

# Preparedness for Study Abroad: Comparing the Linguistic Outcomes of a Short-Term Spanish Program by Third, Fourth and Sixth Semester L2 Learners

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## **Introduction\***

Study abroad is one of the flagship offerings among United States higher education institutions. Approximately 220,000 students studied abroad in the 2005/2006 academic year, 52.8% of whom studied on programs that lasted eight weeks or less (“Report on International Educational Exchange,” 2007). The effect of these short-term programs on second language development has been little investigated, which represents an issue given their increasing popularity.

Study abroad programs are sponsored both by educational institutions and for-profit enterprises, all of which may have different goals for the language development of the participants in the program. This diversity is reflected in the programs’ language requirements, which range from zero to several courses required before participating in complete immersion programs. Very few programs utilize an independent, standardized measure (such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Oral Proficiency Interview) to determine

\*This research was supported by a generous grant from the Dickinson College Research and Development Committee. The authors wish to thank their respective Departments, the Research Assistant, Tim Leonard, for his work in Málaga, the participants and the anonymous reviewers. We, of course, take responsibility for any errors or omissions. Although the authors are listed in alphabetical order, both contributed equally to the writing of this article.

whether or not students are prepared for the study abroad experience. Most programs use a seat-time requirement or minimum course completion requirement as the determination of a student's preparedness to study abroad successfully.

Research on the effect of learning contexts on second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that course completion is only one of the many factors that will affect success abroad. Rather, it points to a more complex interaction of factors that might define preparedness (e.g., Collentine & Freed, 2004; DeKeyser, 1991; Freed, 1995) because linguistic, cognitive, social, and psychological variables weigh in differently on the linguistic outcomes in the study abroad (SA) context: "Predicting success abroad is complex since not only does oral proficiency interact with development but also with cognitive abilities and with the amount of contact learners have with the target language" (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004).

The present study examines second language development in a short-term program based on the number of courses that learners have completed prior to their abroad experience. However, it does not presume that longer seat time before studying abroad equals proportionately higher linguistic returns. Rather, it aims to describe what kind of language development occurs in the short-term SA environment based on learners' previous language experience. This descriptive approach allows us to take into account the individual variation that characterizes SA learning outcomes (Segalowitz *et al.*, 2004). It also brings a level of detail that is useful in investigating optimal timing conditions toward the SA experience, that is, a threshold level at which learners are primed to benefit most from SA (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004).

## Literature Review

The study abroad literature tends to support the position that a semester or year has some beneficial effects on the development of learners' language. In her synthesis about the effects of the SA context compared to the at-home context (AH), Lafford (2006) states that SA impacts "fluency, oral proficiency, pronunciation, lexical development, narrative abilities and discourse abilities" (p. 2). These benefits have been validated across a number of different studies (see, for example, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* special issue 2004). Although there are many studies of the effects of semester-long and year-long SA programs, there are few studies of the effects of short-term programs. Furthermore, their outcomes are not as clear: "...[S]tudies on shorter SA, such as summer terms, are ... inconclusive with respect to identifiable gains" (Lord, 2006, p. 41). Since more than half of the students who studied abroad in 2005/2006 studied on short-term programs, and the trend seems

to be toward increased participation in short programs, it is important to determine what learners can or cannot accomplish during this amount of time (Lafford & Collentine, 2006).

Within the limited literature about short-term SA, some studies have focused on motivational factors of SA and their ability to boost retention (e.g., Ingram, 2005), the under-development of pragmatic competence (e.g., Wilkinson, 2002), and the development of intercultural competence (e.g., Dwyer, 2004). The studies of linguistic outcomes have tended to focus on phonological acquisition and its relationship with the development of fluency that characterizes SA gains. Two studies have examined the phonological gains made by students during short-term programs. Simões (1996) examined the fluency gains by five L2 Spanish learners during a five-week program in Costa Rica. He calculated the correct pronunciation of a series of syllables in word sequences. Two out of his five participants made statistically significant improvements in their pronunciation, which, he concluded, led to improved fluency.

Lord (2006) investigated the phonological gains of 19 L2 learners of Spanish during a six-week summer program in Mexico with the purpose of identifying which factors in the SA context benefit learners compared to the AH context. Based on the accepted conclusion that SA promotes fluency (Freed, 1995; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), Lord asked whether fluency develops “as a result of improving or developing phonological memory” (Lord, 2006, p. 41). Utilizing Ellis’ (1996) model, she hypothesized that learners’ ability to repeat phonological strings is driven by their short-term memory capacity. The ability to mimic a sequence of sounds thus provides a clue into the development of phonological memory. Learners’ mimicry capacity was measured by a pretest-posttest design. The tests consisted of 10 sentences with an average length of 22.2 syllables and with each sentence containing a nonce word. Whole nonce word repetitions, real word repetitions, and correct syllable repetitions were calculated. Results showed that the accuracy rates for nonce words decreased on the posttest. Recall for the accurate reproduction of overall syllables in real words showed a statistically significant increase. Lord concluded that this improved ability to mimic L2 sound sequences from real words, but not nonce words, shows that participants possibly increased their phonological memory through their extensive contact with L2 lexicon during study abroad.

