

The Effects of Study Abroad vs. Classroom Contexts on Spanish SLA: Old Assumptions, New Insights and Future Research Directions

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1. Introduction

Study abroad (SA) contexts have traditionally been assumed to be the best environments in which to acquire a second language and understand its culture. Indeed, for many years American language instructors and university administrators¹ believed that participating in a “junior year abroad” experience and living with host families from the target culture would not only broaden students’ cultural horizons, but would also help them to become “fluent” speakers of the language, with more improvement in their target language (L2) pronunciation, grammar (morphosyntactic) usage, vocabulary knowledge and discursive abilities than those learners who stayed at home and acquired the target language in the classroom. In fact, Carroll (1967) found that time spent abroad was the factor that most strongly predicted high levels of target language proficiency attainment in the nation’s pool of US university language majors.

In the United States, even though most colleges and universities cannot require students to participate in such programs, the experience abroad has been strongly encouraged, especially for language majors. In contrast, a mandatory substantial residence abroad requirement for language degree students in Britain was established over 30 years ago (Ife et al. 2000:56). However, Meara (1994:38) noted methodological shortcomings of the intermittent study abroad research carried out from the late 1960s to the early 1990s and stated that the British belief in the importance of a year abroad were based on “very flimsy and largely anecdotal evidence.” Coleman (1996:8) also stated that “the objectives of compulsory residence abroad in terms of maturity, cultural insight and language proficiency are ill-defined and its benefits are inadequately researched.” He goes on to say that further debate and further research were needed to determine “exactly what components of learners’ proficiency improve as a result of residence abroad” (1996:85). Freed (1995a:16) also notes the methodological limitations of empirical studies carried out from the late 1960’s through the 1980’s, e.g., small numbers of subjects and/or short duration of the studies, frequent lack of a control group and use of only test scores to measure language performance.

The need for more controlled empirical studies on the effects of a study abroad experience on the acquisition of the target language began to be addressed in earnest in the early 1990s with the work of Brecht et al. (1990), Brecht and Davidson (1991, 1992), DeKeyser (1991), Freed (1990, 1993), Ginsberg (1992)² and Huebner (1991). Halfway through that decade (1995), Freed published the first

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¹ Information on these assumptions was gleaned from the reports on study abroad programs from the 1920’s to the 1970’s by Hullihen (1928), Smith (1930), Diez (1946), Dougherty (1950), Graham (1962) and Berg et al. (1975) and from personal communication with various study abroad administrators, including Dr. William Davey, Director of the International Programs Office at Arizona State University.

² These first four studies were part of a large scale project sponsored by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) and the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) to study the acquisition of Russian by foreign students in Moscow and St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad). These studies were based on data from 658 students who studied in a semester long program from the Spring of 1984 to 1990. Measures included the OPI

volume dedicated to empirical research on second language acquisition (French, Spanish, Russian and Japanese) in a study abroad context. This ground-breaking volume contained papers that focused on the following issues: predicting and measuring language gains in study abroad settings (Brecht et al. 1995, Lapkin et al. 1995), sociolinguistic studies (Marriott 1995, Regan 1995, Siegal 1995), and qualitative diary studies (Brecht & Robinson 1995, Miller & Ginsberg 1995, Polanyi 1995). Although all twelve empirical papers in the volume dealt with linguistic development in a SA setting, only four of the studies actually compared study abroad data to ‘at home’ (AH) classroom control groups (Freed 1995b on fluency in L2 learners of French, Guntermann 1995 on grammatical and lexical performances by those learning Spanish in the classroom and during Peace Corps training, Huebner 1995 on proficiency, discourse organization and learning strategies in intensive Japanese courses and Lafford 1995 on communication strategies by L2 learners of Spanish).³

Three years later Freed (1998:50) summed up the SA research to date (including the results of studies in her 1995 volume) by presenting a composite profile of the linguistic skills of students who have been abroad: “Those who have been abroad appear to speak with greater ease and confidence, expressed in part by a greater abundance of speech, spoken at a faster rate and characterized by fewer dysfluent-sounding pauses. As a group, they tend to reformulate their speech to express more complicated and abstract thoughts, display a wider range of communicative strategies and a broader repertoire of styles.”

Thus, most of the empirically-based benefits of a study abroad experience carried out prior to the mid 1990s confirmed the beliefs of many that extended periods in the target culture enhance and improve the language ability of students. Recently, however, Freed (1995a, 1998) and Collentine and Freed (2004)⁴ have made reference to “surprising” results from studies examining the effects of study abroad vs. classroom contexts on various features of SLA.

Although it is always wise to look at SLA issues from a pan-linguistic perspective, considering the focus of this joint conference on Hispanic linguistics and the acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as first and second languages, this plenary paper will focus on the more expected as well as the “surprising results” of studies carried out on the acquisition of Spanish in study abroad and classroom settings. For instance, Lafford and Collentine (In press) show that although most comparative⁵ Spanish L2 studies have shown an advantage for the SA over the AH context in terms of oral proficiency (Segalowitz & Freed 2004), fluency (DeKeyser 1986, Segalowitz & Freed 2004), pronunciation (Díaz-Campos this volume [not Díaz-Campos 2004], Stevens 2001), lexical development (Collentine 2004, DeKeyser 1986), narrative abilities (Collentine 2004) and discourse abilities (Lafford 1995, 2004), in contrast, classroom learners have been shown to be equal to or superior to SA learners in Spanish pragmatic abilities (Rodríguez 2001), use of communication strategies (DeKeyser 1991 [not Lafford 2004]) and grammatical gains (Collentine 2004 [not C. A. Isabelli & Nishida 2005], DeKeyser 1986, 1991, Torres 2003). However, due to the variety of methodological design features that have been used in these studies (e.g., research design, length of stay, living conditions, testing instruments, type of instruction and differences in pre-departure proficiency levels), it is difficult to generalize the findings of these studies to get a clear picture of the effects of a study abroad experience on learners of Spanish.

(Oral Proficiency Interview), proficiency-oriented tests of listening and reading, the ACTR qualifying exam measuring achievement in grammar and reading and the short form of the Modern Language Association language aptitude test (MLATSF).

³ For an excellent review of research on study abroad in a European context, see Coleman (1998).

⁴ The June 2004 edition of the journal *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* contains the studies carried out by a project sponsored by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) on the acquisition of Spanish as a second language in classroom (AH) and study abroad (SA) contexts. This body of research constitutes the first comprehensive comparative AH-SA study of Spanish L2 learners in which various linguistic measures (fluency, phonology, grammar, vocabulary, narrative abilities, and discursive abilities [use of communication strategies]) are studied based on the same data set. The Principal Investigators on the project were Barbara Freed and Norman Segalowitz, who studied issues of fluency. Other researchers on the project included Manuel Díaz-Campos (phonology), Joseph Collentine (grammar, vocabulary, narrative abilities), Barbara Lafford (communication strategies) and Nicole Lazar (statistics and individual learner variables). See also Segalowitz et al. (2004) for a summary of this work.

⁵ See Lafford and Collentine (In press) for a review of non-comparative Spanish L2 studies carried out in SA contexts.

In addition, this research, which has pointed out the complexities of the process of acquiring a second language in two very different contexts (SA and AH), invites a reexamination of the questions posed by recent debates in the SLA literature on the relative importance of the effects of social and cognitive factors on the process of acquiring a second language (Firth & Wagner 1997, Long 1997, Tarone 2000).

The original plenary talk opened avenues of discussion regarding the Spanish study abroad research to date by exploring two main research questions:

- What methodological aspects of the Spanish study abroad research might impact the results of these studies and/or limit their generalizability?
- How might the interaction of social and cognitive factors explain the results found in empirical studies contrasting the acquisition of Spanish in SA and AH contexts?

However, since the first research question is explored in-depth in Lafford and Collentine (In press), in this paper I will concentrate on the second research question and explore how cognitive factors may interact with features of the context of learning to produce very different language abilities among learners who have acquired their second language in SA vs. AH environments. To conclude, I will suggest directions for future research which could lead to a better understanding of how cognitive and social/contextual factors may affect the formation of learners' interlanguage systems in study abroad and classroom contexts.

2. The interaction of cognitive and social factors on Spanish SLA in SA and AH contexts

The effects of contextual factors on the process of second language acquisition (SLA) have recently been the focus of much debate among SLA researchers. As Tarone (2004) attests, scholars such as Long (1997, 1998) have focused on the essentially cognitive nature of the SLA process, while others (e.g., Douglas 2004, Firth & Wagner 1997, Kramsch 2000, Swain 2000, Tarone 1983, 1988, 2000 and proponents of sociocultural theory, such as Lantolf 1994, 2000, Lantolf & Appel 1994) have noted the importance of viewing language acquisition as a process affected by social and contextual factors (e.g., the dynamics involved in non-native speaker [NNS] interactions with other NNSs, native speakers [NS] or expert L2 interlocutors, interlanguage variability according to task, setting, etc.).

