

## EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

### INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO STUDY ABROAD

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#### INTRODUCTION

"Ready access to travel and to technology-enhanced social networking (e.g., Facebook or Skype) has changed the nature of study abroad to the point where today's experiences are fundamentally different from those of earlier eras" (Kinging, 2013a, p. 345). In addition to more travel options and greater technology availability, study abroad has changed in other significant ways. In the US, more students are going abroad for short-term programs (less than 8 weeks), and the participants represent more diverse academic fields, with an increasing number of students from the sciences, social sciences, and business-related fields. The image of the North American student going abroad primarily for language learning, spending a semester or more, no longer fits reality. In fact, many students now engage in service learning, internships, or volunteer work while abroad. Nevertheless, study abroad remains an expected experience for students with a serious interest in language learning. In this column we will be looking at the varied roles that technology can play in the study abroad experience. Some argue that the availability of Internet-based social media while abroad is for language learning and cross-cultural understanding at best a distraction and at worst an inhibitor of full engagement in the target culture, inevitably leading to less exposure to the target language and therefore fewer opportunities for language proficiency gains. I will be arguing that, in fact, technology can play a positive role, particularly if students are provided with appropriate guidance and support. The main areas to be discussed are the personal and learning benefits of technology use while abroad, the formation of second-language identities, the affordances for pragmatic language development, the integration of mobile devices for place-based language learning, and the opportunities for enhancement of intercultural communication competence.

#### STAYING CONNECTED

It is not difficult to find numerous warnings for students going abroad about the downsides of remaining digitally connected, with articles such as "How the Internet screwed up study abroad" (Roberts, 2010) or "Benefits of study abroad WITHOUT technology" (Lee, 2015). National Public Radio in the US recently ran a story on how "Tech may get in the way of good culture shock while studying abroad" (Keck, 2015). In that report, a US student studying in Brazil described the epiphany she had when her phone (used for Internet connections) broke: "Without my phone I would just stay downstairs and talk with my [host] family. And it was like...it was great." In a piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "How Facebook can ruin study abroad", Robert Huesca (2013) recommends a *media pledge* for study abroad programs, similar to the pledge students often take to use the target language exclusively. In this case, the pledge would be not to use their digital music libraries, stream home television shows, or use instant messaging. Study abroad guidebooks frequently issue recommendations to students that they minimize their use of the Internet and mobile devices (Doerr, 2012). At least one study abroad provider, [Carpe Diem Education](#), prohibits students from bringing cell phones on study abroad programs.

While recent studies on study abroad and language learning tend to be more nuanced in the discussion of technology use in study abroad, they do point to individual student experiences that seem to confirm the

worst fears of those wanting to bridle the use of technology while abroad. Here is the profile of one student in a program in France (Kinging & Belz, 2005):

Her daily routine included attendance at required classes, after which she would go immediately to the study abroad center sponsored by her home university where she would stay until closing time, surfing the English language Internet and exchanging emails and Instant Messages with her friends and family in the U.S. Outside of service encounters, framed in various ways in her journal as threats to her well-being, she made little effort to engage speakers of French, limiting her use of the language to her courses. (p. 411)

Now, 10 years after this student's experience in 2005, there are significantly more opportunities for online social connections, particularly through the use of Internet-enabled mobile devices. Stewart (2010) described several US students in Spain skyping every day with boyfriends or girlfriends back home. In one case, the Skype calls were part of a pattern of lack of participation in the local community. However, in the other case, the student maintained the connection and communication with home, while still being able to integrate into the target culture. As Stewart and others have written, the extent of integration into the local community depends on a great variety of factors, not just the availability of online communication with the home culture.

There is little disagreement that internet connections to home communities can benefit the often difficult social and psychological adjustment involved in living in a foreign culture. Mikal and Grace (2012) comment:

Evidence showed that the Internet provided students with a broader social network that provided identity affirming embedded support—and increased the perception that support was available if needed. According to survey results, the continuity provided by a sense of connectedness and the consistency of online communities enhanced students' experience by facilitating integration and decreasing stress. According to scales measuring the benefits of embedded and perceived support, students reported an increased willingness to take risks, initiated more contact with members of the target culture, and experienced less stress as a result of their interactions online. (p. 300)

It stands to reason that emotionally well-adjusted students are more likely to enjoy their experience abroad and to be more willing to engage with the local community (see Mikal, Yang & Lewis, 2014). In any case, students are not likely to abandon their social networks while abroad. As is the case with mobile devices in the classroom, the best part of wisdom may be to take advantage of the inevitable—here Internet connectivity and mobile devices—to provide students with emotional stability while allowing them to tap in to the valuable connections the Internet can provide to the materials, institutions, and people of the target culture. Goertler (2015) provides examples of ways students might connect to the target culture through technology:

Before the students go abroad, technology makes it possible for them to connect with the target community, see it, and engage with it. Students may google-earth the place they will live and search the Internet for available resources they might use (e.g., a local lacrosse team). Students can engage in online communities related to the community they will live in (e.g., Facebook groups, blogs, etc.). In addition, they can read the local newspapers and watch the news to know, what topics are important to the people in the community and learn more about their perspectives. (para. 7)

The host community is likely to be as digitally engaged as the students themselves. Making connections electronically to that community—both at the local and national levels—can provide opportunities for

engagement during the study abroad experience, which may hold the possibility of longer-term relationships through continued electronic networking.