In a third study, conducted over a slightly longer term, Díaz-Campos (2004) revisited the overall effect of SA on the acquisition of Spanish L2 phonology by comparing 20 L2 Spanish learners in their regular classroom environment with 26 students enrolled in a 10-week SA program in Spain. His analyses focused

on measures for voiceless stops, voiced fricatives, word-final laterals, and the palatal nasal. Results showed that both groups improved over time on voiceless stops and laterals, with some AH participants performing significantly better than both AH and SA participants, possibly due to more classroom language experience. Fricatives showed no improvement, and both groups had acquired the palatal nasal prior to SA. The analyses revealed that variables such as years of formal instruction, use of Spanish outside the classroom context, and gender affected participants' scores.

Díaz-Campos (2006) examined the effect of style (conversational vs. formal read-aloud) on the pronunciation of the same sounds reported above and its relationship with the SA and AH learning contexts. His results showed that SA participants outperformed their AH counterparts in the conversational style with all sounds except for voiced fricatives. He speculated that SA learners had more opportunities to develop a conversational style due to their overall access to native speakers.

Although the conclusions drawn in these studies suggest that there may be some benefit that students derive from short-term programs, one factor that needs further examination is that of preparedness. For the purposes of this study, preparedness is defined as the number of courses completed before a student undertakes an abroad experience, or seat time.

One longer-term study by Lapkin, Hart, & Swain (1995) addressed a similar question in the immersion context. The authors examined the linguistic outcomes of a three-month interprovincial exchange in Quebec by 119 L2 learners of French. They investigated the effect of proficiency level prior to the learners' stay on linguistic gains using a pretest-posttest design. On the pretest, consisting of a battery of oral and written tests, the researchers found that learners' prior experience, as measured by seat time, did not correlate with learners' proficiency levels. On the posttest, however, they found that students with more seat time prior to the immersion exchange did better on the *dictée* portion and on the general oral test total scores. Furthermore, results showed that higher gains were made by those participants who initially received lower proficiency scores. In other words, the SA context provided the greatest benefit to those learners who needed to make the most progress. These results reflect those of Freed (1990), who discovered that the out-of-class informal L2 contact that characterizes the SA experience is more beneficial to lower-proficiency learners than advanced learners.

Many short-term abroad programs use a minimum course requirement, a seat-time requirement, to determine eligibility. They also tend to recruit students at the end of the language requirement, with the assumption of a lower

proficiency level. While this seat-time requirement is easily executed from an administrative perspective, it may not be reliable across introductory/intermediate language programs at U.S. colleges and universities.

The present study examines three cases of SA learners motivated by the following research questions:

Based on different levels of preparedness, as measured by number of classes/class level, does the learner show differences in increased language ability? If so, what language skills are affected? To answer these general research questions, we devised two specific research questions:

1. What changes are observable in learners' abilities to orally narrate a well-known folk tale in their L2?
2. What changes are observable in learners' abilities to repeat a range of L2 sentences?

## **The Study Abroad Program**

The target program is owned and run by a small liberal arts college in the Middle Atlantic United States. Students spend five weeks in Málaga, Spain, where they live with host families. The program rules stipulate that there be no more than one student from this program per family in order to facilitate the use of Spanish as much as possible in the familial context. In the cases where more than one foreign student lives in the house, the College stipulates that there be no other English-speaking residents. Some of the Malagueñan families have been working with the program for up to twenty years, and so are familiar with the program goals. Each student has a private bedroom and access to a shared bathroom.

The academic program consists of five weeks of two-hour per day classes, five days per week. The first hour of each day is a Spanish Grammar course, and the second hour is a Spanish Art, Art History, and Culture course. All courses are taught by faculty from the University of Málaga and are conducted entirely in Spanish. In addition, each student attends a twice-weekly small-group session led by a student from the University of Málaga. These sessions, known as *tutorías*, are conducted in Spanish and consist of discussions in Spanish on pop culture and cultural topics. The *tutorías* take place in cafés and bars, away from the typical academic environment. In addition to discussion sessions, tutors sometimes take students to concerts, movies, and other cultural events.

To try to make the most of a limited amount of time, students are encouraged from the time they are selected for the program to speak only Spanish amongst themselves, to attend the weekly Spanish-language table on campus prior to departure, and to make a habit of using Spanish whenever possible.

## Method

### Participants

Three students participated in this study. The minimum requirement for admission to the program is completion of the three-semester College requirement in Spanish. We selected one student who had met only the minimum requirement, Bernardo, one student who had taken one course past the minimum requirement, Sandra, and one student who had taken three courses past the minimum requirement, Gloria.<sup>1</sup> The following paragraphs detail the participants' pre-SA characteristics and their Language Contact Profile while abroad.

For the Language Contact Profile (LCP), participants self-reported to the nearest half-hour how they spent their time reading, speaking, hearing and listening to Spanish and/or English by means of a daily calendar spanning from 8 am to 2 am. The total number of days reported for the program amounted to 31, with the last week of the program ending on the fourth day. The calendar also allowed them to report the context of the language activity in which they engaged, and the kind of people with whom they interacted as well as their degree of closeness. Finally, they were asked to assess on a scale from one to five the degree of comfort and success that they experienced for each reported linguistic interaction. They are presented to provide additional information about the SA context for each participant. These data address the fact that individual variation has been shown to characterize the SA experience. In a case study such as this one, this level of detail is important because the individual variation may have explanatory power for the results.