In the last few years, however, certain scholars have tried to systematically view SLA as a product of both cognitive and social processes. For example, Atkinson (2002), taking a Connectionist perspective, proposes a sociocognitive approach to the study of SLA in which it is recognized that language in the brain is interconnected with experiences and emotions from the context in which it is acquired. In addition Preston (2000, 2002) proposes a psycholinguistic model of SLA that incorporates sociocultural factors.

Crucial to further discussion of this issue is a clarification of how *context* is to be defined. In order to understand the nature of the context in which second languages are acquired, scholars must adopt a micro-level '–emic,' rather than a macro-level '–etic' approach to the issue. This dichotomy was characterized by Pike (1967:37) in the following manner: "the etic viewpoint studies behavior from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system."

Hymes (1972), for instance, chose an etic approach to the definition of social contexts for interpersonal communication. He coined the acronym SPEAKING to represent the *a priori* external contextual factors surrounding the communication (S = setting, P = participants, E = end [purpose], A = act sequence [e.g., adjacency pairs], K = key [tone of communication, e.g., humorous/serious], I = instrumentality [e.g., face-to-face, written], N = norms of interaction/interpretation, and G = genre [e.g., interview, informal talk, narration]). It was assumed that a given communicative context could be objectively defined when each of these elements' parameters had been given a value (e.g., context A = a serious face-to-face job interview in an office setting between employer and interviewee, calling for formal registers of speech by both parties).

However, this etic (external) view of context at the macro-level is a simplistic characterization that does not address internally-driven factors that affect the individual processes involved in SLA at the

micro-level. For example, in this model there is no consideration of allowing for variation among individual learners' perception of contextual features (e.g., a young potential employee may be making the job interview rounds *pro forma* in order to please his parents and not take the interview seriously enough to use the expected formal register of speech) and for dynamic shifts of the values of those features brought about by co-construction of discourse by the interlocutors (e.g., at the beginning of the interview the potential employer may make informal small talk to put the interviewee at ease before shifting to a more formal register later in the interview). Therefore, a more emic (internal) view is called for, in which context is not solely constructed by factors surrounding the communication, but rather, is also defined by the perceptions of the individual learner and is subject to undergoing dynamic and rapid changes during the co-construction process at the micro-level. Batstone (2002), Douglas (2004), Ross (1975), Tannen (1993), and Tarone (1983, 1988) provide the theoretical underpinnings for this emic view of context.

Batstone (2002) distinguishes between two types of contexts for second language acquisition: *communicative* and *learning* contexts. A communicative context is sociolinguistic in orientation. A learner focuses on the use of language to convey meaning in an appropriate fashion according to contextual cues. The target language is used as a tool to exchange information and participate in important social and interpersonal functions. In contrast, a learning context has a psycholinguistic orientation in which learners focus on form with teacher assistance with the goal of improving their linguistic expertise. Batstone (2002:4) also proposed that context is not only external, but is also a matter of internal orientation of the learner to the context.

As learners acquire a second language they come to form structures of expectations (Ross 1975) about their own linguistic behavior and that of their interlocutors, which then affect the way learners view their relationships with interlocutors in both communicative and learning contexts. Tannen (1993:15) notes that previously acquired schemata and scripts⁶ contain "frames of expectations" that help the learner "to predict interpretations and relationships regarding new information, events and experiences" (Tannen 1993:16).

Learners' perceptions about the type of behavior expected of them in communicative and learning contexts also play an important role in helping to understand micro-level contextual effects on cognitive SLA process. For instance, Tarone (1983, 1988) introduced the notion of the systematic variability of interlanguage according to task, e.g., learners will focus on form and tend to be more grammatically accurate in discrete-point form-focused testing situations than in open-ended discourse-level tasks focused on getting a message across. When learners receive cues from the context that they should focus on form over meaning (e.g., often characteristic of learning contexts) then their attention will be drawn to creating grammatically accurate L2 language production. If, on the other hand, the expectations of the context suggest to learners that the purpose of their communication is to get meaning across, perhaps at the expense of focus on form (e.g., characteristic of many communicative contexts), learners may not consider grammatical accuracy a priority. Douglas (2004) adds to the micro-level emic discussion of context with his use of the construct of *discourse domains*, in which there is a two-way interaction between language learner/user and the dynamic, ever-changing context, which is co-constructed in interaction among interlocutors.

Despite the importance of taking such an emic approach to the discussion of communicative contexts, much of the SLA research to date has not yet addressed in detail the micro-level issue of the possible interaction of social/contextual factors with the specific cognitive processes involved in SLA—an interaction that may cause very different types of interlanguages to be formed in classroom (AH) vs. study abroad (SA) contexts. Notable exceptions to this trend are Kormos (1999), Tarone (2000) and Batstone (2002), who have questioned how contextual factors might affect the actual cognitive processes involved in acquiring a second language. For instance, Kormos (1999) notes that the accuracy demand of the situation (context) may affect the error detection process, Tarone (2000) proposes that different contexts provide different types of input and varying amounts of modeling and

⁶ According to Schema Theory (Bartlett 1932, Carrell & Eisterhold 1983) learners rely upon previously acquired structures of knowledge (schemata) to construct meaning from new texts. When schemata are composed of a series of events that prototypically characterize a set of actions (e.g., buying a plane ticket), the term "script" (Schank & Abelson 1977) is used.

collaborative assistance, while Batstone (2002) observes that learners engaged in communicative discourse may not exhibit the risk-taking behavior needed to exploit the context for learning (e.g., attempting more complex structures) so as not to intrude on their interlocutors' time by being incoherent or by holding the floor for too long.

In the discussion that follows this author will continue this avenue of exploration at the micro-level, and will apply the insights gleaned from this line of theoretical inquiry to a new emic analysis of the results of the Spanish SLA research carried out in SA and AH contexts. Therefore, the next section of this paper will explore various sociocontextual factors present in each of these contexts and look at their possible effect on the cognitive processes involved in the acquisition of Spanish by adult learners whose native language is English.

2.1 Micro-level emic approach to the analysis of speech used in AH vs. SA contexts

In this micro-level approach to the analysis of second language speech used in classroom vs. study abroad contexts, four of Hymes' (1972) external contextual features (setting, participants, end [purpose] and norms of interaction/interpretation) will be discussed in an emic fashion by taking into account the internal perceptions that the individual learner has of these factors and the co-construction of discourse that takes place between the learner and his/her interlocutor in these two environments (AH vs. SA).

2.1.1 Setting

Factors which characterize the setting in which L2 acquisition takes place in AH and SA environments include the type of input to which the learner is exposed, the venues in which the L2 is used and the learners' perception of the formality of the context.

Tarone (2000:187) notes that "it is well-established that, for any given target language, the L2 learner receives different input on the grammatical and lexical features to be acquired in different social situations." For instance, Cohen (1997) and Tarone and Swain (1995) have shown that learners in classroom (regular and immersion) settings are mostly exposed only to academic/formal registers, and that vernacular registers (which may have different grammatical rules and lexicons) are only available outside the classroom (e.g., in study abroad contexts).

The input received by classroom learners has traditionally been limited to NNS or NS teacher talk and NNS peer language, with input modified through the negotiation of form or meaning. With the current wide availability of authentic materials from target language/culture videos, DVDs and the Internet students are now able to be exposed to more authentic language input. However, this exposure is very often sporadic and classroom learners normally have little chance to hear/read frequently the same vocabulary items in various contexts to create multiple links among sensory experiences; these types of links would aid their memory and retention of new words (Ellis 2002, Stevik 1996) and would allow for situated cognition⁷ (Brown et al. 1989) to take place.

In addition, exchanges between instructors and students or among NNS peers in classroom settings, especially at the intermediate level, tend to be at the sentence level or below (set phrases). As a result, processing of input is facilitated in classroom contexts due to the fact that the student's working memory is not overtaxed with too much target language input to retain and process while formulating a response to his/her interlocutor. Since processing of discourse-level input involves putting more strain on working memory, it poses more challenges for learners. Although Lee and VanPatten (2003) have suggested that classroom learners should learn to process sentences before discourse, the latter should not be completely banned from the classroom.

