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The L2 Self and Identity: Exploring What Spanish as a Foreign Language Means for Former Mixed-Major Study Abroad Sojourners

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Abstract

The present study seeks to offer insights into how former study abroad students, temporally beyond the period of initial re-entry into their home environments, perceive Spanish as a foreign language in their lives now. This post-sojourn period is explored within the framework of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009) and the expanded model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Written and oral narratives were collected from a sample of ten former mixed-major sojourners, who had studied abroad between 11 – 40 months earlier in Spain. They were now living and working elsewhere. The narratives were analyzed adopting a thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013), for patterns across the dataset. Findings showed four dominant themes: (1) identity echoes; (2) a pivotal experience; (3) sustaining or not sustaining; and (4) enduring value. In the interests of economy, we focused on the words of five participants.

Abstract in Spanish

Este estudio trata de entender cómo estudiantes que en su día realizaron una estancia en el extranjero, en la actualidad perciben el español como lengua

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extranjera en sus vidas pasado el período inicial de regreso a casa. La etapa posterior a la estancia se explora en el marco del Sistema Motivacional del Yo (Dörnyei, 2009) y de un concepto ampliado de inversión en el aprendizje de una lengua (Davin & Norton, 2015). Se recogieron narraciones escritas y orales de una muestra de diez personas con distintas carreras académicas que habían residido en España durante un período de entre 11-40 meses para cursar estudios universitarios. En el momento de la recogida de datos estas personas vivían y trabajaban fuera de España. Se adaptó un análisis temático (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) para identificar patrones comunes en las narraciones. Los resultados de este análisis muestran cuatro temas dominantes: (1) los ecos identitarios; (2) una experiencia transformadora; (3) mantenimiento o no mantenimiento de la L2 y (4) valores que perduran. El artículo da protagonismo al discurso de cinco de los participantes.

Keywords:

L2 self, identity, person-in-context, post-sojourn, study abroad

Introduction

Citing Kinginger's (2004) *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, Plews (2016, p. 3) commented: "…we are left asking what must also have gone on at home, whether there was no going back to her former self…". The post-sojourn in study abroad research has been described as "Another Frontier" with the sustaining of language gains, attrition, and endurability of identity positions highlighted as ripe for further exploration (Plews, 2016). Coleman (2013, p. 27) asked: "Do we not need more studies which address both lifewide and lifelong outcomes?" And, whilst Plews (2016) recalculated Coleman's finding of seven studies somewhat upwards, the long-term impacts reported were judged simply summative. Against the backdrop of the call for finding better ways of understanding what former study abroad students have to say (Wong, 2015), the present study aimed to explore what Spanish as a foreign language means in the here-and-now to a group of mixed-major students who had studied abroad in Spain (we refer to them as "post-sojourners"). Our contribution to the literature is to consider these post-sojourners' perceptions within both the framework of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2009) and the expanded model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Literature Review

The Self Within the L2MSS

The tripartite L2MSS is derived from ideas in social psychology about the future-oriented self-concept and, in particular, the Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and the Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987). The three principal components of the L2MSS are:

1. the ideal L2 self – the future L2 user a learner desires to become;
2. the ought-to L2 self – a learner's beliefs about the L2 attributes they ought to possess to meet the expectations of others and avoid negative outcomes; and
3. the L2 learning experience – the situated motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience, including the experience of success (Dörnyei, 2009).

The L2MSS also includes nine prerequisites "…that need to be in place for future self-guides to be able to exert their motivational impact" (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 9), including that an ideal L2 self exists; is elaborate and vivid; is not perceived as comfortably certain; and is offset by a counteracting feared L2 self in the same domain. The constructs of promotional and preventional instrumentality are also embedded in the framework (You & Dörnyei, 2016), as is an emotional connection, it is theorized, through "…the imagery component of the possible selves…" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, p. 352).

As the present study explores the perceptions of post-sojourners situated in the here-and-now, we foreground that the actual self, the now self, is considered somewhat elusive within the L2MSS (Thorsen et al., 2017). It has been broadly characterized as the L2 learning experience (i.e., the third strand of the L2MSS) (Ushioda, 2009). Indeed, an alternative definition of the L2 learning experience, the framework's "Cinderella", has recently been proffered as "…the perceived quality of the learners' engagement with various aspects of the language learning process" (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 25).

Finally, attention has also turned to the process of personal meaning-making and the adoption of a further psychological construct into the field, namely narrative identity. The L2 version of the construct has been explained as "…an integral part of the individual's overall life narrative, responsible for processing past L2-related experiences and constructing future goals" (Dörnyei, 2017, p. 90). Research on narrative identity employs the life-story constructs of, amongst others, 'redemption' and 'contamination'. With redemption, "…a

demonstrably 'bad' or emotionally negative event or circumstance leads to a demonstrably 'good' or emotionally positive outcome", and, with contamination, fortune turns the other way, so that the preceding good is erased as things turn bad (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 234).

Identity Within the Model of Investment

To the extent that the L2 self exists, it is in the mind. It is an imaginary psychological construct, as is the notion of motivation in general. L2 learners do, however, live in the social, cultural, economic, educational, political, and linguistic space around them. We therefore turn to the sociology-inspired, poststructuralist construct of investment (Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton, 2013) and the recently expanded model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Four constructs sit within the expanded model, with investment at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology.

The construct of investment offers a way to understand "…learners' variable desires to engage in social interaction and community practices" (Norton, 2013, p. 6). The construct is considered to underline the role of agency in language learning (Kramsch, 2013) and allows an exploration of a learner's commitment to L2 learning. This means that, in addition to considering how motivated a learner is, the following can also be asked: "What is the learner's investment in the language practices of this classroom or community?" (Norton, 2013, p. 6).