Nevertheless, the concern remains that “students who retain close ties with their home cultures beyond the initial transition abroad may fail to ever engage fully enough in the target culture to lose their own cultural referents” (Mikal & Grace, 2012, p. 302). The overreliance on home networks may indeed mitigate the value of the experience abroad as a means to gain a new perspective on one’s own cultural values and beliefs as well as those of people in the target culture. This makes orientation, guidance, and support before and during the program of great importance. The advice given needs to go beyond turning off cell phones, but should instead offer concrete tips on how both to maintain contacts back home and to engage with the host community electronically and in person. An organized study abroad program, I argue here, should provide mechanisms for positive technology integration, not only through effective orientation and counselling, but also through a dedicated shared online space.

### **FORGING A SECOND LANGUAGE IDENTITY**

Study abroad has been so heavily promoted for language learning because it has “the potential to enhance students’ language ability in every domain” (Kinginger, 2013b, p. 4). Particular improvement is typically seen in the areas of oral fluency and vocabulary development (Briggs, 2015; Trentman, 2013a). Because the L2 is used for actual, everyday interactions with native speakers, students develop real-world communication skills: “Study abroad appears to be particularly useful for the development of abilities related to social interactions, precisely those abilities that are least amenable to classroom instruction” (Kinginger, 2013b, p. 4). The repeated experiences study abroad students have in daily encounters—ordering food, going shopping, meeting strangers, solving practical day-to-day problems—provide opportunities for learning conversational norms and functional expressions. They likely engage daily in speech acts such as greetings, leave-taking, making requests, asking for help, apologizing, while at the same time gaining experience in circumlocution, turn-taking, and negotiating meaning. Gains in grammar knowledge and accuracy, in contrast, seem to be modest (Collentine, 2004; DeKeyser, 2010; Trentman, 2013a).

Study abroad can be such a powerful supplement to classroom instruction that any student with a major academic focus on language is urged to go abroad. Yet, as shown by both research and anecdotal information, language gains are by no means universal or automatic (Taguchi, 2015b). In fact, some studies have shown no gains from study abroad or even a regression in language skills for several students (Trentman, 2013b). The individual variation in language improvement can be a source of frustration for both students and teachers. Researchers too have struggled to come to terms with the lack of consistency in measurements of language gains through study abroad (see Stewart, 2010; Shively, 2010; Kinginger, 2011; Trentman, 2013a). Part of the problem lies in the complexity of the experience of living and studying abroad, with its multifaceted social, psychological, economic, and emotional dimensions, which vary greatly with each program, location, and individual. The variety of perspectives, environments, and experiences students may encounter makes study abroad “something of a mysterious process” (Meier & Daniels, 2013, p. 212) or, as Stewart (2010) puts it, a “black hole” (p. 138). Outside of formal instruction at the institution abroad, we tend to know very little about what happens to students during their stay, in particular the quantity and quality of local interactions (see Trentman, 2013a). Individual variation in study abroad experiences and outcomes is what has led to the increasing emphasis in research on qualitative studies, which describe in detail individual student experiences (Stewart, 2010; van Compernelle & Kinginger, 2013; Müller & Schmenk, 2015; Taguchi, 2015b).

There are a number of factors researchers have identified which may have an impact on the language learning gains in study abroad. These include initial level of proficiency, grammar knowledge, program type, duration of stay, local language variety spoken, and living situation (Trentman, 2013a). The individual profile of the student may have a major determining effect on local integration and hence on

language learning. Age, racial or ethnic characteristics (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012), as well as gender (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Kinginger, 2013a) can determine to what extent and with what success students integrate into the target culture. Social class and economic status may be factors as well (Kinging, 2004). A major contributor to success or failure is motivation, or the degree to which students are invested in becoming part of the target linguistic and cultural community.

However, even highly motivated students may have difficulty integrating into the local community if their language proficiency does not allow them to express themselves adequately. DeKeyser (2010) demonstrated how unproductive study abroad can be for linguistically ill-prepared students. Other researchers have pointed to similar findings (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). In some cases, limited proficiency stands in the way of students representing themselves adequately in the L2. Trentman (2013a) found that some US students in an Egyptian program prioritized speaking English, as they were “concerned about presenting a persona worthy of being befriended, something they could do much better in English than Arabic, particularly when their Arab friends were equally competent in both languages” (p. 466). In fact, a common theme across research of language learning and study abroad is the importance of reaching a particular threshold of linguistic competence in order to be able to connect to the target community (DeKeyser, 2010).

Students able and willing to seek out opportunities for contact with the local community are likely to have a variety of experiences and reactions. Encounters with the target culture may lead to curiosity and acceptance but could also lead in the opposite direction, namely to anxiety, anger, and rejection. As personal values and norms encounter difference, a variety of reactions are possible. Some US students, writes Kinginger (2013a), when encountering unfamiliarity, “typically retreat into a sense of superiority” (p. 342). Unexpected encounters in homestays can lead to awkward and unfortunate incidents. In one study, five of eight students requested to be moved to different families (Stewart, 2010) and in another, a participant requested to move multiple times (Isabelli-García, 2006). These kinds of incidents may be most likely to occur if the program is of short duration, so that students do not have the time to overcome the initial culture shock. In other cases, the program goals and structure may be oriented towards tourism or the traditional “Grand Tour” of Europe, leading to a series of superficial encounters of little consequence (see Kinginger, 2008).