In contrast, SA learners are constantly exposed to discourse level L2 input (two or more concatenated sentences) in and outside their classroom. Their interlocutors include not only their NS

⁷ According to Brown et al. (1989), knowledge (cognition) is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used. Therefore, the various meanings and nuances associated with L2 vocabulary items may be more easily (and thoroughly) acquired in authentic cultural settings (e.g., SA environments) than in classroom environments virtually divorced from authentic L2 cultural contexts.

instructor and NNS peers, but often NS host families, NS friends and members of the target culture with whom they come in contact to meet daily needs (e.g., butchers, bakers, bankers). The vast amount of input that SA learners daily receive above the sentence level may overly tax the working memory capacities of lower-level and intermediate learners to retain and process new L2 input. This could result in intermediate learners spending more cognitive resources on capturing the “gist of a NS conversation” by listening for lexical meaning, rather than focusing on often redundant grammatical form. Advanced learners with more L2 resources at their disposal and a more developed working memory capacity (Lord this volume) may be able to deal more effectively with discourse-level input, paying attention to form and meaning, in a SA context.

If SA learners do not understand something in the input they receive, they can use communication strategies to negotiate meaning with their NS interlocutors, but pragmatic considerations (discussed below) may inhibit their use of these strategies. Nonetheless, on a daily basis, SA learners are surrounded by a greater variety of input from authentic materials in the target culture than they would be in a normal classroom, and are given numerous exposures to new lexical items in various contexts so that they can engage in situated cognition and create multiple paths of retrieval of new vocabulary items. In addition, frequent exposure to new lexical items in various contexts may assist learners in their formation of meaningful associations among words (e.g., derivationally or semantically-related lexical items and concatenations, Ellis 2002).

Although insights from Tarone’s Variability Model of interlanguage (1983, 1988) indicate that learners in both AH and SA contexts may change their way of speaking according to the type of task (e.g., discrete point with a focus on form vs. open-ended with a focus on meaning), students in a SA environment are exposed to a much wider range of registers (formal vs. informal) than are classroom learners, by virtue of their experience communicating with NSs from various sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., doormen, store clerks, professors) in their daily lives. However, due to a relative lack of studies that compare data from intermediate and advanced study abroad learners, it is debatable whether or not all students in SA contexts are able to distinguish nuances of style and degrees of formality of speech in the input they receive from various interlocutors. It is possible that intermediate students, who have not yet mastered grammatical forms and whose lexical repertoire is limited, may be paying more attention to understanding the essence of what their NS interlocutors are saying and to getting their own basic message across with whatever linguistic means at their disposal, rather than focusing on pragmatic features of the NS input and the appropriateness of their own language—a luxury usually afforded only to more advanced learners with a larger lexicon and more mastery of basic grammatical features.

2.1.2 Participants

Two very important factors that determine the type of context to be created by the learner and his/her interlocutor are the status of the discourse participants and the roles they play in the discourse situation.

In both classroom and study abroad settings, power and solidarity (Brown & Gilman 1960) relations (status of the interlocutors vis-à-vis each other) are defined (co-constructed) dynamically according to perceptions of the learner and his/her interlocutors. Typical university-level language course infrastructure (e.g., a class consists of one NS or NNS instructor and 20-30 NNS students) does not provide students with opportunities to interact with NSs from various social backgrounds in different social settings. In AH environments, relations of power obtain between the NS or NNS instructor (high status) and NNS students (low status), while solidarity relations usually only characterize student NNS/NNS interactions.

In the SA context, however, the range of power and solidarity relations to which learners are exposed is much more complex; from the beginning of their experience abroad students interact daily with a wide range of interlocutors, e.g., NS instructors, NS host families, NS and NNS peers and NS strangers. In addition, as the time abroad progresses, initial formal relationships may change to ones based on solidarity, which would call for the use of more informal registers of speech. After an extended period abroad it is hoped that SA students will notice, understand and begin to successfully

manipulate basic linguistic features used with many different types of interlocutors (e.g., use of formal vs. informal pronouns of address with people in various relationships of power and solidarity).⁸

Another important contextual factor related to the participants in a discourse situation deals with the perceived role(s) played by the learner and his/her interlocutors. For instance, in a classroom environment the instructor's role is to serve as a willing interlocutor who takes time to provide good input, notice gaps in a learner's interlanguage, negotiate form or meaning with the learner, provide feedback on learner output and help the learner develop his/her L2 system. The instructor's choice of task largely determines whether students will focus on form or on meaning in their discourse. NNS student peers usually serve as conversation partners in small group work and may be willing to negotiate form and meaning with the learners.

In the SA context, the role of the classroom instructor may be similar to that in AH contexts, but the role of other interlocutors often depends on the power and solidarity relations established with the learner. For instance, NS host families and NS/NNS friends may take time to provide information and help learners meet survival needs via the negotiation of form and meaning, while NS strangers (e.g., store clerks) may only be willing to negotiate meaning when communication breaks down (e.g., to sell their products to the learner) and may be unwilling or uninterested in taking time to provide feedback on grammatical form. In fact, Varonis and Gass (1985) show that some native speakers evidence "counter-accomodating behavior" by refusing to modify their speech for NNSs, even when the latter experience obvious difficulty with the language. In contrast, Long (1983) found that NS interlocutors did simplify the input they provided to L2 learners. Thus, different NS interlocutors may provide varying amounts of input adjusted to L2 learner needs, according to their perceived role and their willingness to modify their speech to make it comprehensible to the learner.

Students in AH contexts understand that their role as L2 learners obliges them to take time to seek to understand input, notice interlanguage-target language gaps and improve their L2 systems through self-correction and/or by seeking help with form/s and meaning from interlocutors, using communication strategies to bridge gaps and modifying their output. In addition to making him/herself understood, classroom learners seek to improve their command of L2 forms (grammar and vocabulary). Although SA learners may view their roles during class time in a manner similar to AH learners, outside of class many view their role primarily as one in which they need to understand and be understood by NSs (primarily through negotiation of meaning). However, depending on their proficiency level and motivation, SA learners may also want to work on improving their command of L2 grammatical forms and vocabulary.

2.1.3 *End/purpose*

To characterize the differences between classroom and study abroad contexts as being simply a "learning" (AH) vs. "communicative" (SA) context (Batstone 2002) dichotomy would oversimplify the issue at hand. Classroom learning often combines characteristics of these two types of contexts by having learners participate in form-focused as well as meaning-focused tasks. On the other hand, learners in a study abroad context participate in classroom instruction almost on a daily basis in the target culture in which they live among and communicate with L2 speakers outside of class for an extended period of time. Therefore, although both contexts allow learners to pay attention to both form and meaning, typical classroom contexts do tend to focus on form to a substantial degree while study abroad contexts may urge learners to focus on understanding the meaning of the L2 messages they encounter and on getting their own meaning across to their interlocutor, perhaps at the expense of accuracy.

The importance of paying attention to (noticing) new L2 forms in the input before they can be successfully integrated in the IL system has been noted by Schmidt (1993) and Gass and Selinker (2001), among others. VanPatten (1996) proposes two principles involved in the processing of these new L2 items noticed by classroom learners:

1. learners process input for meaning before they process it for form

⁸ See Kinginger and Farrell (2004) on the development of pragmatic awareness in SA learners of French; see also Barron (2003) for the development of pragmatic abilities in German by Irish SA students.

2. learners can process non-meaningful form (e.g., third-person singular –s) with little communicative value only if the processing of informational or communicative content requires little attention from them.

Barcroft (2002) also proposes that semantic elaboration may actually inhibit formal (structural) elaboration. In light of these assumptions, VanPatten (1996, 2002) has devoted much of his time to the elaboration of principles of Processing Instruction, a pedagogical approach created to counteract the tendencies of learners to focus on meaning over form in classroom situations.⁹ In addition, Swain (1985) found that during comprehension French immersion students relied on semantic and pragmatic information to construct meaning. With its focus on constructing meaning this “semantic processing” may circumvent morphosyntactic information. Therefore, study abroad contexts that require learners to attend to meaning may make it difficult for learners to process redundant grammatical forms in the input, while classroom settings that reward attention to form can afford students the opportunity for such focus.

According to VanPatten’s logic, it would also follow that advanced learners with larger vocabulary and more control over grammar can pay attention to non-meaningful (grammatical, informationally redundant) forms with low communicative value in the input, even in a communicative context that requires them to focus mostly on meaning. Intermediate learners without an extensive vocabulary and control of grammatical rules, however, would have trouble processing redundant grammatical forms in the input, especially if the learning context urges them to focus on lexical meanings that they must understand to meet real world needs.

The decision to negotiate for form or meaning or whether or not to focus on improving their interlanguage is determined by learners’ goals and motivations, the learners’ perception of the reward system and the definition of successful communication in a given context. Success in a classroom setting is often measured by a learner’s ability to understand and get meaning across with correct vocabulary and grammatical forms. On the other hand, success in a study abroad context (outside the classroom) tends to be measured by a learner’s ability to understand NSs and get meaning across well enough to get his/her real world needs met, regardless of the correctness of grammatical form.