Identity is considered integrally related with investment (Norton, 2013). In the relationship between the language learner and the social world, identity changes across time and space: it is fluid, a site of struggle (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Norton (2015) has credited her construct of investment as being informed by the theories of capital, language, and symbolic power put forward by Bourdieu (1991). On the notion of ideology within the model, Darvin and Norton (2015, p. 43) posit: "…learners are positioned in multiple ways before they even speak".

The Post-Study Abroad Context

On the new research frontier for study abroad, one direction taken has been to explore the effect on L2 learning on return to a formal instruction (FI) foreign language classroom. For example, Irie and Ryan (2015, p. 359) discuss the negative and helpless feelings of some returnees, with others: "…triumphant and filled with an empowering sense of achievement". Lee and Kinginger's (2018) case study of a study abroad returnee from China, Kevin, to his home

campus FI Chinese classroom in the United States, aimed to understand why he did not sustain his motives for learning Chinese. Over the course of a term, Kevin's narratives, from his experiences in class and during interviews "gave way to challenges" (p. 578). The authors proposed responsive curriculum and instruction, rather than simply expecting student adaptation. Whereas, within a longitudinal research project of bilingual Spanish Catalan students, on a language-specialized degree program, and which included a three month stay in an English-speaking country (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), two studies found positive changes to L3 English motivation. However, the nature of these changes was found to differ during study abroad and FI at home periods, pointing to: "…the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of motivation and beliefs" (Trenchs & Juan-Garau, 2014, p. 279). Study abroad and FI at home periods both "…spurred an increase in learners' integrative motivation, possibly as a reflection of their ideal L2 self in the international arena" (Juan-Garau et al., 2014, p. 254). (The post-study abroad tests were conducted on return and 15 months post-sojourn whilst the participants were still students.)

More pertinent, however, to the present study and the research direction identified by Plews (2016) is recent research on the wider consequences post-study abroad. Studying in Japan was found to present a "critical incident" in life trajectories (Campbell, 2016), with post-sojourners remaining connected with the country in different ways. Interviews were conducted six months to 15 years after completion of study abroad (all bar one of the eight participants were still students). Dissatisfaction with native speaker interaction during study abroad went one of two ways back home. One participant decided it would take too much effort to get her Japanese to a level she could use post-sojourn. Another, with a feared self as someone unable to use her L2, worked to increase her interaction with the Japanese language and culture in Australia. Two unpublished studies are cited: Fridhandler (2006) and Jiménez Jiménez (2003). The first reported, amongst the six students interviewed, recreation of aspects of life on study abroad in Mexico once back in Canada (e.g., with new Latin American friends), and changes to future career plans. The second explored the level of participation (in Spanish-mediated activities during and in the seven-month period post-sojourn in Spain) amongst ten United States students in relation to attrition and self-regulation in linguistic and psychological contexts. In a further post-sojourn study, personal, social, cultural, and linguistic effects were found after the study abroad of 12 English majors from an Austrian university to various English-speaking destinations (Steinwidder, 2016). At the time of the study, ten participants were still studying, and two had recently

completed their studies. The majority saw study abroad as: "the pinnacle of their oral language development" (p. 9). Nine believed their English skills had deteriorated since return: lack of opportunities to speak in English in Austria and fewer opportunities to speak with native speakers on a daily basis identified. Those who used English with significant others or in jobs, believed they had been able to maintain their level of English.

What the studies reviewed in this section have in common is a consideration, at least in part, of the impact of and upon an L2 in the post-sojourn period, arguably in the period beyond immediate re-entry. Save for one participant in Campbell (2016), the participants were still students or had just completed their studies or were on interim internships within their study program. However, a recent study has focused on 33 Anglophone language specialist graduates (French or German) and investigated their career pathways and language identity claimed. The language degrees were found to be a continuing part of these graduates' identities, although few had embarked on language-related careers (Mitchell et al., 2020).

With non-language majors increasingly the profile of study abroad students (Collentine, 2009), the present study therefore aimed to build on the existing body of research by exploring personal meaning-making about an L2 in the post-sojourn period for mixed-majors post-sojourners situated beyond an academic setting, into their working lives. The L2 under consideration was Spanish, a 'big' language, although not the global lingua franca. Or, in the terminology of De Swaan (2001), a 'supercentral' but not the 'hypercentral' language.

The following question guided our research: How do former sojourners, who have recently crossed the threshold into working lives back home, account in the here-and-now for what Spanish, their study abroad L2, means for them and how they experience this, in terms of the models of the L2MSS and investment?

Method

The Study

The present study was conducted with ten former international university students who had studied abroad (two undergraduates and eight on master's programs) between 11 to 40 months earlier at a university in Catalonia, Spain, and whose intended length of stay was for more than two terms (there

was one early return, at almost three months). The data collection took place retrospectively, in the post-sojourn period, between June and November 2018.

Participants

There were seven female and three male participants in the age range at data collection of 24–46 (average age: 30.3). The participants were from Europe (six), the United States (three), and Asia (one). All bar one had stayed in their home countries after return. They were working in various fields, namely human resources, accounting, non-profit, sales, marketing, the civil service, recruitment, and software development. They were native or near-native speakers of English, although one ranked Spanish as her L2 and English as her L3. None of the participants in the sample was studying a language major whilst in Barcelona. The only participant enrolled as a language major – Economics and Hispanic Studies – was on a work abroad (rather than study abroad) program organized by her university. Half of the sample were studying a language-related subject: translation (one), linguistics (three), and the work abroad participant (one). The other half were studying non-language related academic subjects, such as psychology and political science. Half of them had self-organized their educational experience away from home. The participants were allocated pseudonyms.