*Bernardo.* Bernardo was the only male participant. He majors in the physical sciences with a minor in the humanities. During the summer program he was a rising junior and was 20 years old. He began the three-course College language requirement during the second semester of his first year, and completed the requirement in May immediately prior to departing for Málaga. He received an A or A- in all three courses. His overall grade point average was superior. Bernardo's host family consisted of a mother and live-in partner, and a daughter in her late twenties. There were two students from Holland living in the apartment for the first week of the course, but, after their departure, Bernardo was the only student resident. He did not feel like he was able to interact very much

with his host family, who, he felt, treated the hosting very much like a business. At the beginning of the program, he spent most of his time at home alone, and towards the end interacted more with the family members. He started off the program with the goal of improving his speaking and, especially, his comfort level when interacting in Spanish. At the end of the program he reported feeling more comfortable in Spanish in some situations, especially in social settings with the Spanish tutors that work with the program students.

*Bernardo LCP.* Bernardo's initial experience included a great deal of English and code mixing. He reported 27 hours of English during his first week, along with a high proportion of code-mixing due to a wide social network of English-speaking friends and time spent on computer-mediated communication (such as e-mail, or *Facebook*). He reported the mixing of Spanish and English during *tutorías* and weekend excursions, with a lot of English being spoken at the hotel or on the bus. Meal times with his family were a regular component of his routine. He reported eating and speaking, and participating in the domestic life of his "*madre*" increasingly over the course of the program. At the beginning, he did not feel linguistically comfortable during these interactions, rating them as a 2 (= somewhat comfortable). By the fourth week, he started rating his level of comfort in the same situations, such as dinner time, much higher (4 = very comfortable). He also showed nuanced ratings of his understanding of Spanish during guided tours, with some guides and topics receiving a score of 4, 3, or 2. Informal contexts of learning, outside of the home, included shops, the beach, and a health club, which Bernardo attended daily, and for which he reported listening but no speaking.

*Sandra.* Sandra is a non-traditional student who is older than the other two and who holds junior standing at her academic institution. She was the only declared Spanish major of the three participants. Sandra had completed the third course in the College requirement in the Fall semester prior to the program, and had completed the Spanish Composition course during the Spring Semester immediately prior to departure for Málaga. Both her major grade point average and her overall grade point averages were superior. Sandra found the home-stay element of the course particularly difficult given her age. She called her family in the U.S. home almost daily, speaking with them for up to an hour. She did not have a great deal of interaction with her host family, as she was closest in age with her host "mother," who, by Sandra's account, didn't quite know how to interact with her. The other students on the program, again by Sandra's account, seemed to view her as a mother figure, and so Sandra did not socialize very much with them outside of the classroom and scheduled

excursions. Sandra's goals for the abroad experience were to talk more to a wider variety of people and gain more confidence in her speaking ability. She didn't seem to feel like she had accomplished much in terms of the language outside of what she learned in the classroom.

*Sandra LCP.* Sandra followed a regular weekly routine. Her mornings were occupied with Spanish classes while she spent her afternoons mostly alone, exploring the city of Málaga by visiting museums, going to the beach, or shopping. Sometimes she met with American students for homework activities and group projects at the study abroad center or in town. She regularly met with her host family for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Because weekends were organized around excursions, she spent a lot more time with her fellow students on these occasions and reported a higher ratio of language mixing while interacting with them and participating in the touring programs.

On average, Sandra spent 43 hours a week hearing, speaking, listening, or reading Spanish. We get a sense of the kinds of interactions in which she engaged thanks to her description of the settings in which they occurred. Specifically, she participated in Spanish classes 2 hours a day at the study abroad center and also met for a total of five tutorials. The length of tutorials varied from about 1 to about 3 hours depending on the activities. Some were informal conversations at a café, while others included a group trip shopping and eating. She spent an average of 3 hours a day with her host family at meal times. Other activities using Spanish included homework, word puzzles, watching TV, listening to presentations during weekend excursions, and shopping. Homework was a daily part of Sandra's schedule with an average of 8 hours a week. Code-mixing was an important part of her language experience with a weekly average of 31 hours, while she used English exclusively on average 6 hours a week. She reported a gradual increase of her use of Spanish and a gradual decrease of code mixing as she spent more time in Málaga. Sandra generally reported her interactions to be successful. Her consistently optimistic score of 4 may reflect her will to view her linguistic experience as a positive one. We also understand that she felt quite distant from her host family, which she rated at the lowest scale level (1 = stranger) throughout her stay. She felt closer to her professors (2 = acquaintance) and to her fellow students (3 = friends).

*Gloria.* Gloria was a social science major and Spanish minor, and was a rising senior during the summer in Málaga. She had completed the College requirement in the fall of her first year, and had completed the composition course, a Latin American history and culture course, and an Introduction to Spanish Literature course prior to the summer program. Her overall grade



point average was somewhat lower than the other two participants. Gloria's host family experience was very difficult at first, but became easier after a discussion between the director and the host family. Even then, she did not interact with them very much except for basic needs in the household. Gloria's goals for the program were more social in nature: she wanted to use her Spanish in Spain to meet new people and have experiences that she could not have in the United States. However, her exit interview indicated that she grew disillusioned, having imagined Málaga as what she described as "a magical place," and finding that the reality did not meet her expectations.