Since the improvement of L2 learners’ interlanguages depends, in part, on their ability to recognize their own errors, correct them and restructure their IL system along L2 norms, error detection is a crucial part of the psycholinguistic processes involved in IL construction. In a classroom setting, students often attend to the forms they produce, since they are frequently evaluated on their ability to monitor their speech/writing and correct L2 forms. In contrast, L2 study abroad learners, especially those at the intermediate level with smaller lexicons and limited control of grammatical features, may not have enough cognitive attentional resources to detect their own formal errors while they focus on getting their basic meaning across. As Kormos (1999:326) states, “in tasks where the emphasis is on successful communication, the available attention for monitoring in L2 speech tends to be directed toward meaning rather than form.”

Kormos (1999:324) also notes that error detection depends on the availability of learners’ attention and the “accuracy demand of the situation.” This contextually-driven demand depends on the purpose of the discourse: is the focus of the interaction to convey meaning, perhaps at the expense of grammatical formal accuracy, or do learners focus on form in order to produce correct L2 vocabulary and grammatical morphemes? In both classroom and study-abroad contexts, the purpose of a given communication, and a concomitant focus on either form or meaning, may shift dynamically according to changing learner and interlocutor needs within a conversation in either context. Classroom activities in both AH and SA contexts may be either form- or meaning-focused, and so the accuracy demand of the moment would depend on the task at hand. However, learners in a study abroad context may spend most of their time outside of class interacting with NSs who do not demand accuracy on learner grammatical forms with little communicative value (VanPatten 2002), and who may tend to only negotiate miscommunications of lexical meaning with L2 learners. In addition, the communicative orientation characteristic of study abroad contexts may urge the learner to divine the meaning of new

⁹ VanPatten’s Processing Instruction manipulates L2 classroom input in order to facilitate learners’ focus on form (see VanPatten 2002 for more information on this pedagogical approach).

L2 lexical items from contextual cues, and help to render target language grammatical forms redundant (see Batsone 2002).¹⁰

2.1.4 Norms of interaction and interpretation

Learners' perceptions of the norms of interaction and interpretation that obtain in AH and SA contexts are based in large part on the other contextual factors already discussed: in a given *setting*, the status and roles of the *participants*, as well as the *end/purpose* of the communication determine what kind of behaviors the interlocutors expect of themselves and of each other. The different norms of behavior encouraged by each context determine the learner-based (perceived) discourse constraints that obtain in each setting and the amount of error detection and self-correction that takes place (Kormos 1999:324). However, these *norms of interaction and interpretation* also constrain the type of discourse in which instructors or NS interlocutors participate.

In AH contexts, for instance, the perceived roles of both learners and instructors allow them to take time to focus on learner comprehension and output and the development of the learners' L2 systems. This time taken to focus on form as well as meaning allows learners to notice gaps between their own interlanguage and the target language, to use communication strategies to bridge those gaps, and to modify his/her output, with the goal of restructuring their L2 systems along native speaker lines. In addition, instructors are perceived as willing interlocutors whose job it is to facilitate learners' focus on improving their second language systems. Therefore, it is not considered an imposition on the interlocutor (instructor or other NNS peer), for the learners to take time to focus on formal aspects of their communication; rather, the time taken to focus on form is considered to be an integral part of fulfilling the goals of the learning process.

Although similar norms of interaction may obtain in classroom settings within the SA context, the norms of interaction and interpretation outside of class may be very different. When engaged in conversations with native speakers outside the classroom, learners may not take the time necessary to focus on formal details of their own production, due to issues of politeness, more specifically, due to learners' recognition of the need to respect what Brown and Levinson (1987:61) call an interlocutor's *negative face*,¹¹ "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distraction." In order to respect these rights of the interlocutor, learners in SA contexts may hesitate to self-correct or use communication strategies to negotiate for form, so as not to impose on the NS interlocutor's time and patience; after all, it is not the job of the average native speaker in a SA context to willingly take the time necessary to allow learners to self-correct and ask for help or to provide assistance to the learner, unless the two interlocutors need to focus on negotiating meaning to meet the real world needs of the interaction. On the other hand, in order to avoid face-threatening acts that might embarrass the learner, NSs may also engage in negative politeness strategies by not bringing NNS errors to their attention, unless communication breaks down and the intended meaning is not being conveyed. Moreover, the learner may want to save his own *positive face* by not stopping to correct him/herself during a conversation, so as not to draw attention to his/her own linguistic shortcomings.

In addition, the Maxim of Manner of Grice's Cooperative Principles (1975), which is part and parcel at least of the English L1 learner's assumptions about language use, states that interlocutors should be brief and orderly in their communication; therefore, taking time to deviate from the trajectory of the line of communication already established in order to self-correct and negotiate forms that are not crucial to the conveyance of the basic meaning of the utterances, may be seen as a violation of this maxim.

Thus, due to the pragmatic exigencies of the SA context, learners often focus on meaning over form, i.e., to "keep the conversation" going, at the expense of grammatical accuracy so as not to impose on interlocutors or lose face, at the same time their NS interlocutors refrain from correcting

¹⁰ See Batstone (2002) for a critique of VanPatten's Processing Instruction (taking out redundancies in the input).

¹¹ According to Brown and Levinson (1987:61) *positive face* consists of a positive and consistent self-image and a desire for approval, while *negative face* is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves and rights to non-distraction." Negative politeness strategies can be expressed either by mitigating *face threatening acts* (FTAs), such as disapproval, or by respecting the interlocutor's right not to be imposed on.

them so as not to be impolite. The classroom context, however, encourages learners and instructors to take the time necessary to focus on form and consider such behavior consonant with norms of interaction and interpretation that obtain in classroom settings.

3. The role of controlled vs. automatic processing in second language acquisition in AH and SA contexts in light of Working Memory Theory and Levelt's Language Production Model

The effect of context on *controlled* vs. *automatic* processing (McLaughlin 1987, Schmidt 1992, Shiffrin & Schneider 1977) may also help to account for the differences in L2 acquisition in study abroad and classroom settings. Controlled processing (CP) of language is activated under the control of and through the attention of the speaker/listener. Memory nodes are activated in a given sequence and held in working memory on a temporary basis since the items in question have not yet been learned or automatized. The optimal environment for CP in language learning would be one in which the learner was able to focus attention on the process (input or output) and had time to hold new input or output in working memory. In addition, contextual distractions would be kept to a minimum and there would be a willing interlocutor to give feedback to the learner so the interlanguage-L2 gap can be noticed. Furthermore, there would be time for planning the utterance, negotiating form and meaning and time for output modification.

On the other hand Automatic Processing (AP) is activated without the necessity of active control or attention by the subject. The activation patterns of certain nodes are built up over time by practice, so that they are learned responses. Once an automatic response is learned, it is quick and difficult to change. Ideally, automatic processing follows the controlled processing of forms so that the learner can effortlessly access acquired forms without having to take time to expend attentional resources. In this sense, controlled processing provides "stepping stones" for automatic processing (Shiffrin & Schneider 1977:170). However, over time even new forms that have not been acquired through controlled processing will become automatized and temporarily stabilized (Long 2003) and may become a permanent part of the restructured interlanguage system. We will now consider what characteristics of the AH vs. SA context may facilitate or hinder the controlled → automatic processing path of L2 forms within the framework of Working Memory Theory and Levelt's Language Production Model.¹²

Baddeley (1986) proposes that *working memory* is comprised of three components: the *visuo-spatial sketch pad* (which temporarily stores and manipulates spatial and visual information), the *central executive* (which controls the awareness of the information being held and manipulated) and the *phonological loop* (which is constituted by an inner ear and inner voice that rehearses verbal information). Basing their work on Baddeley's (1986) model, Payne and Whitney (2002:9) define working memory as "an individual's capacity for temporarily maintaining verbal and visual-spatial information in memory and for performing judgment or executive functions based on changing conditions in one's immediate environment."

Working memory plays a significant role in controlled processing, by temporarily storing new information to be processed so that learners can compare new input (or their own production) to what they know already about the target language. In classroom settings, where there are often ample opportunities and time for controlled processing, learners are able to use their working memory to hold and compare new input and output to target language norms. With time, items acquired through controlled processing become automatized in the learner's interlanguage. However, in study abroad settings containing episodes of rapid L2 input with little time to process unknown items, the phonological loop is taxed and information being stored for comparison with the learner's knowledge about the target language may be released to take in new information in order to "keep up" with the flow of the conversation.

¹² Payne and Whitney (2002) provide an excellent discussion of the interrelationship between Levelt's model and Working Memory theory in the context of investigating the role of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the development of oral L2 skills.

As a result, the conditions for controlled processing, which would also include time for planning and self-monitoring of one's production, are not optimized in a study abroad setting. In addition, SA contextual pressure to perform and not take time to inconvenience the interlocutor by asking him/her to repeat an utterance or to help the learner with his own production, may diminish the efficacy of the learner's working memory functions during the SLA process. Thus, these SA contextual conditions may cause a "short-circuiting" of the controlled → automatic cognitive processing procedure and facilitate the automatization of incorrect L2 forms in SA learners.