Name (age) Residence Degree level	**Sojourn number Program* or Self-organized (*home university or Erasmus)**	**Length of stay (Length of time since return home)**
Hannah (20s) Belgium Master's	First sojourn Program	3 months (left early) (1 year 11 months)
Selina (20s) Germany Master's	Third sojourn Program	11 months (3 years 4 months)
George (40s) United States Master's	Third sojourn Self-organized	10 months (2 years 11 months)
Maria (20s) Romania Master's	First sojourn Program	5 months (3 years 4 months)
Mayleen (20s) Taiwan Undergraduate	Second sojourn Program	11.5 months (3 years 2 months)

Elena (20s) The Netherlands Master's	First sojourn Self-organized	1 year 10 months (3 years 1 month)
Rachel (20s) United Kingdom Undergraduate	First sojourn Program	9 months (3 years 1 months)
Jana (20s) Serbia Master's	First sojourn Self-organized	9 months (2 years 11 months)
Peter (30s) United States Master's	Second sojourn Self-organized	2 years 5 months (2 years 4 months)
Adam (30s) United States Master's	Second sojourn Self-organized	1 year 8 months (11 months)

TABLE (1): THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR SOJOURNS

Participant	**English/Spanish/Catalan medium instruction (EMI/SMI/CMI) during study abroad**	**Spanish/Catalan FI during study abroad and other languages**	**Spanish/Catalan on arrival/ departure/at data collection**
Hannah	English in the office (internship)	Spanish = L5 (FI: no) German = L4 French = L3 English = L2 **Dutch = L1**	A1 - A1 - A1
Selina	EMI: 100%	Spanish = L4 (FI: yes) French = L3 English = L2 **German = L1**	A1 - B2 - A2/B1
George	EMI: 90%, SMI: 10%	French = L4 Spanish = L3 (FI: yes) Japanese = L2 **English = L1**	B2.1 - B2.1 - B1
Maria	EMI: 60%, SMI: 40%	German = L6 French = L5 Italian = L4 Spanish = L3 (FI: no) English = L2 **Romanian = L1**	B2 - B2 - B2
Mayleen	EMI: 40%, SMI: 60%	Spanish = L3 (FI: yes) English = L2 **Chinese = L1**	A2/B1 - B2 - B1/B2
Elena	EMI: 100%	Dutch = L6 Catalan = L5 (FI: yes)	0 - A2 - A2 (Spanish)

		Spanish =L4 (FI: no) German = L3 English = L2 **Greek L1**	0 - A1 - A1 (Catalan)
Rachel	English mainly, in the office (internship)	Spanish = L3 (FI: no) Italian = L2 **English = L1**	"high" - "fluent" - C2
Jana	EMI: 10%, SMI: 90%	French = L4 English = L3 Spanish = L2 (FI: no) **Serbian = L1**	B2 - C1 - C1
Peter	EMI: 60%, SMI: 30%, Catalan: 10%	German = L5 French = L4 Catalan = L3 (FI: yes) Spanish = L2 (FI: no) **English = L1**	C1 - C1 - C1 (Spanish) A2 - B2 - B2 (Catalan)
Adam	EMI 10%, SMI 90%	Portuguese = L3 Spanish = L2 (FI: yes) **English = L1**	C2 - C2 - C2

TABLE (2): THE PARTICIPANTS' LANGUAGES

Data Collection: Instruments and Procedure

There were three instruments employed for data collection in the present study:

1. A sociolinguistic questionnaire (SLQ), to identify the participants' relevant language backgrounds, including self-assessed Spanish level on arrival, departure, and at the time of data collection; the medium of instruction of their academic subject during study abroad; and whether languages classes attended.
2. A writing template, designed by the researcher and intended to prompt memories and aspirations about L2 Spanish. This targeted five periods: just before, during, on return from study abroad; in the now; and looking forward. Vocabulary associated with the L2 self was employed in parts of the template, as one means for the participants to gather thoughts. However, they were given explicit 'permission' to write using whatever vocabulary they wished. The participants were asked to write in English if they were native speakers or were comfortable using English. Otherwise, they were to feel free to write in Spanish, which one did. Extracts from the template are included in the Appendix.

3. Finally, and most importantly, a semi-structured interview designed to broaden out, with open-ended questions, the completed templates, and to focus in on the present. The questions are set out in the Appendix.

Contact was re-established via social media with the participants because they met the criteria of being beyond immediate return from their sojourns. For the purposes of the present study, they also fulfilled the criteria of providing a mixed-majors group; of having all studied abroad in the same university city; and they spoke English. There was no requirement for persistence in foreign language learning (e.g., Shedivy, 2004).

Thirteen former study abroad students were contacted to ask if they would be interested in participating in the research study. If they agreed, they were sent a short email explaining what was involved. Three did not respond. The remaining ten were sent the template and SLQ, and they were reminded about the interview. There was intentionally minimal contact with the participants. Most indicated that, due to work commitments, they either would only be able to complete the template or participate in the interview at weekends. This resulted in a delay in data collection. The interviews were conducted remotely, over Skype, with minimal interruption from the interviewer. This was when continued consent to participate in the research was verified. The recordings were transcribed in their entirety. The interviews ran for between 25 and 59 minutes, with a mean length of 43 minutes, and generated between 2,853 and 5,078 words (M: 4,171). The completed templates yielded 639 and 1,876 words (M: 1,378).

Analysis

Initial analysis began upon return of the SLQs and completed templates. The latter were read, re-read, and studied for emerging patterns. The intention had been for the interviews to be a follow-up to the writing exercise. However, due to the written data including thoughts about a wider L2 identity than the L2MSS anticipates, and notions of an L2 capital value, the scope of the interview was widened, and the model of investment was added as a construct for the present study. Once the interviews had been conducted, the written and interview data were analyzed using a pattern-based analytic method, the thematic procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013). This included: (i) the recursive reading of the data for text units of interest (words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs); (ii) the labelling and coding of text units relevant to our research; (iii) the searching for themes through the collation of codes with provisional names; (iv) the systematic review of the themes and generation of a

thematic map (four dominant themes emerged with 12 related sub-themes); (v) the generation of clear names and definitions for each theme; and (vi) the final analysis of the data. Whilst analysis of the written and interview data was geared towards the guiding question, i.e., to understand what L2 Spanish meant for the post-sojourners in the here-and-now, we aimed to generate an analysis of the data inductively, with no predetermined categories. All coding decisions were discussed at length between the first and second-named authors and, where there was any disagreement, possible adjustments were considered until full consensus was reached. This resulted in all of the data that was identified as relevant to our research topic being allocated to at least one sub-theme.