*Gloria LCP.* Gloria reported a great deal of English and code mixing, to which she refers as "Spanglish" in her diary log. For example, her second week included 41 hours of Spanish, 28 hours of language mixing, and 33 hours of English. The high proportion of English and code mixing reflects her wide social network of English-speaking friends, as well as access to computer-mediated communication such as *Facebook*. Gloria distinguished between "friends" in the program, with whom she spoke English, and "classmates," who were associated with formal contexts of learning, and with whom she alternated between Spanish and English. Furthermore, Gloria reported a high use of English during the weekend excursions. *Tutorías* were reported as code-mixing contexts. She rarely reported spending time alone, except for afternoon *siestas* or email sessions. Unlike Sandra, Gloria spent only one meal per day with her family on average. Informal contexts for the use of English and code mixing included nightlife venues such as bars and discos, the beach, and shops. By her fourth week in Málaga, she reported using a lot of Spanish, with a count of 64 hours for only 10 hours of English because she interacted more with her host family and used more Spanish during her tutorials. She also started watching television. The code mixing count remained high, with a reported figure of 53 hours due to an active social life with English-speaking friends.

## **Procedure**

Each of the participants met with the research assistant in Málaga on three occasions for about an hour each. The first meeting was held before the end of the first week, the second was held at the midpoint of the program, and the last was held at the very end of the last week of the program.

Each meeting included three tasks. The first task was an oral narration task that required the participants to tell a relatively well-known fairy tale story based on a series of pictures used for reference. A basic vocabulary sheet was provided to ensure that lack of vocabulary did not impede production,

and participants had thirty seconds to brainstorm what they were going to say prior to beginning. Each of these oral narrations was recorded. There was no time limit put on the narration. Participants did not know ahead of time what fairy tale they would be working with for any of the periods. For the first and third sessions, they narrated *Little Red Riding Hood*, for the second session they narrated the *Three Little Pigs*. The repetition of the *Red Riding Hood* task was planned to provide direct comparison of performance from the beginning and end of the program. There was no fear of priming the participants on this story from the first interview to the third because it is a very well known story and participants were unaware of the planned repetition.

The second task was a written narration of the same short story used in the first task. Results from this task will be reported in a separate article because they respond to a different set of research questions.

The final task was a listen and repeat task that consisted of ten sentences of varying complexity. The complexity of sentences was varied by including subordinate adjectival clauses into the subject noun phrase, the object noun phrase, both noun phrases, use of subjunctive, and formation of questions (see Appendix A for the listen and repeat sentences).

At the end of each session, the research assistant conducted an informal interview to determine how the students perceived their experience and their progress in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Immediately following the sessions, the research assistant transcribed all of the recorded data. Using those transcriptions, the researchers conducted word counts, syllable counts and analyzed language use in the oral narration for fluency, vocabulary, instances of the past tense, and sentence complexity.

## Results

Results for all three participants from Time 1 and Time 2 were analyzed for the Oral Narration Task and the Listen and Repeat Task.

### Oral Narration Task

*Bernardo.* Bernardo's oral narration task at Time 1 was characterized by numerous silent pauses, verbal pauses (e.g., *uh*) and, essentially, one-or-two-word-at-a-time production. There are agreement errors, lexical errors and production and speaking errors.

Bernardo produced 231 individual words (self-corrections or repetitions of the same word were counted as one word) that are recognizable in the syntax and story. To do so, he used 82 notable silent or verbal intrasentential pauses.

The narration consists of 19 sentences, most of which are simple, declarative sentences. Bernardo does provide two examples of subordinate adjectival phrases (4), and three examples of coordinated sentences joined with *y* or *pero*, one of which, example (5), is composed of three clauses. The entire narration occurs in the present tense, with no identifiable attempts to use the preterite or the imperfect. There are some lexical errors (2, *tiempos* vs. *veces*), and apparent influence of L1 word order in some cases (3).

- (1) La Caperucita Roja (.) essss (.) camino (.) <uh>(.) sobre (.) tu barrio.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) Caparucita Roja (-2-) va a este casa y (-2-) llama (.) en en la puerta (-2-) <uh> tres tiempos.
- (3) El lobo ess (-2-) disum/disumulá <uh> disúmula/ disúmula <uh> con azul / un azul <uh2> azules ropas.
- (4) Pero <uh> el lobo <uh> va a (.) este casa y (-2-) mata / mata un abuela que vi <uh> viva / viva (.) en el /este casa.
- (5) Capucita Roja (-2-) va a interior de la casa y (-3-) vea /ve/ ve la <uh> la abuela en su cama pero es no abuela en /es no real abuela es el lobo también en la cama.

Bernardo's oral narration from Time 2 was more fluid, demonstrated greater control over vocabulary and syntax, and was conducted much more at the sentence rather than the word level. His total production was 298 words in 24 sentences. There was no difference between his number of words per sentence ( $p=.88$ ), but there was a significant decrease in the number of intra-sentential pauses (from 4.3 per sentence to 2.3 per sentence,  $p=.002$ ).