On the other hand, encounters may lead to questioning and reflecting on one’s own values and norms, resulting in a willingness to craft a “third space”, representing a foreign language mediated identity (Kramsch, 1993; Kinginger, 2013a). Students who have the most satisfying and successful study abroad experience are those who engage in the target community to the extent that they take on this added identity (Block, 2007). This is something that is greatly facilitated through study abroad:

In contrast to proficiency gains, which can be obtained in both at home and study abroad settings, developments in second language identities are also of interest, because they appear to be specific to study abroad, or at least to the experience of using a second language in everyday environments that require its use. (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2012, p. 190)

Another benefit for students of learning via everyday, lived experiences is the knowledge that they can learn through informal, out-of-school contexts, an important lesson for the continued maintenance of language proficiency in the future.

Study abroad, as a voluntary and time-delineated enterprise, may not provide the same strong incentives for integration that migrants experience (Block, 2007). One of the ways to compensate for this lack of immediacy and necessity is to engage students through their own personal interests. In order to make connections with the target culture, students may seek out groups, hobbies, or sports clubs which mesh with their own inclinations. Studies have shown that establishing such connections makes a tremendous difference (Schauer, 2008; Dewey, Ring, Gardner, & Belnap, 2013; Meier & Daniels, 2013). They not

only provide opportunities for real-world language exchange with native speakers, they also provide valuable cultural experiences. At least some of the local community groups or organizations are likely to include online communities of practice or interest. Participating in such groups can have multiple benefits for study abroad participants. Investigating the possibilities and making contact before the program begins can establish relationships which allow students an easier initial entry into the target culture (Trentman, 2013a). Once in-country, the online participation may result in face-to-face meetings, as well as entry into related groups. After the program, continued participation can be instrumental in maintaining connections with the target culture.

A number of studies have shown that participation in exchanges through email, forums, or chat can be helpful in relationship building as well as in developing cultural awareness (Thorne, 2003; Tudini, 2007; Zeiss & Isabelli-García, 2005). Trentman (2013a) found that having students connect in this way before the start of the program offered valuable opportunities for establishing contact, something study abroad students often find difficult:

While communications technology is often seen as something that pulls students home from the study abroad environment (Kinginger, 2008), some of the most successful friendships of the participants' in this study were developed through online relationships that began prior to their study abroad experience. Finding ways to connect students at home and abroad via technology, and have them engage in activities that can lead to the development of deeper relationships that extend beyond the study abroad sojourn is one way of countering the trend of increasingly shorter terms of study abroad. (p. 470)

The kind of language encountered in online exchanges provides good preparation for the study abroad experience, as the colloquial register used will likely supplement the more formal language learned in the classroom and reflected in textbooks. Experiences of this type provide students opportunities for language learning in multiple ways, as well as for gaining metalinguistic awareness: "Telecollaborative exchanges provide a sheltered opportunity to participate in socially consequential interactions, discover the social significance of linguistic choices, and begin crafting an appropriate foreign-language-mediated identity" (Kinginger, 2011, p. 68). Studies have shown that chat and other forms of written exchange between learners and native speakers can promote the development of negotiating techniques for clarifying information, seeking confirmation, or asking questions, aspects of strategic competence that are of particular importance in study abroad (Tudini, 2007).

### **GAINING PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE SKILLS**

A naturally occurring, real-world environment, such as study abroad, provides an obvious opportunity for learning to use language in social settings. Students typically engage in a variety of interactions in their daily life abroad:

By experiencing diverse patterns of communication, learners develop their sociopragmatic sensitivity: they come to understand that their linguistic choices are guided by the contextual factors of the circumstances and the person to whom they are speaking, and those choices have a direct consequence on the outcome of the interaction and interpersonal relationship. (Taguchi, 2015b, p. 4)

However, studies have shown that students having studied abroad do not always outperform those who did not in their use of linguistically and culturally appropriate forms (Shively, 2010; Taguchi, 2015b). As in all study abroad outcomes, it depends on the context and the individual learner. In contrast to grammar, there are no clear-cut rules and patterns for learning pragmatic competence, understood here to be "the ability to employ different linguistic resources in an appropriate way for a given context" (Martínez-Flor

& Usó-Juan, 2006, p. 40). Learning comes slowly, usually through repeatedly encountering the use of particular language patterns in speech acts (requests, apologies, etc.) or other social settings or functions. This is also the case in other areas, such as turn-taking, expressing politeness, or using face-saving strategies. In our first language, we gain pragmatic competence through socialization, not through explicit study. Over time, these habits and speech patterns become so automatic, that for adult L2 learners, interference from pragmatic patterns in the L1 is frequent. Pragmatic learning in the classroom “generally has a poor reputation” (Taguchi, 2015b, p. 8), as these areas of language use are generally neglected in favor of grammar and lexis. In addition, textbooks typically give short shrift to language pragmatics.