Theme	Sub-themes	Summary of the code topics arising
1. Identity echoes	• Out of reach identity • Lost identity • Retained identity	**A past Spanish L2 identity continues to resonate in the present:** the post-sojourners articulated their thoughts and emotions about a past L2 Spanish identity, be that one that was desired but remained out of reach; one that was lived then lost; or one that was fulfilled then retained. Thoughts and emotions included: feelings of failure and enduring L2 fears, L2 identity loss or gain.
2. A pivotal experience	• Good to bad • Bad to good • Good to better	**Something happened in the L2 story (a negative event, a positive event, or things just got better):** the post-sojourners included a contamination event, a redemption event, or a tipping point in their narratives.
3. To sustain or not to sustain	• No maintenance • Minimal maintenance • Maintaining	**A choice has been made about maintaining or not maintaining L2 Spanish:** the post-sojourners expressed their ideas on sustaining L2 Spanish today, including thoughts about attrition and examples of efforts they are making to maintain their L2.
4. Enduring value	• Linguistic • Sociocultural • Economic	**L2 Spanish is prized at personal level for its pure linguistic value, for how it broadens sociocultural thinking and activities, and for its economic value:** the post-sojourners expressed their thoughts and emotions about: • their current linguistic know-how and how this is valued, be that reflected in pride, satisfaction, enjoyment, increased confidence, or as a transferable skill for approaching other L2s; • a current richer perspective or life, socioculturally, due to L2 Spanish, be that in relation to friendship groups, family members, work colleagues, local community, social status; and • the economic relevance to them today of their L2 Spanish.

TABLE (3): THEMES

Findings and Discussion

Groupings of Post-Sojourners

Four dominant themes, common experiences for all the post-sojourners, emerged, as presented in Table 3: (1) identity echoes; (2) a pivotal experience; (3) to sustain or not to sustain; and (4) enduring value. An interesting finding was that the same post-sojourners accounted for the same sub-theme meanings within each of themes (1) – (3). We have labelled these groupings of post-sojourners: 'Unfulfilled', 'Pragmatists', and 'Aligners'. We ascribed these labels as the Unfulfilled had L2 desires which were not met; the Pragmatists moved onto L2s more relevant to the communities in which they now reside; and the Aligners have lives aligned with Spanish. To acknowledge these groupings, we treat them one-by-one in this section i.e., the theme clusters are subordinated to the groupings. To illustrate our findings economically, we have selected half of the post-sojourners from each grouping to provide examples of perceptions from North America, Europe, and Asia (their names appear in bold in the first column in Table 4 below). We exemplify the ideas which constitute the relevant sub-themes, within each of dominant themes, with direct representative quotes. Quotes from the written data appear in italics, to distinguish them from oral interview data.

POST-SOJOURNERS	THE FOUR DOMINANT THEMES AND THEIR SUB-THEMES			
	identity echoes	**a pivotal experience**	**to sustain or not to sustain**	**enduring value**
UNFULFILLED: Hannah, **Selina**, **George**, Maria	out of reach identity	good to bad	no maintenance	linguistic sociocultural economic
PRAGMATISTS: **Mayleen**, Elena	lost identity	bad to good	minimal maintenance	linguistic sociocultural economic
ALIGNERS: Rachel, **Jana**, Peter, **Adam**	retained identity	good to better	maintaining	linguistic sociocultural economic

TABLE (4): SUB-THEMES ACROSS THE THREE GROUPINGS OF POST-SOJOURNERS

The Unfulfilled

The sub-themes which appeared in the data for the Unfulfilled conveyed what Spanish means for each of them today, and how they experience this, namely: (i) as an out of reach identity; (ii) through an account of a good to bad experience; (iii) with no intention of maintaining; but (iv) nevertheless, with a sense of enduring value, a sub-theme which is repeated in the two other groupings of post-sojourners. We turn to the words of Selina, a native German-speaker, and George, a native English-speaker.

SELINA arrived in Barcelona from Germany with A1 Spanish and improved to B2 during study abroad. **Out of reach identity:** part of Selina's ideal L2 self was to have a "decent conversation". When describing this hoped for identity, Selina focused on her self-worth and revealed her feared self: "*I did not feel proud at all. After all my 'fear' of not having been able to learn Spanish after having been living in Spain for a whole year had become true.*" **Good to bad:** the pivotal point in Selina's narrative came post-study abroad. She had found a Spanish language exchange friend in Germany and, through meeting regularly, had been able to: *"…regain a certain level of 'friendship' with the Spanish language."* She explains the process of attrition as her story goes in the wrong direction: "He's actually moved back to Spain last month... I know it's there [points to head] and that somehow in my head but I couldn't really use it, so to say. And that's why I kept losing it, or maybe forgetting it is a better word." **No maintenance:** Selina no longer speaks Spanish: "…I guess there was a point there where we say yeah that's enough for me." Selina wrote: "*After all, large parts of the worldwide population is Spanish speaking.*" However, when asked whether there was any overlap between Spanish and her life at the moment, answered: "Only if I really force that into my life, so to say." **Enduring value:** linguistically, Selina plans to travel to Latin America: "…people are not necessarily able to speak English so it will definitely be a positive thing to at least be able to communicate a bit". Socioculturally, Selina said of her language tandem that without knowing Spanish: "I wouldn't have him as a friend." Finally, from an economic perspective, Selina includes Spanish on her CV.