At Time 2, Bernardo demonstrated an increase in the number of sentences that contained discourse markers. There are nine examples of conjunctions with *y* or *pero*, and five sentences that start with narrative markers, such as *entonces*, *luego*. In addition, we observe two unexpected indirect object pronouns, *le dijo* and *le pregunta* (though this latter should be, based on context, *le pide*). Because of their location in the narrative structure (see (6) below), it may be that these indirect object pronouns represent chunks in Bernardo's interlanguage. The example of *dijo* in (6) is one of only three examples of the preterite, all used appropriately, in the narration. In the case of *salió*, we observe Bernardo self-correct (8). The remainder of the narrative is in the present tense. We see other examples of self-correction for pronunciation errors (9) and agreement errors (10).

- (6) Y <uh> entonces Caperucita Roja <uh> via/ viajá no sale de su casa y (3) le dijo "adios" a su madre.
- (7) Luego, <uh> Caperucita Roja llega a la casa de su abuela y (.) llama/ llama a la puerta.

- (8) Caperucita Roja tiene mie/ miedo pero el lobo sale/ sa/ salió.
- (9) espura/ espera
- (10) este casa pequena/ esta casa pequena

Sandra. Sandra's initial narration was relatively fluent and comprehensible by someone listening to the recording without having been present in the room. The narration consisted of 226 words in 22 sentences with 41 intrasentential pauses. The entire narration is in the present tense. She uses seven examples of *y* (11) to combine sentences, and three other examples of subordinate clauses with temporal markers *mientras* (12) and *cuando* (13).

- (11) El lobo (.) esconde en la casa, y come la abuela
- (12) Mientras la niña <uh> coge las flores el lobo <uh2> corre hacia la casa de su abuela.
- (13) Cuando la Caperucita Roja llega a la casa, ella toca a la puerta y (.) en/entra la casa.

Sandra's narration at Time 2 is shorter than her Time 1 narration, and she is the only one of the three for whom this is the case. The narration consists of 206 words in 16 sentences. There is no significant difference between the number of words per sentence between her the two narrations ( $p=.09$ ). During the narration, she uses 33 intrasentential pauses, which causes the average number of intrasentential pauses per sentence to increase slightly from 1.9 to 2.1, though this difference is not significant ( $p=.68$ ). The most notable characteristic of her Time 2 narration is that Sandra makes a very clear effort to relate the story entirely in the past tense. In the 16 sentences, there are 21 contexts for the preterite and 13 for the imperfect. Sandra provided the correct verb form in 14 and 1 cases (14 and 15), respectively, and when she provided the incorrect form it was, without exception, the present tense. Interestingly, there is a clear pattern to Sandra's pauses before the examples of the past tense that she produces. In 11 of the 15 cases where she provides a past tense form, Sandra pauses either immediately before the word (14, *comió*), or in the middle of the word (14, *entró*) or demonstrates significant self-correction as she pronounces the word (16), which we may interpret as an indication of her conscious effort to produce the correct past tense form.

In addition, like with Bernardo, we observe an increased use of discourse markers at the beginning of sentences. Sandra starts four sentences with *entonces* and *luego* (16), and includes four examples of *cuando* and *mientras* (17).

- (14) El lobo lle/ llega a casa de la abuela y él en/(.) tró la casa y (-2-) comió la abuela.

- (15) Érase una vez hay una niña se llamaba la Caperucita Roja.  
(16) Luego (.) ví un <uh>/ vío un lobo (.) muy (-3-) antipático.  
(17) Ella (-2-) corrió de la casa sin un zapato y (-4-) cuando está corriendo ella (.)/ ella ve unnnn/ un hombre (.) que está trabajando en el bosque.

*Gloria.* Gloria's initial narration was perhaps surprisingly dysfluent given the number of Spanish classes she had completed. There were a number of lexical errors, agreement errors, verb morphology errors, and other errors that make the narration difficult to follow when listening to it without the benefit of seeing the pictures to which she is referring as she narrates. The narration consists of 213 words, making it the shortest of the three initial narrations, in 16 sentences, with 54 intrasentential pauses.

One item that is unique to Gloria's narration out of the three participants is the inclusion of dialogue in her story. Rather than narrating the entire story from the outside, she gives the characters voices (18). However, the linguistic accuracy is surprisingly low. Gloria is forced to resort to circumlocution when she doesn't know the word for grandmother in Spanish (20), and to create a word when she doesn't know the word for weapon (21). When Gloria provides dialogue, the sentence is in the present tense (18–19). In the other sentences, some of her verb errors appear to be subject/verb agreement errors (20). However, the consistency of the errors (23–25) suggests that some may be the result of attempting the preterite. Gloria shows very few discourse markers, with only four examples of coordinated sentences with *y*, and no sentences that start with linking words. Gloria's frustration is audible as she narrates, she sighs loudly on several occasions, and the tone of her voice is clearly one of frustration in others. On one occasion, she breaks the narration when she is clearly having difficulty and apologizes to the research assistant.