Levelt's (1989) Language Production Model also provides insight into the interplay of cognitive and social factors in the acquisition of second languages in AH and SA environments. In this model non-language communicative intentions originate in the Conceptualizer, the component that determines the semantic content of the utterance to be produced. Preverbal messages from the Conceptualizer are stored in working memory before entering the Formulator, in which lexical items (lemmas) that best represent the content of the message are selected. Through grammatical encoding, syntactic information stored in these lemmas helps to produce the surface structure of the sentence. The Formulator also chooses phonological representations (lexemes) for the lemmas (phonological encoding). The resulting articulatory plan that emerges from the Formulator enters the Articulator, where the vocal apparatus is engaged for utterance production. The stages in this model "operate in a modular and incremental fashion" (Payne & Whitney 2002), in which the utterance journeys along a non-retractable path from the Conceptualizer to the Articulator. Parallel processing is made possible in this model through consecutive progression of the utterance through the three modules (Conceptualizer, Formulator and Articulator).

Although in Levelt's (1989) model of L1 production Controlled Processing is limited to the Conceptualizer, Payne and Whitney (2002:12) propose that in L2 production "controlled processing appears to play a central role in lexical access and articulation in a second language, at least until a high level of proficiency has been achieved." They contend that less fluent L2 speakers "may expend a great deal of their attentional resources on retrieving appropriate words from their mental lexicon, determining the correct surface structure or syntax, and selecting the corresponding lexemes or phonological units for the words in the utterance" (Payne & Whitney 2002:13) However, for more fluent speakers "many of these processes occur without much conscious attention, leaving attentional resources for contemplating subtleties of expression" (Payne & Whitney 2002:13). These "subtleties of expression" may include redundant grammatical markers as well as usage of politeness strategies, formal vs. informal registers, etc., that is to say, elements beyond those involved in the basic lexical parsing of the utterances.

Due to the learner-perceived characteristics of the classroom and study abroad environments discussed above (setting, participants, end/purpose and norms of interaction and interpretation) the amount of controlled vs. automatic processing that takes place during the L2 process may vary substantially. In classroom contexts, where learners are normally given time to plan and execute their utterances and are expected and encouraged to monitor and correct their speech using their explicit grammatical knowledge (Ellis 2004), controlled processing is facilitated. Ellis and Yuan (2005) have shown that when learners were given time to engage in on-line planning and were not pressured to produce the L2 rapidly, they evidenced more grammatical accuracy in both oral and written narrative tasks. However, the pragmatic pressures to "keep the communication flowing" and to save face for both interlocutors that is put on learners in a study abroad context, may cause many to produce the target language rapidly without taking time for controlled processing.

More advanced learners who have already automatized many basic grammatical forms and structures before entering the SA context may be able to pay attention to the subtleties of expression mentioned above (e.g., redundant grammatical markers) and incorporate them into their interlanguage. However, less proficient learners in an SA context, who do not have automatic control over basic grammatical markers and structures before arriving in the study abroad context, may allow the pragmatic exigencies of the SA context to take precedence over their need for more controlled processing of forms in their interlanguage. The result may be a stabilization of L2 forms with incorrect grammatical markers and structures by learners in SA contexts who automatize these forms before taking the time to acquire them through controlled processing.

The pressures of the SA context on learners to get their meaning across quickly and efficiently may also cause these them to become quite fluent in the production of these stabilized forms, which are difficult, but not impossible, to erase after becoming automatized. However, it may be the case that in order to undo the effects of plateauing and stabilization learners must “backtrack” and engage in conscious controlled processing of subtle form/meaning associations (e.g., grammatical morphemes) in order to replace incorrect forms they have been using to just get their meaning across with a correctly inflected form (e.g., change *andé* to *anduve*). Ideally, the classroom experience in SA contexts is supposed to afford learners time for necessary controlled processing. However, since no in-depth research has been carried out to date on the nature of classroom interactions within a SA context, no conclusions can be reached about the facilitating effect of classroom experiences on controlled processing of forms in a study abroad context.

4. The effects of context and cognitive factors on the results of empirical studies on Spanish L2 acquisition in AH and SA contexts

In this section I will briefly discuss the results of several studies on the acquisition of Spanish in classroom and study abroad environments in light of the interaction of cognitive factors (*controlled vs. automatic processing, working memory*) and learner-perceived features of both classroom and study abroad contexts (*setting, participants, end/purpose and norms of interaction and interpretation*). Studies carried out to date include an examination of the acquisition of certain linguistic features (pronunciation, the lexicon, grammar), narrative, discursive (use of communication strategies) and pragmatic abilities, and fluency (see Tables 1 and 2).

4.1 Pronunciation

Four studies examined the development of phonetic and phonological abilities (Díaz-Campos 2004, Díaz-Campos this volume, Simões 1996, Stevens 2001.). Studies using conversational data (Díaz-Campos this volume, Stevens 2001) report better phonological abilities in study abroad (SA) than in classroom (AH) learners. In addition, Simões (1996) revealed (in an acoustic analysis of oral interview data without an AH control group) that SA learners improved their vowel quality during their time abroad.

These results are not surprising, since learners in a study abroad *setting* were exposed to more native speaker models and had more opportunity to practice the L2, most often in conversational styles. However, Díaz-Campos (2004) was not able to completely confirm this finding, perhaps due to the fact that only a reading task was used to collect data from AH and SA learners. Tarone’s contextually-based Variability Model (1983, 1988) would predict more normative pronunciation by all learners in social contexts which require attention to form (e.g., reading tasks) under conditions of controlled processing in which the working memory is not overtaxed; this would explain the lack of significant difference between the pronunciation of the AH and SA groups in Díaz-Campos (2004).

4.2 Lexical acquisition

Lexical acquisition in AH vs. SA contexts has been studied by DeKeyser (1986) and Collentine (2004). Although DeKeyser’s (1986) study found an advantage for the study abroad group in terms of lexical abilities, Collentine (2004) presents scaled (normed over 1000 words) data suggesting that the study abroad experience does not consistently promote significantly higher acquisition of more semantically dense words (e.g., nouns and adjectives) than the classroom group. In fact, the only measure on which the two groups differed significantly was adjectives, with the AH group producing proportionally more unique adjectives after the treatment than the SA group.

This surprising lack of difference in the two groups on vocabulary acquisition measures may be due, in part, to the fact that both the AH and SA learners in Collentine’s study were at the Intermediate level. Learners at this level in both contexts have limited L2 working memories and spend most of their time focusing on either getting their meaning across (SA) or focusing on form and meaning (AH);

this leaves few cognitive resources to hold new lexical items in working memory for acquisition. However, when Collentine looked at the non-scaled data, he found that the SA group generated many more semantically dense utterances, due partially to the fact that they were more fluent (produced more words per syntactic unit at a greater speed with fewer pauses) than the AH group. This fluency (and the consequent production of more semantically dense utterances) on the part of the SA group may very well be related to their reluctance to stop the flow of conversation to use communication strategies, due to the learner's focus on meaning (*end/purpose*) and use of negative politeness strategies (*norms of interaction and interpretation*).

	N	Duration	Instrument	Pre-exp. level	Results
Collentine (2004)	AH=20 SA=26	16 weeks	OPI	3rd semester	SA>AH narrative abilities; SA>AH (non-scaled data), SA=AH and AH>SA (scaled data) lexical density; SA=AH or AH>SA in grammar abilities
De Keyser (1986)	AH=5 SA=7	16 weeks	Grammar test; interview; picture description; recall	Intermediate	SA= AH in grammar and communication strategies (CS); SA>AH in fluency
De Keyser (1990)	AH=5 SA=7	16 weeks	Grammar test; interview; picture description; recall	Intermediate	SA=AH monitoring grammar
De Keyser (1991)	AH=5 SA=7	16 weeks	Grammar test; interview; picture description; recall	Intermediate	SA=AH in grammar and communication strategies (CS)
Díaz-Campos (2004)	AH=20 SA=26	16 weeks	OPI	3rd Semester	SA=AH in pronunciation (reading task)
Díaz-Campos (This volume)	AH=20 SA=26	16 weeks	OPI	3rd Semester	SA>AH in pronunciation (conversational task)
C.A. Isabelli & Nishida (2005)	AH=32 SA=29	9 months	SOPI. Questions involving hypothesizing, beliefs, etc.	3rd year	SA>AH in grammar (subjunctive)
Lafford (1995)	AH=13 SA=28	n/a	OPI (at end of 4th semester)	n/a	SA>AH in repertoire of CS & conversational management strategies
Lafford (2004)	AH=20 SA=26	16 weeks	OPI	3rd semester	SA<AH in frequency of CS use
Rodríguez (2001)	AH=11 SA=11	16 weeks	Judgment task; recall	1st or 2nd year	SA=AH in pragmatics (perception of requests); both groups improved over time
Segalowitz & Freed (2004)	AH=18 SA=22	16 weeks	OPI; various cognitive measures	3rd semester	SA>AH in fluency and proficiency level
Stevens (2001)	AH=13 SA=9	16 weeks, 7 weeks	Reading task & story-telling task	1st or 2nd year	SA>AH in pronunciation
Torres (2003)	AH=5 SA=10	16 weeks	OPI	Intermediate	SA=AH in use of clitics