In recent years, there has been a greater awareness of the importance of learning pragmatic features of language, especially as a consequence of the growing interest in language use online (see Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008). In participating in international online communities, pragmatic appropriateness is more important for effective and acceptable communication than grammatical accuracy or correct word choice (Tudini, 2007). Studies have shown that explicit instruction in pragmatics can improve student abilities in this area (Cohen & Shively, 2007). A recent state-of-the-art article provides abundant confirmation of the utility of explicit instruction (Taguchi, 2015a). The article highlights the important role technology can play in this area: “Effective use of technology could increase authenticity of pragmatic language use and incentivize the learning of pragmatics, which is often difficult to attain in a formal instructional setting” (p. 43). In fact, effective application of technology in the development of awareness and skills in pragmatic language use before and during study abroad can make a significant difference, making it more likely that students will be successful in engaging with the local community.

There is a number of ways in which technology can be used to foster learning of pragmatics. Approaches which provide networked access to resources are most appropriate for study abroad purposes. In a project involving Japanese students studying English in Australia, a commercial product ([English Central](#)) was used with good results. It featured videos on situations and encounters students were likely to encounter. Instruction in English pragmatics may be somewhat different than for most languages, as it will most likely not be tied to country-specific practices, given the role of English as a lingua franca and the absence of a single cultural homeland. For other languages, online resources may be more specific, tying together more closely language and culture. An example is [Strategies for Learning Speech Acts in Japanese](#), a website from the University of Minnesota Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), developed for self-access in helping learners with specific speech acts, namely greetings, requests, apologies, and complaints (Ishihara, 2007). For each speech act, there are sample dialogs with photos (including audio and transcripts), with the contexts chosen as those most likely to fit the needs of college-age learners of Japanese. The site provides rich contextual information and explanations of the linguistic forms used. It provides initial introductions to the cultural aspects of each speech act, along with comparisons to US patterns. The site includes self-check exercises with generic feedback provided, with the option of emailing results to an instructor.

Johnson and deHaan (2013) used a wiki to create a site for English learners dealing with requests and apologies. Students used the wiki in a variety of ways, including posting transcripts of their own encounters, which were then analyzed by the students themselves as well as commented on by other students. This kind of peer-to-peer learning can be a significant benefit to students (see Shao & Crook, 2015). Student to student assistance was part of the multi-layered feedback system discussed by Hampton (2015), in a study where the [Moodle](#) learning management system was used, together with the e-portfolio system [Mahara](#). The resulting web site provided support and instruction to UK students studying in France. Native speaker tutors monitored course forums and other student writing, offering assistance as needed. When patterns of recurring issues and common difficulties appeared, the tutors created online tutorials to provide customized help.

For learning pragmatics, the incorporation of digital video can be quite helpful, as it provides valuable visual and nonverbal dimensions, often important in speech acts, as well as in other instances of situated

language use. The use of video is frequently part of instruction in pragmatics (Takimoto, 2012; Cunningham, 2012). Whatever delivery platforms or media are used, designing a technology plan for enhancing students' pragmatic ability might begin with a consideration of the well-developed instructional strategies outlined by Cohen (2005) and Shively (2010). The first step both recommend is to raise awareness of sociolinguistic phenomena, initially in the students' L1. Students—particularly monolingual US students—tend to have “folklinguistic” theories about language and language learning (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995), typically based on the central role of learning grammar and vocabulary (Kinginger, 2011). To raise awareness, students might be asked to analyze L1 recorded speech acts for evidence of patterns and formulaic exchanges as well as other linguistic phenomena such as adjacency pairs (e.g., “How are you?” and “Fine, thanks”). Even though such exploratory material might be covered in a pre-departure orientation session, it would be helpful to have it available online, for possible consultation abroad. Several researchers have pointed to the positive student views on having some kind of handbook (print or electronic) available while abroad (Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004; Trentman, 2013a). The guidebook from the University of Minnesota, [Maximizing Study Abroad](#), has been found to be of particular helpfulness (Goertler, 2015), as it provides practical tips on living and studying abroad, but also introduces important metalinguistic concepts.

The orientation sessions or sessions should introduce and discuss a sampling of L2 pragmatic exchanges—the recommended next step in the learning strategy. Since before-departure students are most focused on highly practical, day-to-day living information, the examples should be kept to a small number that have obvious immediate benefits to students while abroad, such as requesting and thanking, or that have a high stakes status such as apologizing (Cohen, 2005; Shively 2010). More complete information and additional examples should be available to students while abroad through the website or electronic handbook. In some cases, researchers have reported on in-country courses in applied linguistics or pragmatics, often taught by the researcher, while serving as the on-site student advisor (Shively, 2008; Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo, & Valentine, 2009; Stewart, 2010; Trentman, 2013a; Goertler, 2015). This arrangement, however, is far from universal and, given shrinking budgets, is unlikely to be possible in many situations.

Having an on-site instructor helps significantly with mentoring and monitoring, but this is possible through a networked environment as well (see Hampton, 2015). Personalized attention to individual student progress may not be feasible, but tailoring resources and materials to the unique context of the study abroad program can be very helpful. Creating a resource-rich site, such as that for Japanese speech acts, is no easy task. Researchers in pragmatics have pointed to the importance of using, whenever possible, language spoken by native speakers in real, naturally occurring settings, rather than relying on the intuitive responses of native speakers to discourse completion tasks (DCT), often used in pragmatic studies (Golato, 2003; Shively, 2010). As Cohen (2005) comments, “questionnaires may reflect what natives think they do rather than what they do in real interactions” (p. 281). When available, speech can be retrieved from corpora (Taguchi, 2015a). It is possible as well to pull examples from sources such as feature films, television programs, filmed role-plays, or YouTube videos (see Alcón Soler, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006; Takimoto, 2012).