- (18) Pero, la/ el lobo dice que <uh> “Los ojos es más grande porque <uh> él <uh> necesita/ <uh> pueden/ puede necesitar <uh> ves/ <uh> ve mejor.  
(19) Ella dice “Tu nariz es más grande que mi mama...  
(20) ...ella va para <uh> visité tuu <uh> tu mama grande.  
(21) Cuando ella corrí él/ ella ve un hombre con un <uh2> unn (-2-) <uhhh> (-3-) unn (-2-) wéppone.  
(22) Cuando ella visité su <uh> mamá <uh> ella vea un el lobo...  
(23) ...ella <uh> vivé en una casa...  
(24) ...el lobo comé el mamá.  
(25) ...cuando ella corré...

Gloria's Time 2 narration is longer than her first in word count, consisting of 254 words, but the number of sentences remains the same. The average words per sentence increase from 13.3 to 15.8, but this difference is not significant ( $p = .29$ ). The number of intrasentential pauses increases from 53 to 54, but, again, this difference is not significant ( $p = .94$ ). This second narration contains dialogue, like the first narration, but also contains many of the same errors. One notable change is that virtually the entire narration occurs in the present tense, which makes it much more comprehensible. There are a few attempts at use of the preterite, but it is clear in this narration that they result in subject/verb errors (26). She has solved the lexical issue with *abuela*, but is forced to create a new word when she doesn't know the word *bosque* (27). There are more examples in terms of the use of *y* to coordinate sentences, with six examples, two of which contain more than just two sentences joined together (28). There are three examples of *así* starting sentences as discourse marker (28).

(26) Cuando ella corrí ella <uh> ve un hombre...

(27) Cuando ella anda <uh> en la fôresta, ella <uh> ve los flores...

(28) Así, el <uh> el hombre <uh> va a la casa de abuela y <uh> ve un lobo y matá <uh> a lobo y <uh2> tocar un abuela de la lobo.

### Listen and Repeat Task

Two scores were generated for each participant at each Time: total words repeated and total syllables repeated. In addition, the repetitions were examined qualitatively to examine any possible patterns in what was repeated based on the structural complexity of the sentences.

Total words repeated were counted only for whole words repeated in approximately the same place in the sentence as the prompts. Slight agreement variations were still counted (e.g., *amigos* for *amigo*), but variations that changed the meaning of a word were not counted (e.g., *lleva* for *llega*). Syllables were counted even if they occurred in an incorrect word or not in a word at all, as long as they appeared in an approximately relative location in the sentence (e.g., the *lle* of *lleva* would be counted for the target *llega*). In the statistical analyses that were conducted, results from only six of the ten sentences (2–7 in Appendix 1) were included because they had roughly the same number of syllables and syntactic structure. The number of syllables ranged from 17 to 22 with a mean of 19.4.

A repeated measures ANOVA conducted on the word count and syllable count of those six sentences for all three participants revealed a main effect for time ( $F = 10.894$ ,  $p = .005$  and  $F = 12.504$ ,  $p = .003$ , respectively) in the

development of the listen and repeat. All three participants improved their listen and repeat scores from Time 1 to Time 2 both in terms of whole words and correct syllables repeated.

Qualitative analyses revealed patterns in the improvement from Time 1 to Time 2 and specifically examined two issues: First, the participants' correct repetitions of relative pronouns that started subordinate clauses, and, second, repetition of questions.

Three sentences (Target 2, 3, 4; see Appendix A) were characterized by their use of a subordinate adjectival clause in the subject noun phrase, in the object noun phrase, and both, respectively. One question, Target 9, included a subordinate adjectival clause in the predicate. Bernardo, in particular, demonstrated a greater ability at Time 2 to discern the subordinate clause in the subject noun phrase in sentences 2 and 4 (italics added for emphasis):

(29) Target 2: El chico *que* estudia español en la universidad habla con su amigo.

(30) Bernardo Time 1: Este chico estudia español <uh> en la universidad <uh> para habla español.

(31) Bernardo Time 2: El chico *que* estudia español en la/ en la universidad habla mucho con amigos.

(32) Target 4: La mujer *que* habla alemán llega a la casa *que* está al otro lado de la calle.

(33) Bernardo Time 1: La chica en la casa <uh> mujeres

(34) Bernardo Time 2: La mujer <uh> *que* habla alemán <uh> va a el calle

In both of these cases, Bernardo did not repeat the relative pronoun in Time 1 but did repeat it in Time 2. Sandra improved her repetition of the relative pronoun in Target 4:

(35) Sandra Time 1: La mujer la casa otra lañe

(36) Sandra Time 2: La mujer *que* habla something lleva a la casa.

Sandra does not repeat the relative pronoun in Target 2 at either time, and Gloria does not repeat the relative pronoun in either Target 2 or 4 at either Time.

None of the participants repeated the relative pronoun for the subordinate clause in the object noun phrase in either sentence 3 or sentence 4. However, in Target 9, Bernardo and Sandra both repeat the relative pronoun at Time 2.

(37) Target 9: ¿Cuál es la materia *que* es más difícil para ti?

(38) Bernardo Time 1: ¿Cuál es tierra es más difícil para qué/ para ti?

(39) Bernardo Time 2: ¿Cuál es la material *que* es más difícil para ti?

(40) Sandra Time 1: ¿Cuál es la tarea más difícil para ti?

(41) Sandra Time 2: Cuál es la materia que something para ti?