Table 1: Spanish study abroad vs. at home research

In addition, Collentine's (2004) treatment period for AH and SA subjects was only a semester long (16 weeks). Ife et al. (2000) found that learners with more time abroad (two semesters) improved in vocabulary abilities more than those that only stayed for one semester. This would indicate that greater amounts of time spent being exposed to and practicing new lexical items in a study abroad *setting* allows SA learners more opportunity to solidify new form-meaning connections in long-term

memory. They also found that intermediate learners tended to improve in the acquisition of discrete vocabulary items while advanced learners improved their ability to make meaningful L2-L2 word associations. Since different instruments and measures of vocabulary gain were used in Collentine (2004) (OPI data looking at semantic density) and Ife et al. (2000) (A3VT test of lexical associations) more comparative research using the same measures and instruments is needed on the acquisition of vocabulary in AH and SA contexts before any further conclusions are drawn on this measure.

	N	Duration	Instrument	Pre-exp. level	Results
Guntermann (1992a, 1992b)	SA= 9	1 year & 12 weeks	OPI	Novice	Learners improved in overall proficiency and in use of copulas and por/para
Hokanson (2000)	SA=27	4 weeks	Measures of cognitive style preferences; AATSP National Exam-Level II (listening & reading) discrete point grammar exam, short essays; observations of students' oral performance and behavior	Intermediate and Advanced	Learners gravitated toward activities associated with their cognitive style (e.g., extroverts sought out communicative interaction with NSs). Similar oral and written gains found in Extroverts and Introverts, Intuitives and Sensing students. Advanced students increased in social and cultural skills.
Ife et al. (2000)	SA=36	one and two sem.	Vocabulary & translation test	INT = 21 AV = 15	Learners with more time abroad improved more in vocabulary abilities; both groups improved (Int.: discrete items; Adv.: vocab associations)
C.A. Isabelli (2004)	SA= 31	one year	GJ & Oral interview	Intermediate	Learners improved null-subject behaviors & subject-verb inversions in embedded clauses
C.L. Isabelli (2001)	SA= 5	20 weeks	OPI; SOPI	Intermediate	Learners improved in fluency and in grammatical abilities
Lafford & Ryan (1995)	SA=9	16 weeks	OPI	Novice	Examined stages of por/para
López Ortega (2003)	SA= 4	16 weeks	OPI	4th semester	Learners acquire proper use of null subjects; discourse factors at play
Lord (This volume)	SA=22	7 weeks	Mimicry test	3rd year	Learners improved ability to imitate longer strings of L2
Ryan & Lafford (1992)	SA=16	16 weeks	OPI	Novice	Examined stages of ser/estar
Schell (2000)	SA=5	16 weeks	Cloze-like tests (w/infinite prompts)	University: year 2 = 2 year 3 = 3	Found evidence against Lexical Aspect Hypothesis in early developmental stages.
Simões (1996)	SA=5	5 weeks	Spoken test	Int. Low to Advanced	Learners improved pronunciation abroad
Talburdt & Stewart (1999)	SA=6	5 weeks	Ethnographic interviews	4th semester	Affective variables (race and gender issues) that students experience can have deleterious effects on acquisition.

Table 2: Spanish study abroad research

4.3 Narrative abilities

Collentine (2004) showed that SA learners' narrative abilities surpassed those of classroom learners. Collentine used Biber's (1988) five variables associated with narrative discourse to measure this ability: past-tense verbs, third-person morphology, past participles, present participles, and public verbs (e.g., verbs of communication and events). The results show that the SA group attained the ability to generate more instances of narrative discourse than the classroom group. This may be explained by the fact that the classroom *setting* is limited in its ability to provide numerous narrative models for learners, while the study abroad context provides almost daily exposure to written and oral models of narrative structure in authentic materials. Isabelli's (2001) study of SA learners (with no AH control group) presented evidence that students' narrative abilities develop significantly in an abroad context.

4.4 Discursive and pragmatic abilities

Work by DeKeyser (1991), Lafford (1995, 2004) and Rodríguez (2001) has compared the discursive and pragmatic abilities of AH and SA learners. Rodríguez (2001) found no advantage for the study abroad group's pragmatic ability to recognize and use request formulas (e.g., negative interrogatives *¿No puedes traerme un vaso de agua?* 'Could you bring me a glass of water?'). These results may be due, in part, to the small number of subjects used (11) and the limitation of the instruments to judgment and recall tasks. In addition, since the linguistic abilities of both the AH and SA subjects were at the Intermediate level, the learners in both contexts may not have had enough cognitive resources to pay attention to pragmatic fine-tuning while engaged in the processing of basic vocabulary and grammar. In addition, since the distinguishing feature of the negative interrogative was the unstressed monosyllabic negative marker *no*, it is very possible that both groups (AH and SA learners) had difficulty noticing that negative element in the input they received. Thus, in this case (Rodríguez 2001), it does not seem that intermediate learners in a study abroad *setting* were able to take advantage of the myriad opportunities to notice and incorporate the negative interrogative as a request formula, perhaps due in part to their focus (*end/purpose*) on the basic meaning (rather than the nuances of) a conversation in order to understand the gist of what was being said.

In contrast to Rodríguez' (2001) findings, Lafford (1995, 2004) discovered superior discursive abilities among SA learners. Lafford (1995) demonstrated that SA learners possessed a wider range of discourse management strategies (e.g., ways of opening and closing a conversation) than the AH group, perhaps due to the greater exposure these learners had in a SA *setting* to NS models of managing a conversation (e.g., *norms of interaction and interpretation*).

DeKeyser (1991) investigated the use of communication strategies by learners in both SA and AH contexts. No statistically significant difference was found in the number and type of CSs in the two groups for either the picture description or interview tasks. DeKeyser acknowledges that this lack of significance could be due to the small sample size (SA=7; AH=5).

Lafford's (2004) study examined the effects of SA contexts on learners' use of communication strategies, or conscious learner strategies that bridge a perceived communication gap from a lack of L2 knowledge, performance problems, or interactional problems. In this study her data indicate that SA learners used significantly fewer communication strategies after the treatment period than the AH learners. Interestingly, this research suggests that the relative lack of use of CSs on the part of learners in a SA *setting* is not due to superior grammatical or lexical abilities (as demonstrated in Collentine 2004, who used the same data set). Rather, the lack of CS use may be the result of the fact that pragmatic constraints (e.g. the learner's perception of the roles of *participants*, the need to focus on meaning [*end/purpose*] and the *norms of interaction and interpretation* that lead to the use of negative politeness strategies and strategies to save the learner's own positive face) presented by the SA environment may discourage the use of communication strategies and short-circuit the learner's ideal trajectory of controlled → automatic processing. On the other hand, the AH context encourages learners to take the time necessary for controlled processing, i.e., to negotiate for form and meaning (due to considerations of *end/purpose*, *participants [roles of learner and interlocutor]* and *norms of*

interaction and interpretation); as a result, classroom learners evidenced significantly more CS use in the post-test than their SA counterparts.

4.5 Fluency

De Keyser (1986), Isabelli (2001), and Segalowitz and Freed (2004) present compelling evidence that the most powerful advantage that study abroad affords students is in the area of fluency (e.g., words per syntactic unit, speed, segments without pauses/hesitations).¹³ These results complement those of Lafford (2004) that revealed the use of fewer communication strategies by SA learners, and can be explained in similar fashion. If learners in a SA *setting* are focusing on meaning over form (*end/purpose*) and use negative politeness strategies (*participants [roles of the learner and interlocutor] and norms of interaction and interpretation*) so as to not impose on their interlocutors (or lose their own positive face), they may not interrupt their speech production with communication strategies in order to negotiate form, and only negotiate meaning when communication breaks down. Therefore, they do not take time for controlled processing and whatever forms they utter may become automatized with use. This leads to fluency by SA learners, sometimes at the expense of accuracy.