GEORGE arrived on study abroad from the United States with B2.1 Spanish and left with the same level. **Out of reach identity:** although firm on having had an ideal L2 self, this was described simply as being able to speak "in this situation or that situation". George recalled his fear of communicating with native speakers during study abroad, which continued until today: "I had studied all this time and I can't understand what you are saying back to me? So that was the fear right, trying to get over that hump was hard. Is hard and will be hard." He had had the opportunity to chat in Spanish with Latin American colleagues, living in California post-sojourn, but had not done so. **Good to bad:** the pivotal point in George's narrative, like Selina's, goes in the wrong (learning) direction. George had started enthusiastically, in the weeks before study abroad, meeting with a Peruvian language exchange partner. He had felt he ought to take advantage of the target language environment Barcelona offered him and endeavoured to explain what went wrong as his narrative becomes contaminated: "*I was very eager at the beginning then that tapered off during the 2nd semester of grad school classes. I don't think my fears changed; in fact, they*

probably got worse once I stopped taking language classes." **No maintenance:** on sustaining his L2, George wrote: "*Maybe I will watch soccer in Spanish and that's about it*." He commented:

> Learning Spanish I'm kind of fed up with it. Not learning a language in general, just the maintenance and the upkeep, it's just so much. You know if I'm still in Spain I would be still motivated and learning it and speaking it.

Enduring value: linguistically, George, through his Spanish language, identified as what we might call an 'L2 survivor': "I have that background. I have the knowledge in Spanish. I have those challenges that I faced in Spain or in other countries that I know that I can get over and other people can't." From a sociocultural perspective George commented: "Spanish and languages in general gave me a lot. Opened my eyes to a new world and opened my eyes to other, maybe other non-native English speakers in the U.S. and the things they go through. Their struggle." Economically, George occasionally writes phone applications in Spanish at work.

In sum, the Unfulfilled told us about identities which were aspired to but never achieved. They recounted imagined study abroad L2 selves which, despite their desires, had not become reality. This was perhaps because their ideal L2 self had ceased to exist (this was the case for Hannah); was overwhelmed rather than balanced by a feared L2 self (Selina and George); had not been vividly imagined (George); and/or had been perceived as comfortably certain (Maria). In this sense, these selves fell outside the L2MSS prerequisites for an ideal self capable of exerting motivational impact (Dörnyei, 2014), and so had failed to propel them forwards with their L2. The Unfulfilled also recounted their internalized L2 contamination experiences. If we narrate ourselves into the L2 learners we become (Dörnyei, 2017), then these learners' Spanish-speaking motivation had indeed stalled. The Unfulfilled also had no current L2 engagement, with Spanish or other L2s. Indeed, their unachieved L2 identity position and negative pivotal experience help to explain these post-sojourners' zero strategy position on sustaining their L2. However, unlike the negative essence of the first three themes, when it came to the fourth theme, 'enduring value', the Unfulfilled positively experienced their L2 in the here-and-now, linguistically, socioculturally and economically. For the Unfulfilled, L2 Spanish is promotionally instrumental e.g., for Selina's future travel. For George, his L2 experience has provided him with transferable survival skills, a confidence in his mobility and his ability to cross boundaries. In fact, Elena, one of the Pragmatists, similarly identified as an L2 survivor. George also attributed his

own L2 learning with an ability to recognise in others "…the things they go through. Their struggle". This is a direct reflection of the notion of L2 identity as a site of struggle. All of the Unfulfilled were aware of the economic value of their L2 (Bourdieu, 1991), however frustrated they were with their L2 level. Indeed, their awareness of their symbolic capital, of being pre-equipped with linguistic capital and social networks, also resonates with the expanded model of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

The Pragmatists

We turn now to present direct examples of the perceptions of the Pragmatists. Again, the sub-themes which emerged in the data conveyed what Spanish means for these post-sojourners today and how they experience this. However, for the Pragmatists this was as: (i) a lost identity; (ii) through the telling of a bad to good experience; (iii) with minimal intent to maintain; and (iv) as with the other groupings of post-sojourners, with an acknowledgement of enduring value. We focus in on the words of Mayleen, a native Chinese-speaker.

MAYLEEN arrived in Barcelona with A2/B1 Spanish and left with B2, passing B2 DELE on her return to Taiwan. **Lost identity:** Mayleen described the impact of her L2 identity change when having no communicative use for her L2 at home:

> It's like your hand is still there but you don't use, you don't have the chance to use it anymore. And so of course your your other hand will probably be lost cos it's kind of the same feeling like that. Yeah.

Bad to good: unlike the pivotal points in the narratives of the Unfulfilled, the Pragmatists' narratives resolve positively. Mayleen wrote:

> *During the first 3 months, I had very little improvement, and sometimes I was really upset. But I kept on meeting new friends, talking as much as possible, taking more classes, and meeting up with my language partner. Yet, after my stay in two families' house during Christmas break, my ability suddenly had significant improvement.*

Minimal maintenance: on L2 maintenance, Mayleen wrote: "*I have only trivial time to learn Spanish now, so I have subscribed to Netflix for its several original Spanish films (with Spanish, English, Chinese subtitles)*". **Enduring value:** from a linguistic value perspective, Mayleen rarely speaks Spanish now, but plans to continue using with her Spanish-speaking language tandem, a native Japanese speaker who had already paid a visit: "…of course we can tell that maybe she's not Taiwanese but we are not talking in Japanese, not Chinese, not English, but

we were speaking in Spanish, so that was really fun". Mayleen had shifted her focus to languages more local to her. She had found a naturalistic pathway for learning Spanish and was approaching Korean in the same way, watching TV dramas in a new L2. She commented about her recent trip to Korea: "I know little words and when I've been able to use that little sentence to ask for directions, I feel so super fine". Socioculturally, Mayleen believed of her L2 Spanish:

> …you naturally, you absorb the language itself. The culture, the energy… it's kinda the nature of the language itself and I am being affected by this. And that sometimes will feed back to my own life experience like. It can help me to be like a person more passionate.