Gloria does not repeat the relative pronoun at either Time 1 or Time 2.

Targets 8 and 9 were questions, and all three participants demonstrated a high score on their repetition at both Time 1 and Time 2, with both Bernardo and Sandra repeating Target 8 verbatim at Time 2, and Gloria mis-repeating at Time 2 only slightly:

(42) Target 8: ¿Cuál es el tema del libro?

(43) Bernardo Time 1: ¿Cua/ Cuál es tu ma tu libro?

(44) Bernardo Time 2: ¿Cuál es el tema del libro?

(45) Sandra Time 1: ¿Cuál es el tima/tema del libro?

(46) Sandra Time 2: ¿Cuál es el tema del libro?

(47) Gloria Time 1: 1. ¿Cuál es del la ma libro?

(48) Gloria Time 2: ¿Cuál es el tema en el libro?

This was the shortest of the repetition sentences, which may account for the overall success rate.

Target 9, however, was clearly made more difficult by the presence of the subordinate clause. As noted above, Bernardo and Sandra correctly repeated the relative pronoun at Time 2, but Gloria did not.

In addition, three items that called attention were examples of reformulation of semantic information instead of repeating verbatim. All three examples of this come from Time 2.

(49) Sandra Target 1 Time 2: ... todos los días (Target=... cada día).

(50) Sandra Target 6 Time 2: ... después de la clase (Target=... cuando termina la clase).

(51) Bernardo Target 10 Time 2: ... sus traba/trabajadores... (Target= ... empleados...).

## Discussion

### Narrative Development

All three of the participants in the present study demonstrated an increase in narrative abilities from a qualitative perspective. Each of the participants uses more discourse markers and demonstrates an improved ability to make transitions from sentence to sentence at Time 2. This improvement reflects the findings in longer-term programs (e.g., Collentine, 2004; Isabelli, 2001).



Unlike those other studies, we do not see a significant difference from Time 1 to Time 2, which may not be a surprise given the duration of the program. However, it is clear that some improvement was made for each individual, though the type of improvement is different in each case.

Bernardo has made advances in the fluency of his narration, demonstrated by his reduced number of pauses and increased number of discourse markers. He is able to tell the story as a narration rather than a loosely connected series of words or sentences, and it appears that he has possibly developed some chunking to allow him to use the past tense and indirect object pronouns in some specific situations. We also observe awareness of the past tense at Time 2, though very little use of it, and a higher degree of self-correction, which may indicate a greater awareness of the formal features of the language.

Sandra demonstrates clear improvement in her awareness of and control over the past tense. Even though her pause behavior seems to indicate that she has to stop herself to slowly formulate the correct forms in a deliberate manner, she does not shy away from putting forth that effort, and still is able to form a coherent narrative. She maintains accuracy on items that she seemed to control at Time 1, so this deliberate use of the past tenses, especially the preterite, does not seem to overwhelm her output processing resources. Moreover, as with Bernardo, we see an increased use of discourse markers in her Time 2 narration.

Gloria's development is perhaps less in linguistic terms than it is in awareness terms. The most salient development is that she seems aware of the fact at Time 2 that she doesn't control the past tense, as she apparently attempted to do at Time 1, and so uses the present tense to make the story comprehensible, a strategy that may tend to increase comprehensibility of her message when speaking in a conversation with other speakers. In addition, Gloria seems to have adopted a more straightforward declarative sentence following declarative sentence narration, which allows her to focus on one piece of information or action at a time, a strategy that may allow her to focus attention and plan her utterance in a way that makes it more likely she will be understood.

### **Phonological Development**

Although there is an increase in words/syllables repeated for all three participants from Time 1 to Time 2—a finding that reflects Lord's (2006)—there is no particular overall linguistic effect observable for all three participants. If we look at the participants individually, however, Bernardo is the one who makes marked improvements in his ability to process language. He was able to correctly repeat the *que* introducing the subject noun phrase subordinate clause at Time 2,

showing that he had expanded the amount of information that he was able to retain in memory from the beginning of sentences to then repeat correctly. Sandra showed some increases in the language she was able to repeat, but very little in terms of specific items. Gloria, on the other hand made very little progress in terms of the language she was able to listen and repeat. It may be that Gloria had reached some sort of plateau in her online listening comprehension, and that five weeks of abroad time was not enough time for her to increase her abilities in this area. In contrast, Bernardo was in a place where he was primed to increase his listening abilities and so was able to make progress during a short-term experience. This increased capacity to repeat word sequences is indicative of learners' efficiency of lexical access and speed and efficiency of attention in their L2 (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004).

The findings in the present study show that short-term SA provides an opportunity for benefits similar to those provided by longer-term SA, as described by Lafford (2006): narrative abilities, discourse abilities and fluency. In the present study, these benefits varied across participants, but that variation may have had more to do with individual variation, as observed in the Language Contact Profile, than with level of preparedness as measured by course completion.