4.6 Grammatical ability

Although the SA studies carried out without a control group (Guntermann 1992a, 1992b, C.A. Isabelli 2004, Isabelli 2001, Lafford & Ryan 1995, López Ortega 2003) found improvement in the grammatical abilities of learners during their stay abroad, most comparative studies of grammatical abilities in AH vs. SA learners (Collentine 2004, DeKeyser 1986, 1990, 1991, Torres 2003) have found that the classroom group was equal or superior to the study abroad group in the ability to monitor and accurately use grammatical forms. Reasons for this “surprising result” may be found when examining the interplay of cognitive and sociocontextual factors in both AH and SA environments.

In many classroom *settings*, the learner’s view of the role of the interlocutors (*participants*) may be that of a student obliged to focus on grammatical form when interacting with an interlocutor (instructor or student) willing to assist him/her. If the classroom reward system (grades) is based largely on scores on grammar tests, learners may perceive that the *end/purpose* of L2 interaction in AH contexts is to focus on form, as well as (or sometimes at the expense of) meaning, and are motivated to understand new input, modify their output and integrate correct L2 forms into their interlanguage system. In addition, the perceived *norms of interaction and interpretation* in the AH setting allow students to take the time necessary to plan their utterances, hold new input and incipient output in working memory, notice the IL-L2 gap and use communication strategies to bridge that gap without feeling that they are threatening their interlocutor’s negative face or their own positive face. Thus, conditions in this type of AH context are conducive to a learner’s controlled processing of L2 forms in the input and in his/her output before they become automatized with use.

On the other hand, learners in a study abroad *setting* may sense conflicting cues from their environment as to what is expected of them linguistically as they go through their day. In the classroom part of the SA experience it is possible that some of the same factors may obtain as those just discussed above for the AH classroom context. However, the complete lack of information available on what actually happens in the SA classroom prevents us from speculating on this any further. Outside the classroom, however, the SA learners interact daily with their host families and other native speakers in the target culture. Learners may tend to perceive the role of these interlocutors (*participants*) as one of focusing on meaning (*end/purpose*) to help the learner meet his/her basic survival needs in the target culture, rather than giving feedback on redundant grammatical form.

In addition, learners outside the SA classroom see themselves more as participants in a communicative situation in which getting one’s meaning across without imposing on the interlocutor’s negative face or losing their own positive face (*norms of interaction and interpretation*) is considered

¹³ Freed (1995a) and Freed et al. (2004) have found the same positive effects of SA on fluency for learners of French.

to be the primary goal (*end/purpose*). As a result, the learner takes little time for controlled processing of forms and may tend to become quite fluent in the target language while producing incorrect L2 grammatical forms. If these uncorrected forms become automatized with use, stabilization of aberrant L2 forms may occur in the learner's interlanguage system.

The only SA vs. AH study that showed an advantage for study abroad learners in terms of grammatical abilities was that of C. A. Isabelli and Nishida (2005), who found superior control of the subjunctive by SA learners. However, unlike all other comparative AH vs. SA studies, which investigated the interlanguage of intermediate students over a semester's time, this study examined the grammatical abilities of advanced AH and SA learners over a period of nine months.

The fact that students staying abroad for an academic year improved their grammatical (subjunctive) abilities confirms what many resident directors of SA programs have noted for years: students say that they are just "getting the system down" after a semester, when they have to leave to go home. It is possible that learners who only go for four months stay just long enough to have their interlanguage systems challenged and "shuffled up" by new input and new contexts and uses for items they already know. In Kellermann's (1985) terminology, they may be at the nadir of the "U-shaped" learning curve when they have to leave the target culture. This confusion may manifest itself in poor performances on tests of grammar on returning SA students and may account for their negative or equal performance to that of AH learners. However, by staying for nine months, SA students have the time to put their system back together in more native-like fashion and solidify new grammatical information in appropriate ways in their interlanguage system. Thus, it is the academic year SA students that are truly able to take full advantage of the target culture's linguistic laboratory in which to test, reject or accept hypotheses about the target language.

Grammatical attainment may also be dependent upon the effects of the pre-experimental level of language ability of the learner. The solid grammatical base and larger working memories possessed by advanced students who go abroad may facilitate their focus on the nuances of grammatical form in the L2 input without them needing to expend too many attentional resources. If the controlled processing of basic grammatical forms and structures has already taken place, the advanced learner can concentrate on acquiring subtle, often redundant grammatical forms in complex syntactic structures (e.g., the subjunctive). However, as mentioned earlier, intermediate learners with smaller working memories and not in possession of a strong grammatical base, may find that SA contextual conditions allow a "short-circuiting" of the controlled → automatic processing procedure and facilitate the automatization of incorrect L2 grammatical forms.

The question then arises: Is there a threshold level of grammatical or cognitive abilities that facilitates second language acquisition in a study abroad context? This question was first addressed by the pioneering work of Brecht and Davidson (1991), who found that "communication skills are most effectively built upon a solid grammar/reading base" (1991:16). Brecht et al. (1995) studied effects of SA contexts on the acquisition of Russian and found that grammatical and reading scores were the best predictors of proficiency gains in the study abroad context. The notion of a cognitive threshold for effective SLA was also proposed by Segalowitz and Freed (2004), who found that in order for oral proficiency and fluency to develop, learners may need to have an initial threshold level of basic word recognition and lexical access processing abilities. Moreover, Hulstijn and Bossers (1992) found that more advanced learners, who have automatized a great deal of lexical retrieval, have developed a larger working memory capacity, a valuable resource in the acquisition process that allows learners to process longer segments of input and hold longer strings in their heads for incipient output (Payne & Whitney 2002).

On the other hand, intermediate learners without a solid lexical and grammatical base may also possess less developed working memory capacities with which to process both content and grammatical form. With more of a burden placed on their phonological loop (Levelt 1989), these intermediate learners are unable to hold long strings of new input or output in working memory, and so less information (input) can be converted to intake. Due to frustration caused by their limited working memory capacity, and perhaps other pragmatic factors (mentioned above), these intermediate learners in a SA environment may choose to focus on meaning over form, and, therefore, may neglect to work on acquiring redundant target language grammatical markers with less communicative value. In contrast, advanced SA learners with a better cognitive, lexical and grammatical base (threshold) have

more cognitive resources to focus on and acquire redundant grammatical markers as they process input for meaning.

Thus, the evidence to date (Brecht & Davidson 1991, Brecht et al. 1995, Hulstijn & Bossers 1992, C.A. Isabelli and Nishida 2005, Segalowitz & Freed 2004) seems to point to the existence of a “threshold hypothesis” for students planning to study abroad. This hypothesis would state that those students with a well-developed cognitive, lexical and grammatical base will be more able to process and produce grammatical forms more accurately after their experience in a SA context. Nevertheless, due to the relative lack of data on more advanced learners and comparative intermediate-advanced level studies, it is unwise to generalize the results of the AH-SA Spanish studies to all learners in these two contexts. Therefore, the important questions posed by Freed (1995b) regarding the efficacy of study abroad experiences for beginning and intermediate learners (as opposed to advanced learners) cannot be answered without putting the “threshold hypothesis” to the test with future comparative AH-SA studies on learners with various pre-experimental levels of proficiency.

5. Conclusions

This plenary paper has investigated the effects of the interaction of cognitive and sociocontextual factors in the acquisition of Spanish as a second language by learners in classroom and study abroad contexts. While making reference to the results of the extant literature on this subject (Tables 1 and 2), I have explored the possible effects that selected features of the learning context (*setting, participants, end/purpose* and *norms of interaction and interpretation*) have had on the cognitive processes involved in the acquisition (*controlled vs. automatic processing, working memory*) of Spanish in AH and SA environments. As a result of this in-depth analysis, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

It is not the context of learning alone, but rather individual learner perceptions of specific characteristics of the contexts (*setting, participants [status and roles], end/purpose, norms of interaction and interpretation*) that interact with cognitive factors (*controlled vs. automatic processing, working memory*) to account for differences in linguistic performance among L2 learners in classroom and study abroad contexts.

Indeed, Giles and Byrne (1982) proposed that the L2 learner’s speech production is inextricably linked to the perceptions that learner holds about his/her own identity and the context in which communication takes place.

Taking this hypothesis to its logical conclusion, we may then temper the notion that there is a global effect of either classroom or study abroad contexts on all learners who acquire the target language in one of those two contexts. Instead of assuming that the aforementioned quantitative research on the effects of study abroad and classroom contexts on groups of learners can be generalized to predict effects a given context (AH or SA) on all learners in that environment, we need to also qualitatively focus on the effects of those contexts on individual learners.

In other words, given a learner with certain characteristics (e.g., a given proficiency level, personality, attitudes, motivation, prior knowledge of L1/L3, cognitive abilities, learning style, language learning strategies, prior experience living abroad, academic major) and certain perceptions of *setting, participants (status and roles), end/purpose* and *norms of interaction and interpretation* appropriate to given contexts, can we predict how that learner will fare in either learning environment (AH vs. SA) within a given set of contextual parameters (e.g., living conditions, length of stay, focus on form or meaning, amount and type of feedback given to learner, pragmatic pressure to “keep the communication flowing”)?