She also wrote:

> *Spanish isn't a language that popular in Taiwan, and being able to speak it well makes me become a person more resourceful and more connected to the international community. And I think this image is part of what I wanted to become.*

Finally, from an economic perspective, Mayleen narrated her L2 story as if Spanish was an economic "*asset*", although she assigned a lower value to L2 Spanish than L2 English: "…it's not like it is a super pass but of course you have more chances". This resource was managed during study abroad; Mayleen "permitted" herself only certain friends with whom she spoke Chinese or English.

In sum, the Pragmatists gained and then lost an identity. They had imagined study abroad L2 selves which had become reality. Both Mayleen and Elena explored their feelings of L2 identity loss when having no use for the language back home. There was a sense of the gaining and losing of power in mobile lives, "…that value shifts across spaces" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42). The loss also suggests former strong L2 self-guides (Higgins, 1987). Indeed, these two post-sojourners chose to narrate only aspects of their past L2 selves which were L2MSS prerequisite compliant. Also, the Pragmatists had internalized an L2 redemption experience i.e., there were positive resolutions, as we saw in Mayleen's narrated event. Neither of them has given up entirely with maintaining their L2, nor have they shied away from investing in new linguistic challenges, buoyed in part perhaps by successful past self-guides. They had made pragmatic shifts to local community L2s, namely Korean and Japanese for Mayleen, and Dutch for Elena, who was working in The Netherlands. L2 Spanish continued to hold an enduring value for the Pragmatists. Both had discovered

their own naturalistic pathways to learn Spanish, linguistic know-how which they had employed when acquiring other L2s. Their telling of this resonates not only with the construct of capital (Bourdieu, 1991), but also – given their sense of Spanish identity loss – with the idea that narrative identity provides lives "…with some degree of unity and purpose" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). From a sociocultural perspective, their L2 had given them access to other cultures. Mayleen talked about the process of becoming, of reaching the possible self she had imagined (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and also reaching her goal of connecting with an international community. This transnational thinking about her L2, i.e., beyond the borders of Spain, dovetails with the examples of symbolic capital in the "new world order" discussed by Darvin and Norton (2015, p. 45). These post-sojourners recognized too the economic value of their L2, with Mayleen in particular making it clear that she understood this as an exploitable commodity *(*Bourdieu, 1991; Jackson, 2010; Darvin & Norton, 2015).

The Aligners

The sub-themes which emerged in the data for the Aligners on what Spanish means for each of them today and how they experience this, were: (i) a retained identity; (ii) framed by accounts of a good to better experience; (iii) with ongoing L2 maintenance; and (iv) with a sense of enduring value. We turn to the words of Jana, a native Serbian-speaker, and Adam, a native English-speaker.

JANA arrived in Barcelona with B2 Spanish and left with C1. **Retained identity:** for Jana, the notion of a prior ideal L2 self as a guiding force was denied during the interview on the basis that it would not have been relevant to her economically in her home country of Serbia: "Yeah. I understand. But but no I didn't have anything like that because Spanish here in Serbia it's not like a Germany language. Like Swedish." This denial included waving her finger as a no during the interview. However, in her written narrative, Jana had introduced a past L2 self with a desire to learn Spanish so that she could study her master's through Spanish medium instruction:

> *When I called my teacher the first time to tell her that next year I want to go to Barcelona to finish my master's degree and that I need to learn Spanish until then, she thought that it is not possible and told me that, but all I knew and wanted was to go to Barcelona to study. Today she always tells me that she has never had a student like me.*

Jana identified strongly in the present with the Spanish language: "…I am so sorry that it is not my native language and I feel sorry because I didn't born in

in Spain." She also wrote about the "*Desorden total*" (total confusion) she had felt on return home: "*I returned to a culture not so different, but yes different, which I didn't like. I had to get used to everything, even though it is my own country*". **Good to better:** Jana's narrative about her time in Barcelona tips from good to better: "*My Spanish was getting better and better every day. I haven't noticed when I stopped thinking in my mother tongue*". **Maintaining:** on sustaining her L2, Jana, with the most agentive style of the ten post-sojourners, had carefully chosen her job, apparently for the principal reason of not forgetting her Spanish: "*My vision was not to lose it or forget it, that's why, mainly because of that, I accepted this job*". **Enduring value:** Jana returned from study abroad "*muy orgullosa*" (very proud) of how much her Spanish had advanced. She described acquiring Spanish as adding to her personal knowledge bank: "…a part of other things that I know to do it". On sociocultural value, Jana accessed the Spanish culture during study abroad almost exclusively through the Spanish language, avoiding the use of English as much as possible. She felt on return: "…my punto de vista [point of view] was like ocean" and "*I changed a lot*". She emphasized this was particularly in relation to her ideas about other cultures and religions. Jana uses Spanish everyday with her boyfriend, who lives in Spain. From an economic standpoint, Jana needs (although, as we have seen, by design) to speak Spanish in her current job. She works for a U.S. company.