Lapkin, Hart, & Swain (1995) asserted that seat time does not necessarily correlate with proficiency, and learners who need to make the most progress are the ones who benefit the most from the SA learning context. However, examining the mixed results about learners' linguistic development in the longer-term study abroad environment, Lafford & Collentine (2006) ask if there is "a threshold level of grammatical or cognitive abilities that facilitates second language acquisition in a study abroad context" (p. 117). The essential difference is that Lapkin *et al.* state that lower proficiency learners will make greater gains, whereas Lafford & Collentine state that learners must have a minimum proficiency to make gains at all. Therefore the key here, from our perspective, is how we identify the aspects of language development on which we focus, and how we conceive of language development over time during SA.

The present study does not identify the specific linguistic gains made during study abroad in terms of grammatical features, but rather identifies them more holistically. As we have seen in the present results, each participant made some improvements in narration and listening, but their preparedness by seat time did not necessarily predict the specific outcomes that we observed. Our participants reflected Lapkin *et al.*'s (1995) finding that longer seat time does not equal greater proficiency: Gloria, who received Spanish instruction the longest, did not demonstrate at Time 1 a higher proficiency on our tasks than the other two participants. In contrast to Lapkin *et al.* (1995), the present results

do not necessarily reflect their conclusion that those who need to make the most progress benefit most from SA, as we see that all of the participants made some kind of progress during their abroad experience.

There are simply many more factors to consider rather than seat time. Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg (1995) and their pioneering study about proficiency gain predictors in the SA context are helpful in drawing the picture of the “most likely to succeed” language learner in the SA context. In finding that on all modalities, the higher the initial level, the less likely the gain (p. 54), they also teased out predictive factors of success to be grammatical knowledge, among others. In a follow-up study, Golonka (2006) reiterated the role of grammatical knowledge as a leading predictor of linguistic development during study abroad. Lafford & Collentine (2006) reformulate the issue by means of the Threshold Hypothesis: “[t]hose students with a well-developed cognitive, lexical, and grammatical base will be more able to process and produce grammatical forms accurately after their experience in an SA context” (p. 117).

Our findings suggest that short-term study abroad programs provide an appropriate fit for lower proficiency students. Bernardo exemplifies this type of student, and the gains that can be made. In contrast, Gloria had more classroom seat time than the others, and enrolled in the study abroad program as a terminal component of her language experience. In the context of the short-term program, these two factors may diminish the possibility of linguistic returns.

The present results, and previous findings, show that there is linguistic development during a short-term program. However, perhaps an equally important role for short-term SA is revealed by Ingram (2005): early timing of short-term SA in the language curriculum is more likely to provide heightened motivation and can play a vital role in fulfilling the educational mission of a collegiate language requirement.

To reveal its greatest benefits, short-term SA must ensure that the experience provides more than an AH experience would do. Data from the present study’s language contact reports show that the participants used their greatest concentration of Spanish during class time. There were many informal contexts outside of class where they used Spanish and mixed languages, but the only reliable Spanish-only experiences were class and meals at home with the family. The restricted use of extensive social interaction outside of the classroom would suggest that these learners did not diversify their opportunities to develop pragmatic competence in addition to their classroom-language competence. This would reflect the findings in Wilkinson (2002) that short-term programs do not necessarily provide an environment as conducive to pragmatic competence as generally assumed.

## Conclusion

The present study supports the assertion that preparedness, as defined as seat time, is not the sole predictor of appropriate timing of a short-term study abroad experience. As a case in point, Gloria, who had received the most instruction prior to study abroad, did not exhibit superior narrative fluency or more ability to repeat word strings than her counterparts at Time 1. However, she remained able to benefit from the SA context with regard to language strategies. In contrast, Bernardo and Sandra, whose initial lower proficiency correlated expectedly to their limited/shorter amount of instruction in Spanish, boosted their abilities in the SA context. In other words, the timing of their SA experience within the language program was more beneficial to them than it was for Gloria.

Secondly, our results do show that short-term study abroad experiences can benefit language learners of different levels in different ways. This dynamic reflects the intrinsic individual variation that characterizes SA learning outcomes. In the same way that comparative studies of AH and SA contexts are beginning to tease out the specific effects of each environment on language development, future studies that are able to control for features of individual variation before and during the SA context will shed more light on the role of previous instruction, among other factors.

Finally, given the recent proliferation of short-term language programs, our findings are reassuring enough to justify their role in the language curriculum. It is important to establish specific goals for language learners in their abroad experiences, so that each takes best advantage of this context rather than duplicating the classroom environment. Short-term programs are only one of the many steps towards developing proficiency in a target language.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Participants' names have been changed.

<sup>2</sup>Transcription symbols: (.) indicates brief silent pause; (-2-) indicates silent pause as measured in seconds; <uh> is verbal pause; <uh2> indicates extended verbal pause, with length in seconds.

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**Appendix A.**  
**List of prompts for the listen and repeat activity.**

1. El estudiante lleva una mochila cada día.
2. El chico que estudia español en la universidad habla con su amigo.
3. La chica lee un libro que es del profesor de matemáticas.
4. La mujer que habla alemán llega a la casa que está al otro lado de la calle.
5. La profesora pide los exámenes cuando termina la clase.
6. El padre espera que su hija lleve una vida saludable.
7. Si la madre tuviera más tiempo, ayudaría a su hijo con la tarea.
8. ¿Cuál es el tema del libro?
9. ¿Cuál es la materia que es más difícil para ti?
10. El jefe compra varios regalos para sus empleados cada año para celebrar el aniversario de la compañía.