Large quantitative studies of groups of AH and SA learners do not begin to tell the whole story; indeed, some AH learners may not attend to form and some SA learners may spend a lot of time focusing on form and trying to restructure their interlanguage according to native speaker norms. Therefore, of great importance to the understanding of linguistic development in SA environments are the effects of individual factors (e.g., personality/cognitive styles, learning styles, language learning

strategies, cognitive abilities, motivation, prior linguistic and/or SA experience) as well as qualitative differences among individual learners on the acquisition process.¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, Segalowitz and Freed (2004) found statistically significant relationships between gains in oral performance and pre-test levels of cognitive abilities, thus confirming the hypothesis that there is a threshold of pre-departure cognitive development necessary for significant linguistic development in SA contexts. These scholars also looked at the effect of context on gains in cognitive abilities (lexical access speed, lexical access efficiency, attention control speed, attention control efficiency). The results show that similar gains in fluency-relevant cognitive processing abilities were made by students in both SA and AH contexts and that there was a complex relationship between these gains and time-on-task variables.

The effects of cognitive style on the acquisition of Spanish in a study abroad setting was studied by Hokanson (2000). Several tests of cognitive style preferences¹⁵ were administered to Intermediate and Advanced students before they spent a month in Guatemala. Measures of students' oral and written performance (discrete point grammar tests, short essays, observations of oral interactions, observations of student behavior [choice of activities]) were then analyzed in light of cognitive style preferences.

Results showed that learners gravitated toward activities associated with their cognitive style (e.g., extroverts sought out communicative interaction with NSs). In addition, similar oral and written gains were found in extroverts and introverts with no apparent advantage for intuitive or sensing students (MBTI ratings). Hokanson attributes the lack of difference in gains by students with different cognitive styles to the flexibility of the study abroad program that encouraged students to participate in activities of their own choice outside the SA classroom (e.g., take a bus to the market, go to a coffee shop to talk with a professor, seek out Spanish magazines, videos, TV and radio, staying at the school to study) that satisfied their particular learning styles. In addition, in her field observations Hokanson found that advanced students increased in social and cultural skills during their time abroad. However, the results of this pilot study need to be submitted to rigorous statistical procedures before more definitive conclusions about the interaction of cognitive styles and student outcomes can be proposed.

Despite the attention given to case studies of individual differences in SA studies involving learners of other languages (e.g., Russian [Brecht & Robinson 1995, Pellegrino 1997], Japanese [Dewey 2002, Marriot 1995, Siegal 1995] and French [Freed 1995b, Regan 1995, Wilkinson 1998, 2002]), only DeKeyser's (1986, 1990, 1991) early work looked closely at those differences as potentially contributing to student outcomes in SA and AH environments for second language learners of Spanish.

In fact, DeKeyser (1991:115) noted that "group differences were far less important than the individual differences." Comparative data on two SA individual learners in DeKeyser (1986, 1990) show that the Spaniards perceived the student who monitored very conspicuously to be harder to communicate with than the student who monitored but used interactive communication strategies to dissimulate his lexical and grammatical problems. In order to contextualize the use of Spanish by these two SA students, DeKeyser provides ample descriptions of their personalities and how they interacted with native speakers. DeKeyser speculates that in the long run, this difference in the type of exposure and interaction these two learners had with native speakers in Spain should differentially affect their L2 systems.

A dramatic example of the differential effects of the study abroad experience on individual learners was reported by Talburt and Stewart (1999). Their ethnographic study of five L2 Spanish learners on a five-week study abroad program in Spain described the experiences of the only African-American woman in the group. During the first week of the program that student reported being singled out and "harassed" verbally for her color, especially by male Spaniards. These actions made her reluctant to leave her host family's house and interact with native speakers, a necessary ingredient

¹⁴ See Pellegrino (1998) for a review of qualitative literature focusing on individual differences in student perspectives on language learning in SA contexts.

¹⁵ Tests of cognitive style preferences in Hokanson (2000) included the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Learning Style Inventory, an Attitude Assessment Form, Sensation Seeking Scale and the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (see Hokanson 2000:5 for a discussion of these instruments)..

for improvement in a learner's interlanguage in SA contexts. As a result of their study and their reading of Polanyi's (1995) study of women students in Russia and Twombly's (1995) research on the experiences of female students in Costa Rica, Talburt and Stewart (1999) call for study abroad programs to create ongoing opportunities for SA students to discuss cross-cultural issues of race and gender during their time abroad.

One of the reasons that the recognition of individual differences is so important in research on the context of learning has to do with the existence of variables unique to the SA context (e.g., homestay vs. other living conditions, the ready availability of various social contexts and opportunities for NNS-NS interaction outside of class for students willing to take advantage of them to improve their L2 communicative abilities). For instance, in a classroom setting 'at home' all students in that class are exposed to the same basic input, output and interaction opportunities. Depending on the location of the community, opportunities outside of class to interact with native speakers of Spanish may be readily available (e.g., many large urban areas in the US) or may be harder to identify (e.g., smaller, rural communities). Even if there are ample opportunities for students to interact with L2 speakers, they may not take advantage of this situation to talk with NSs since the students' daily existence does not depend on this interaction. Therefore, it is possible that the amount and type of exposure classroom students have to the target language and culture is more uniform, i.e., their primary exposure to the L2 takes place in the classroom.

On the other hand, in the SA context, although students in the classroom portion of the experience most likely have a uniform exposure to input and practice of output and interaction, outside the classroom each student has the opportunity to choose how s/he will spend the remaining hours of each day (e.g., talking with the host family, talking with L1 peers, reading, watching movies [in Spanish or English]). In addition, as Wilkinson's (2002) qualitative work on students studying French has shown, the amount and type of interaction between individual SA students and their host families may vary considerably. Therefore, the variability of these factors present within the SA context may cause study abroad student outcomes to vary considerably when compared to those of AH classroom students, who may have a relatively more uniform experience with the target language and culture. As mentioned earlier, Hokanson (2000) recommends encouraging SA students to choose activities consonant with their learning styles so that all students make gains in a study abroad context.

As Segalowitz and Freed (2004:196) state "Contexts differ in terms of what learning opportunities they present. Learners differ in terms of how ready they are linguistically and cognitively to seize the opportunities provided and to benefit from them once they do." Thus, future qualitative and quantitative research should take into account individual factors (e.g., personality, learning styles, cognitive abilities) as well as differences among learners in order to portray a more in-depth picture of the effects of a SA or AH context on different types of Spanish learners. In addition to standardized tests to evaluate personality, learning styles, language learning strategies and motivation, scholars could use attitude and demographic questionnaires, retrospective protocols and participant observation notes as valuable instruments for the gathering of such data.

Certainly, more research is needed in order to begin to address the question of the interplay of individual characteristics and features of a given context of learning. Future Spanish L2 empirical AH-SA research studies related to this topic should also include the following:

- a focus on *process* as well as on *products* of learning
- *qualitative* analyses (e.g., introspective diary studies, interviews, case studies of learner's perceptions about the context involving think-aloud and retrospective protocols) to complement *quantitative* studies on language acquisition of discrete items, by the same subjects (informants) profiled in the qualitative studies
- classroom conditions in both AH and SA environments (e.g., amount and type of interaction with instructor and other learners, focus on form/meaning, type of feedback given by instructors, focus on input, output and interaction) in both language and content-based (e.g., literature, culture) courses
- fine-grained instruments that capture oral and written L2 data using multiple tasks and that measure factors important to SA (e.g., sociolinguistic, pragmatic, conversational management strategies, vocabulary associations) as well as to AH (e.g., grammar and lexicon) contexts

- comparative semester/year-long/summer and shorter duration treatment periods in AH and SA contexts
- studies comparing effects of various SA living conditions (e.g., homestay, dormitory, other) on L2 development
- multiple post-tests to measure the long term effects of AH and SA contexts; what can be done to maintain proficiency acquired abroad?
- a variety of linguistic backgrounds of the subjects (L1 and L3)
- data from advanced and intermediate learners in AH and SA contexts.
- the role of working memory capacities in intermediate and advanced AH and SA learners
- videotaped sessions of learners interacting with NNS and NS interlocutors in various contexts

To conclude, more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to explore the complex interaction among cognitive processes and perceived contextual factors on the acquisition of Spanish as a second language by individual learners in classroom and study abroad environments. Only after we begin to understand the complexities involved in the acquisition process in both classroom (AH) vs. classroom + naturalistic (SA) contexts by various individuals can we apply this knowledge to advise students and to inform decisions regarding pedagogical and programmatic (study abroad) issues.

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