ADAM had hoped to become more native-like in his Spanish abilities during study abroad. He arrived with C2 and left for the United States with a C2 certificate. **Retained identity:** when asked in the interview whether he had ever had a vision of an ideal L2 self, Adam commented: "Never consciously no. I don't think I ever stood there and thought this is who I am going to be". Despite this, he described a former roadmap-carrying ideal L2 self: "Like when you are starting out your goal is to read a newspaper article and understand it. Then your goal is to go to a restaurant and order in Spanish and they don't laugh at you…". Having met his wife during study abroad, when asked what part of him is Spanish, he said simply and immediately, "my son". **Good to better:** Adam's last big hurdle, when his narrative tips from good to better, was a few weeks pre-interview, getting his hair cut in his L2 (in Miami) without his Spanish wife's help. **Maintaining:** Adam watches some television programs and listens to music in Spanish. He also uses Spanish daily with his wife and child. **Enduring value:** Adam, now with family ties back in Spain, finds his linguistic know-how helps him fit in and not to be an outsider on family visits. He gave as an example, adjusting his dialect (e.g., switching 'ustedes' to 'vosotros' and 'ok' to 'vale'): "So when I was in Spain the first time I got tired of people you know looking at me funny when I go to the shoe store and say ustedes tienen este talle [do you have

this size]?" Socioculturally, he too felt a sense of changed cultural awareness, although expressed in reverse.

> Adam: I think it makes me feel like I know less of the world than I thought I knew when I only spoke English. If that makes sense?
>
> Interviewer: Less of the world?
>
> Adam: Yeah like the more you learn the more you realise you don't know anything I guess.

Adam had previously converted a single into a double honors degree, so that he had a Spanish as well as a History degree. Economically, he believed this had been important for his prior employment.

In sum, the Aligners retained elements of a study abroad L2 identity. They have former ideal L2 selves which had become reality, although they would not necessarily have described their prior motivation in this way. These four post-sojourners described L2 identities grounded in the present. As with the Pragmatists, they chose to narrate only aspects of their past L2 selves which met with the L2MMS prerequisites e.g., they expended effort and carried a roadmap. To varying degrees, Jana, along with Rachel and Peter, remained affected by otherness, left between-cultures, and in a 'third place' (Bhabha, 2004), albeit less so now than on immediate re-entry. Arguably they have no need to imagine a possible future self, they have a more concrete past one to guide them, to be more connected with that part of themselves again. The past is certain (Suddendorf, 2010). For Adam, his identity is totally connected with the Spanish language now. For the Aligners, a sojourn in Spain had been internalized as a successful L2 learning experience, which had only become better. They narrated experiences of things naturally tipping from good to better. In terms of sustaining their L2, having described Spanish as part of who they are, their thoughts about maintenance were expressed in terms of the natural course of things, although Jana and Rachel had adopted an agentive approach to creating their own situational contexts for L2 use. Jana, Rachel, and Peter expressed their emotions, an intrinsic joy, about using Spanish (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). For Jana, having L2 Spanish is prized, simply as something that is known; L2 Spanish dialect know-how helps Adam with his investment in the L2 of his wife's family. All of them perceived their L2 as capital, although it was Rachel, like Mayleen in the Pragmatists, who was particularly conscious of this, identifying its prestige value, perhaps because she found Spanish not to be readily usable in the United Kingdom. Adam and Jana have important personal relationships where the

language of communication is Spanish. Peter lives in New York City, where he feels his Spanish allows him to "associate with a larger section of the community". All four post-sojourners use Spanish at work and, in short, have invested beyond the study abroad context of their L2: they have Spanish situated in their lives, be that serendipitously or agentively.

Meaning-Making

Through the words of the former sojourners, we have been reminded of "the mutually constitutive relationship between persons and the contexts in which they act – a relationship that is dynamic, complex and non-linear" (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218). On return home, our ten sojourners transitioned from second to foreign language learners. We have been privy to that next stage of their L2 motivation journeys, living and working back in their home communities. Through the process of their meaning-making, we have heard about their past experiences in the target language rich environment of study abroad, re-constructed and internalized in the present, along with their intentions for the future (Karniol & Ross, 1996). They have each presented to us an "identity in time" (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233). Spanish did indeed have meaning for these post-sojourners in the actuality of their current lives. In the domains of L2 identity, narrative identity, and L2 maintenance, there were different degrees of negativity and positivity. However, when the post-sojourners shared what enduring capital value Spanish has for them today and how they experience this, they each did so with positivity, albeit from different perspectives. Indeed, that the theme cluster of 'enduring value', with its associated sub-themes, emerged as a dominant one is consistent with the findings of Steinwidder (2016).

None of the present study's participants were taking Spanish as their degree subject whilst on study abroad, increasingly the profile of sojourners (Collentine, 2009). However, six of them chose to enrol in an academic course with an element of Spanish medium instruction. Each made their own choices and efforts to acquire Spanish. Four of the former sojourners had invested in formal Spanish classroom instruction during their sojourns, whilst another, Maria, had tried to but had been frustrated by her experience: "If I had been able to attend Spanish classes at [her university] I would have studied but no they only asked me to attend classes run in Catalan". A further two had chosen to attend Catalan classes. Given improved foreign language competence is a stated aim of exchange programs (e.g., European Commission, 2019), this begs the question: what linguistic and other support from host and home universities (including from their language schools, international student offices, and

careers services) would have benefited these post-sojourners before, during and after study abroad, to maximize the potential of their L2 Spanish? It is worth noting that, with half of the participants in the present study having self-organized their study abroad, the burden for that support would have fallen disproportionately on the 'host' universities.

Recommendations

From the curriculum and pedagogical perspectives of university language schools, the dominant themes which arose in the present study caused us to reflect that language lessons could be adjusted to straddle the immediacy of L2 learning whilst on study abroad with the prospect of L2 use post-sojourn. Classroom activities might include the use of the L2MSS prerequisites as curriculum planning checklists. Are desired future L2 selves primed, vivid and elaborate, are they perceived as plausible? Have the students prepared roadmaps to work to close the discrepancy gap between their actual and ideal L2 selves? Is there realism about how much effort is involved in acquiring an L2? Have feared L2 selves been explored, to ensure balance with future ideal L2 selves? Indeed, vision work on the ideal L2 self, such as described in Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014), might be adapted to focus on imagining L2 use in communities back home. In what ways do sojourners envision L2 Spanish as part of this future identity? How do they anticipate sustaining L2 gains back home, what drives this? Have they conceived of their L2 having a place in their career choices? We suggest vision work be implemented at host universities and continue to be carried out by home universities for returnees, since this could help students to examine their language learning motives, support them taking an agentive approach towards the usability of their L2 in their working and personal lives, and provide a positive foundation for students' lifelong language learning narratives and multilingual identities. Importantly, any negative past L2 experiences during study abroad could be addressed by home universities, with a "reframing of the bad moments" (Falout, 2016, p. 124). Indeed, research supports the notion that past L2 identities are malleable and classroom activities beneficial for co-construction of past identities (Fukada et al., 2011).