Online resources for learning pragmatics may focus exclusively on one specific area of pragmatics, such as speech acts. However, given the language-specific nature of pragmatic speech, it may be helpful in some cases to link to or include specific grammatical or lexical information typically needed. If dealing with polite requests in German, for example, one would want to link to information about subjunctive forms and modal verbs, while for Korean, information about titles and honorifics would be needed. Depending on the site and the language profile at that location, it can be very useful to include information about language varieties, including dialects, as well as specific communities of practice (i.e., student slang). Of particular usefulness are audio and video clips of authentic speech. Trentman (2013a) advocates strongly preparing students learning Arabic for the reality of Arabic diglossia (coexistence of

different language varieties), exposing them to at least one dialectal variety in addition to the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) of the classroom:

Even if students do not study the exact dialect used abroad, studying both MSA and a dialect at home will expose them to the shared linguistic features of the Arabic dialects as well as the sociolinguistic contexts in which they need to mix these varieties, making them more prepared to deal with the sociolinguistic reality of the Arab world, whether they intend to go abroad or simply engage with a variety of Arabic media at home. (p. 469)

In a recent study, Raish (2015) found that having students learn at least some dialect forms before going to Egypt made a significant difference in the initial integration into the local community.

According to Taguchi (2015a), the most consistent benefit for students comes from an instructional model which provides pragmatic samples, followed by opportunities for production practice. This is the recommended next step in the learning strategy—to provide virtual practice with using appropriate pragmatic language. One of the advantages of using technology for practice with pragmatics is the ability to provide feedback. In real-life encounters, native speakers are less likely to correct miscues in pragmatic appropriateness than in grammar mistakes, due to the greater possibility of loss of face for the learner, as well as to the fact that there are not well-established “correct” options in many situations (Shively, 2010). The kind and extent of computer-based feedback provided will depend on the incorporation of machine intelligence (versus pattern matching) and on the resources available, which may range from stock text responses or explanations to a library of audio or video clips. An intelligent system tracking student progress can keep a log and flag errors to a monitoring system or person. With improvements in speech technology, one can imagine use of speech recognition in this context. To be useful to study abroad students, a pragmatic learning site would still be valuable even without a great deal of interaction or customized feedback. In fact, there is a danger of creating something with too sharp a learning curve. A study abroad companion site should be designed to supplement and support students learning experiences abroad, not replace them. It is also the case, as Hampton (2015) comments, that students abroad already carry a heavy cognitive and emotional load coping with a new linguistic and cultural environment and do not need the extra burden of trying to work out how to use complex technology tools or services.

One of the ways in which study abroad programs have helped participants with learning pragmatics is to send them out to become amateur ethnographers (Jurasek, Lamson, & O'Maley, 1996; Ogden, 2006; Trentman, 2013a). This provides valuable cultural insights as well as language learning opportunities. Students are typically trained in basic ethnographic field methods, providing the ability to observe, record, and analyze events and interactions in the target culture:

This connects their more general knowledge to the local context they encounter, promotes interactions with locals via data collection, helps them overcome ethnocentric orientations, and assists linguistic development through the need to collect and analyze information in the target language beyond superficial interactions. (Trentman, 2013a, p. 469)

This kind of hands-on learning is likely to imbue social encounters with more significance and, as Trentman (2013a) comments, may be used on the students' return from abroad in follow-up analysis and reflection, in the context of a senior seminar or other such course. Shively (2008) sent students studying in Spain out with voice recorders to record service encounters at banks, cafés, and stores. Students created transcripts of the conversations, which they analyzed in their journals. Shively provided program participants brief instruction in Spanish pragmatics with a one-hour orientation at the beginning of the program and shorter sessions during the sojourn, including half an hour at five weeks, just prior to students' scheduled second round of service encounters. That session focused on making requests, which students implemented in the upcoming service encounter. It is likely that this kind of just-in-time

orientation is of particular usefulness for students.

## LEVERAGING MOBILITY

In her study of service encounters in Spain, Shively (2008; 2011) equipped students with dedicated digital voice recorders (Marantz 660, at some \$350 each). Today, students would be able to use their audio recording capabilities on their own smartphones. In the US, in 2015, 92% of students own smartphones (exceeding for the first time the percentage owning laptops, 91%; Dahlstrom, Brooks, Grajek, & Reeves, 2015). Given that fact, it seems nonsensical not to have students use the phones for data gathering, and not just for audio recording, but for taking photos and videos as well. Today's smartphones are, in fact, ideal for ethnographic fieldwork, given their built-in GPS and networking capabilities. There are a great variety of ways in which students abroad could engage with on-site people and places through use of their smartphones, such as creating a virtual tour of a city, museum, park, or campus; conducting surveys, interviews, or polls; doing realia studies (menus, posters, etc.) based on photo-capturing and running an optical recognition or translation app (such as [TextLens](#)); or creating a narrated montage of signs and billboards.

