpeme* ('I'm sorry') in several vignettes on the pretest and posttest. Participants 15 and 16, Intermediate high speakers at both the pre- and posttest, used *perdón* ('forgive me') and *perdóname* ('forgive me') several times on the posttest. Participant 18, an Advanced low speaker before and after SA, employed *perdón* ('forgive me'), as well as the informal *discúlpame* ('I'm sorry') and the formal *discúlpeme* ('I'm sorry') in several vignettes both before and after SA. These results are similar to what Shively and Cohen (2008) found. By the end of a semester of SA, most of their students also had begun to expand their repertoire of Expressions of apology.

Evidence from previous studies (e.g., Gómez, 2005; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Rojo, 2005; Shively & Cohen, 2008) suggests that the impersonal *se*, in expressions such as *se me olvidó nuestra cita* (literally, 'the appointment was forgotten by me') and *se me cayó el vaso* (literally, 'the glass fell from me') is one distinguishing strategy that native Spanish speakers use to mitigate their apologies. This construction allows the speaker to distance himself or herself from responsibility for the committed offense, thus defending his or her self-image in front of the offended person (Gómez, 2008). While the present study's students generally increased their use of Acknowledgment of responsibility from pretest to posttest, Participant 18 (Advanced low speaker on pretest and posttest) was the only student who incorporated the impersonal *se* into her use of this strategy. In contrast, the native Spanish speakers used this mitigating device often, thereby indicating that the infraction was out of their control. In comparison, Shively and Cohen's (2008) SA students began to use the impersonal *se* in their apologies only after a semester of SA. It might be the case that the students in the present study did not have sufficient control of the target language in order to employ this agentless construction. Another possible explanation is that the students were not aware that the impersonal *se* is frequently used in Spanish to minimize responsibility for an offense.

Intensification represents another feature of apologies that is difficult for L2 learners to acquire (e.g., Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Trosborg, 1995). A similar developmental pattern was observed with the present study's participants. They overwhelmingly underused Intensification both before and after SA compared to the NSSs, who used this strategy consistently. Furthermore, the students' use of intensifiers was limited to *lo siento mucho* ('I'm very sorry'). Nowhere on either the pre- or posttests did a student employ one of the several other intensifiers available in Spanish. On the other hand, the native Spanish speakers used a wider variety of intensifiers in their apologies, such as *lo siento muchísimo* ('I'm very sorry'), *lo siento de verdad* ('I'm truly sorry'), and *le pido mil disculpas* ('I'm very sorry'). Shively and Cohen (2008) found somewhat parallel results. After a semester abroad, their participants expanded their use of intensification, so

much that it often surpassed the target norm. However, similar to the present study's findings, their group's use of Intensification also was primarily limited to *lo siento mucho.*

The present study had several limitations that we must consider when interpreting our findings. First, there was no control group. Researchers might therefore compare the pragmatic development of short-term SA students with a group of at-home classroom learners in a summer session at the home institution. The second limitation was the use of a DCT to measure the students' apologies. We must acknowledge that DCTs measure what students know rather than how they use their knowledge to interact with an interlocutor (Félix- Brasdefer, 2010; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Given the advantages of role-plays (Bataller & Shively, 2011), future researchers might consider employing both DCTs and role-plays to examine the development of students' apologies and other speech acts during SA. Finally, because the students improved some features of their apologies while others remained unchanged or, in some cases, shifted away from the target norm, researchers should measure the impact of pragmatic intervention on the development of SA participant's apologies compared to a SA group that is not exposed to intervention.

7. Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to investigate the development of students' apologies during a short-term SA experience in Spain. Seven major findings were observed. First, based on performance ratings assigned to them by two NSSs, the students made significant gains in pragmatic appropriateness in two out of the five vignettes and on the five combined vignettes (composite). The second finding was that the students became more target-like by increasing their use of three strategies (Acknowledgement of responsibility, Explanation, and Promise of non-recurrence) in several of the vignettes. The students also increased their use of Intensification in Meeting professor. Third, the SA group reduced their use of Expression of apology in Babysitting spill and Meeting professor. Fourth, in some cases the students became less target-like from pretest to posttest (e.g., less frequent use of Offer of repair in Meeting friend), which suggests that they had not acquired sufficient sociocultural knowledge to understand which strategies to use in this particular context. The fifth finding was that despite gains, there remained at times significant differences between the students' strategies and those of the NSSs. While the SA group increased their use of Acknowledgement of responsibility on the posttest, for example, they did not employ the impersonal se (e.g., *se me olvidó nuestra cita*, 'I forgot about our appointment'), an important mitigating device used frequently by NSSs. In addition, the students overused routine expressions, such as *lo siento* ('I'm sorry'), whereas the native speakers used a wide range of IFIDs. The seventh and final finding was that the students underused Intensification (e.g., *lo siento mucho*, 'I'm very sorry') when compared to the NSSs, who used this strategy very frequently while obviously possessing a more extensive set of lexical intensifiers (e.g., *cuánto lo siento*, 'I'm so sorry').

Taken together, our findings indicate that exposure to target language input during SA may well be insufficient for L2 learners who have the expectation of acquiring the pragmatic features of the host community. If pragmatic competence is one of the goals of the SA experience, the students should be made aware of the pragmatic norms of the host culture before and during the course of their time abroad. SA programs should develop this knowledge through explicit instruction, awareness-raising activities, communicative output practice, targeted feedback, and guided reflection (e.g., Hernández, 2018; Hernández & Boero, 2018; Kondo, 2010; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006; Shively, 2010). The model I envision is based on second language acquisition constructs (e.g., noticing, pushed output) that are thought to facilitate language development. The noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 2001) states that

there must be conscious attention or noticing of a given feature in the input for acquisition to occur. Output (Swain, 1995) and guided metapragmatic reflection, for their part, further draw learners' attention to target forms and their use. Building on the pragmatic knowledge that students will have acquired in pre-departure orientation, participants could then be given tasks during SA designed to provide them opportunities to listen and observe native speakers making apologies and performing other speech acts, practice them, and receive targeted feedback about their L2 pragmatic development (Hernández, 2018; Hernández & Boero, 2018).

Footnotes

[1] To measure oral proficiency gains made during SA, a simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI; Stansfield, 1996) was given to participants prior to their departure for Spain, and again during the final week of the program. SOPI scores are provided to help the reader contextualize the study's findings.

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