Limitations

Our intention in the present study was to explore what L2 Spanish meant for former study abroad non-language majors who had recently crossed the threshold into working lives, and to do this through the medium of the returnees' own words. The post-sojourners returned to different locations: North America (three of them), Asia (one) and Europe (six). In this respect, whilst we have some

indication of the home location impact on how Spanish was perceived for these particular post-sojourners, the present study was limited by our sample size of ten. Additionally, there was no data collected on the socio-economic background of the participants. Indeed, there was a sense at times in the data that we were exploring the perceptions of a migratory elite, armed with pre-existing mobility capital from earlier experiences abroad (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Further research might identify what sojourn Spanish means on return to a number of specific home locations and across different socio-economic groups. Finally, it is worth noting that the L2 Spanish of the Aligners was generally stronger on arrival than the Unfulfilled and the Pragmatists (see Table 2), although the L2 arrival level does not explain the differing perceptions between the latter two groupings. Two of the Aligners also sojourned for longer (see Table 1). Again, this factor is likely to have impacted what Spanish means in their lives now.

Conclusion

The view that language learners are seen as binary, motivated or unmotivated, has been questioned (Norton, 2013). In the present study, the old paradigm of L2 motivation as an individual difference did not ring true in the narratives of the individuals we explored, from our "focus on real people, rather than learners as theoretical abstractions" (Ushioda, 2009, p. 220). Four themes emerged about how L2 Spanish is perceived in the here-and-now by these former students who had studied internationally. These were explored across three groupings of the former sojourners which we labelled the Unfulfilled; the Pragmatists; and the Aligners. The post-sojourners experienced echoes of their former L2 identity in the present, although this resonated differently across the three groups. There were expressions of thoughts and emotions about this identity, be that one that had been desired but remained out of reach (the Unfulfilled); was lived and then lost (the Pragmatists); or was fulfilled then retained (the Aligners). Each post-sojourner wove a pivotal L2 experience or event into their narrative which was good to bad / contaminating (the Unfulfilled), bad to good / redeeming (the Pragmatists), or things simply tipped from good to better (the Aligners). Common, too, were thoughts on whether to sustain or not to sustain their L2. Whilst some of the post-sojourners had no strategies for maintaining their L2 Spanish (the Unfulfilled), others acted to maintain their L2 in a light touch way and made a switch to more local L2s (the Pragmatists). The remainder were maintaining their Spanish (the Aligners). Importantly, each of the ten post-sojourners attributed an ongoing value to their L2 post-sojourn on three distinct levels: linguistically; socioculturally; and economically.

For our mixed-major post-sojourners there was no going back to their former study abroad selves. We are left wondering though whether and how L2 Spanish is experienced in the here-and-now by these post-sojourners could be different, particularly for the Unfulfilled, had their L2 learning experience in Barcelona been more supported from a holistic policy perspective. We should indeed reflect on whether opportunities are being missed to enrich the lives of non-language majors studying abroad.

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Appendix

EXTRACTS FROM THE TEMPLATE

EXTRACT 1

JUST BEFORE YOU ARRIVED IN BARCELONA

How would you describe your **Spanish-speaking self** at that time?

In your imagination, how did you envision your desired / ideal **future Spanish-speaking self**? Please describe.

Did you have a '**roadmap**' (or set of **goals**) for becoming this ideal self / **closing the gap** between this and your actual Spanish-speaking self? Please explain.

What were your **fears** / anxieties about not learning Spanish?

Tell me about your **beliefs** at that time about your ability to reach your Spanish-speaking goals.

EXTRACT 2

ON RETURN FROM BARCELONA

At that time, did you feel **proud** (or not) about your linguistic efforts during study abroad?

Did you **continue** to learn Spanish? Please elaborate. What happened to your **motivation** to learn Spanish?

Was there anything you **wish** you had done with your Spanish whilst in Barcelona? Or, put another way, did you have any **regrets**?

What thoughts did you have about your **identity** during study abroad and once back home?

What - in relation to languages - did you **miss** about the bilingual community you had recently left? And what - in relation to languages - were you **glad** to have left behind?

At that time, did it feel right to have **directed energy** towards learning Spanish during study abroad?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1	Did / does knowing Spanish give you something?
2	If you woke up one morning and all your knowledge of the Spanish language had gone, what would this mean for you?
3	If you woke up one morning and all your memories of living in a Spanish culture had gone, what would this mean for you?
4	What part of you is Spanish?
5	Did study abroad in Barcelona matter for you?
6	How did / does knowing Spanish make your feel? …psychologically?
7	How did / does knowing Spanish make your feel?…economically, socially, culturally?
8	Did you ever consider learning Spanish as an investment?
9	What does any of our conversation tell us about your motivation to learn Spanish?
10	I used - in the questions / prompts in the template document you completed - quite of lot of vocabulary from social psychology about the self. In particular, the desired possible self; the self in the future. Do you think you ever had something like this in your mind when learning Spanish or any other language?

Author Biography

Elizabeth Machin is a former doctoral student in the Department of Translation and Language Sciences at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Her research interests include the motivation and language identity of L2 users inside and outside the classroom. She has run seminars in Applied Linguistics and Translation at her university, and she has taught English as a foreign language in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, and the UK.

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