In studying a given neighborhood through its signs and inhabitants, students could aspire to provide a view into the linguistic landscape of a given area. Leung and Wu (2012) used signs in Mandarin and Cantonese to study the changing dynamics of the tension between long-established Cantonese speaking Chinese-Americans in Philadelphia's Chinatown and the spread of Mandarin through its popularity as an instructed foreign language in the United States. Bloomaert (2013) provides another interesting example, examining the make-up and history of a neighborhood in Amsterdam through its changing signs. Students might similarly study the mix of languages used in advertising or in personal or public signs, in that way combining linguistic and cultural study.

Many North American students are likely to be familiar with the very popular "[Humans of New York](#)," and may find its combination of street portraits and brief life stories inspiring, and something they might want to emulate with a project of their own. The creator, Brandon Stanton, has recently expanded the scope of the project, collecting photos from some 20 countries, with a special [interest in Iran](#). He also created a [Facebook page about Syrian refugees](#) to Europe, a topic likely to be of interest to many students as an example of interacting with an issue of significant current interest. In fact, the ability of a smartphone to document events as they unfold makes it a powerful tool for capturing immediacy, mass events, or unexpected scenes of everyday life. In the process, students can move beyond the tourist gaze, towards the possibility of interacting with critical social or political issues. One approach that could be used for this purpose is reflexive photography. This involves selecting key photographs, which are then annotated to provide a personal record and analysis of a situation or location (Amerson & Livingston, 2014). Wallace (2015) describes the use of reflexive photography in a project helping international teaching assistants in the United States improve their English. In some cases, an approach like that used in [PhotoVoice](#) projects (Graziano, 2011) might be appropriate, in which local inhabitants are provided with loaner cameras to take pictures they judge to signal important aspects of their cultural identity. This could become part of a compelling project in oral history.

Stanton always asks permission before photographing his subjects. This issue is one which students engaging in similar projects are likely to face, along with cultural or religious concerns over photographs. Ethical concerns and cultural sensitivity apply as well to making audio or video recordings. For Shively's (2010) study, students were told to record their service encounters surreptitiously. This process was justified by the researcher, in that the conversations took place in public areas:

The Institutional Review Board of the researcher's home university approved this method of data collection based primarily on the principle that the Spaniards who were unknowingly recorded along with the students were speaking in a public place and that anyone in the vicinity would be

able to overhear what they said. Public speech does not carry the same risks to the speaker as does private speech, which may contain elements that a person may not want other people to hear. (p. 130)

There may be a difference between recording anonymously an openly public interaction with many speakers (orders being placed at a food stand, for instance) and recording a conversation with a single individual, particularly, as was the case in this study, when detailed information about that person and location were documented. In any case, this is an area where some open discussion about best practices would be advisable (see Rosenbaum, 2012). This could be done in person, or become part of a program's online presence.

As smartphones have improved in terms of processing power, connectivity options, and quality of audio/video capture and processing, using them to connect directly to cloud services has become much more feasible. In a mobile blogging project several years ago, the intent was to have students send all photos, text entries, and audio recordings directly to a blog (Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo, & Valentine, 2009). However, this proved to be technically challenging, resulting in a total of only two images and three audio recordings actually posted. Today there are mobile apps, such as [BlogPress](#), [Blogsy](#), or the [WordPress mobile app](#), that make it quite easy to upload media-rich blog posts. WordPress recently added an [Instagram widget](#) that shares Instagram posts in a blog sidebar. Facebook and Pinterest are easily now updated from mobile phones. Microblogging, such as through Twitter, is an ideal candidate for use on mobile devices. Of potential interest as well are apps for writing personal journals, such as [Penzu](#), [Rove](#), [Journey](#), or [Day One](#). These include features such as automatic reminders, searching, multiple privacy options, media integration, and cloud syncing.

In fact, there are many mobile apps that can be helpful for students engaged in study abroad. The Study Abroad Blog offers an [annotated list](#) of apps in a variety of categories, as does [studyabroad.com](#). These apps range from obvious, such as [Google Maps](#), the [Wi-Fi Finder](#), or [Evernote](#) (for note taking), to more specialized areas such as locating a public bathroom ([Sit or Squat](#)). Another option in support of a study abroad program is the creation of a dedicated app, ideally available on all major mobile platforms (Godwin-Jones, 2011). An example is the Connect-Exchange Study Abroad app from Texas Tech University (Rice & Lauren, 2014). It is designed to foster communication and collaboration, and features user-generated content through student uploads and categorizing of local sites, people, and artefacts. The app's *Activity Stream* shows most recently uploaded content, along with the number of views of each item. Users are asked to tag uploads using their own descriptions or the suggested tags. Unfortunately, the embedded tags tend to encourage essentialist views of culture, as they include categories such as *collectivistic* or *individualistic*. Moving even further in that direction is the [CultureGPS](#) app from the Hofstede Center, which provides for tourists or business people numerical scores for national cultures in the familiar Gert Hofstede categories of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. This encourages the misconception that individual cultural identity is determined by generalized national characteristics (Godwin-Jones, 2012).

Because mobile devices are available anywhere and anytime, they provide a uniquely efficient tool for support. That use was the primary goal of the group blog project discussed in Shao and Crook (2015), which offered assistance in cultural and linguistic areas to Chinese students in the UK. Cultural adaptation and language learning are the goals behind the EU sponsored [MASELTOV Project](#) (Kukulska-Hulme, 2015), which provides migrants with a daily mobile companion, supplying localized information and place-based opportunities for vocabulary acquisition. The GPS and other enhanced capabilities of smartphones now also allow creation of quite sophisticated place-based mobile games. In fact, the [ARIS platform](#) was specifically designed for this purpose. A number of language-learning games have been created with this platform. *Mentira*, for example, was designed to teach Spanish pragmatics through students helping to solve a murder mystery (Holden & Sykes, 2013):

Successful completion of in-game tasks requires completing various pragmatic functions such as agreement, refusal, and apology with each of the NPCs [non-playing characters]. Pragmatically appropriate player choices lead to more clues and successful gameplay, whereas inappropriate pragmatic choices can result in roadblocks or game over experiences. Another unique component of the Mentira-based curriculum is a visit to a local neighborhood where the game's story is based. Players are required to collect clues while visiting local sites to solve the mystery. The connection of the fictional game world and the real world plays a critical role for the learners, as it makes the target language interaction with simulated characters meaningful. (Taguchi, 2015a, p. 14)

There are obvious opportunities here for mobile games to incorporate places, situations, characters and history tied to the location of a study abroad program. It is certainly possible that students would be included in or even primarily responsible for creating such projects. In fact, the [Chrono-Ops](#) game (saving the planet from ecological disaster) was created by students and designed in a way which allows future users to add content created on their mobile devices. Using the GPS capabilities of phones, apps could be developed which provide content (text, audio, or video) based on the user location. The [Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature](#) app provides an example. Similarly, scavenger hunts could be created which help students learn about landmarks, institutions, or other significant places in a given location. My local television station recently created such an app, the [Mercy Street Scavenger Hunt](#), built with [Scavify](#), to take viewers of a new TV show around Richmond, Virginia, to discover US Civil War sites and characters.

## GAINING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Using games for developing pragmatic language skills likely makes that process more enjoyable to students and therefore may lead to more time on task. The development of pragmatic competence in the L2, combining as it does language and culture, is a key factor in students gaining confidence and competence in the area of intercultural communication, a stated goal for many study abroad programs: “Through the examination of cross-cultural differences in pragmatic behavior and the specific language practices of a speech community, the study of L2 pragmatics can play an important role in developing the cognitive, behavioral, and communicative components of intercultural competence” (Shively, 2010, p. 106). That process involves the experience of using the L2 in real social interactions, but also the opportunity to analyze and reflect on those encounters. The greater awareness of metalinguistic considerations in communication is a key goal in the instruction of pragmatics. While some students may choose on their own to write thoughtfully about their interactions abroad, most current programs which target language learning and intercultural learning provide organized, often required, opportunities for online student reporting. In US study abroad programs, this is usually done through student blogs, which may serve as much for marketing as they do for learning (Rodríguez, 2010). Blog posts, assuming they are made public, have the benefit of allowing friends and family to follow student study abroad adventures. In some cases, this one-to-many format may free students from the obligation of more frequent, hence potentially disruptive, personal communication back home (Mikal & Grace, 2012).

In studies on the use of blogs for study abroad in recent years, some best practices have emerged. Although blogs serve the important role of helping to develop learner autonomy, guidance is often needed to introduce students to key concepts, to suggest contexts for discussion, or to encourage deeper reflection. Lee (2011) stresses the importance of “training students to learn autonomously with teacher intervention guidance and support” (p. 89). Moving beyond surface level understanding of social interactions and miscommunications may require prompting: “Teachers need to find ways, such as using guided questions, to stimulate students’ high order thinking” (p. 90). As part of that effort to encourage and enable more reflective posts, Lee suggests the option of having students blog in their own native language. This is, in fact, done in the highly regarded *Cultura* model for cross-cultural exchange

(Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001). Another approach, used by Winke and Teng (2010), is to have students write short weekly posts in the L2, in this case Chinese, and more intermittent, longer, and reflective posts in the L1, here English. In a program for UK learners of French, Hampton (2015) had students use different languages for different kinds of posts, namely English for academic and reflective writing and French for more informal posts, such as those recounting excursions, movie reviews, or sharing recipes. Shao and Crook (2015) describe the experience of having students participate in mobile blogging as “naturalized language learning” (p. 19), as Chinese students in the UK moved from exclusive use of Chinese to a mix of Chinese and English, and finally, after an extended period, to English.

Lee (2011) points out that the post-comment structure of blogs does not encourage *cultural exchange*, with exchanges being quite brief and lacking in continuity. Goertler (2015) points to the fact that blog posts often echo each other, with students rarely engaging others through questioning views or expressing opposing opinions. An alternative to blogs is to have students create personal electronic journals. These do not tend to be public, but that is also an option. Stewart (2010) had US students during a semester abroad in Mexico write in their journals two to three times a week. For the first three weeks, students wrote in English, then switched to Spanish for the rest of the semester, following requests from the students themselves. Stewart reported that through the journals, he was able to have a fuller, ecological grasp of the entire Mexican experience, including living arrangements, classroom instruction, and interactions with native speakers. This gave him significant insight into the different ways students were living and learning, providing both opportunities for intervention, when needed, and a more complete picture of student learning for assessment purposes. Through the use of student journals, Jackson (2013) was able to follow the development of linguistic and pragmatic competence doing a semester abroad: “Those who displayed a higher level of sociopragmatic awareness in the host language at the end of the sojourn had a more sophisticated understanding of cultural difference and a higher level of intercultural competence” (p. 184). As was the case with blogs, it may be helpful for student journals to include recommendations on topics as well as guiding questions.

Another option for students to engage electronically with others on their experiences abroad is to use Facebook or other social media. Back (2013) points out that one of the advantages of Facebook is that, given its wide international usage, it is possible that students could contact host families in advance through that medium. This could also result in continued Facebook interactions, something less likely to be possible with blogs or other media normally used in academic settings. In his study of Facebook use by English learners from a variety of countries, Mitchell (2012) found that Facebook proved to be an efficient mechanism for maintaining contact, but not well suited for the initial process of making friends. As Facebook plays such a central role in the lives of many college-age students, it provides a communication channel with which students feel comfortable and which therefore they are likely to use regularly. In a recent project of UK students in France, Hampton (2015) discovered that students found the communication options provided through Moodle did not fit their needs for informal conversation among themselves and decided to create a backchannel Facebook group. Similarly, a group of US students in Europe used the app [GroupMe](#) to create a group discussion tool that bypassed the “official” social media used in the program (Hetz, Dawson, & Cullen, 2015).

One of the benefits of having an organized group of study abroad participants regularly writing about their experiences is the possibility for the home university to incorporate those student experiences into regular on-campus instruction. A group of US students studying in Spain served as “intercultural informants” for students at home studying Spanish (Elola & Oskoz, 2008). In addition to raising greater awareness of cross-cultural issues in the at-home group, the questions from those students led the group in Spain to reflect more on their social interactions and what they meant:

Study abroad students helped confirm or reject some of the at home students’ preconceptions about the culture of Spain, especially on certain occasions in which the knowledge acquired in the

classroom did not accurately correspond with first-hand knowledge of Spain's diverse cultures. As a result, the study abroad students became the eyes and ears of the at home students. Moreover, it was important to discover that the at home students' comments made the study abroad students think more deeply about certain aspects of life in Spain. (p. 472)

Beloit College (Wisconsin) students studying in Buenos Aires, Dakar, and Quito connected with a variety of classes at their home campus through blogs and videoconferencing (Ellett, 2010). The peer-to-peer learning was effective for both groups, while the experience is reported to have eased the reentry process for returning students. They were able to reconnect with at-home students who had shared their experience virtually, and thus were more receptive to the changed perspective of the returnees. Bittner (2015) points out that the scheduled interactions with the home campus provided a helpful structure for the study abroad students. On the other hand, Hampton (2015) found that some students resented and resisted the requirement to connect to the home campus, feeling that it interfered with their main goal of integrating into the target culture.

## CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Much of the research on study abroad emphasizes the importance of providing some kind of structured follow-up for returning students. There seems to be a growing recognition that this needs to be more than a one-time presentation or lecture, but rather an opportunity for students to reflect on the experience and use the knowledge and skills gained to develop a project related in some way to the experience abroad. That could be through a regular on-campus course, online learning, or through contributions to a shared electronic space such as a wiki. Students at the University of Warwick returning from a year abroad in France serve as online consultants to the next cohort (Hampton, 2015). For that program, participating students have a permanent electronic companion for their experience by creating an e-portfolio on Mahara. One of the other options is the use of digital storytelling, in which students focus on a particular experience, write a script (usually in the L2), and provide a narrated slideshow, often accompanied by an appropriate soundtrack. Digital storytelling has been used with good results in study abroad environments (Rodríguez, 2010, using [VoiceThread](#); Buckner, 2015, using [SoundSlides](#)). The created stories provide excellent vehicles for sharing highlights of the study abroad experience.

In addition to connecting to the campus community, returning students can use social media to continue the connections they established abroad. As Shively (2010) comments, this is likely to be increasingly an option, no matter where the experience took place:

As the number of people who participate in online communities throughout the world continues to increase, educators must recognize that increasingly, being a member of a culture also includes being a member of an online community. Instead of discouraging SA [study abroad] students from using technology during their sojourn abroad, educators may want to consider the ways in which new technologies can be best employed as a means to engage students in online TL [target language] communities, as well as to help them develop pragmatic competence. (p. 124)

The advice sometimes given to students going abroad to forego technology is not just unrealistic, it also wrongly assumes that host communities are not digitally connected:

The assumption behind advising against Internet and TV use is that locals do not share in these activities. Given that using the Internet and other media is one way people become viewed as 'globalised', portraying the host people as not actively using these media renders them parochially localized. (Doerr, 2013, p. 237)

As Doerr points out, the whole discourse of immersion used to describe the study abroad experience sets

up a dichotomy that does not exist in reality. *Immersion* also assumes that both the home culture of the students and the host country represent homogeneous communities. Part of the rationale for exposing students to language varieties is to sensitize them to the reality of linguistic and cultural diversity within a given language community. The frequent code-switching and mixing of registers on the Internet, one hopes, will expose students to the “heteroglossic real world of linguistic hybridity” (Kramsch, 2014, p. 300), moving them beyond the binary opposition of home and host cultures, towards a more multilinguistic and multicultural orientation.

An important part of the broadening of horizons through study abroad should be a more complete understanding of language. Encouraging students to focus on developing abilities in language pragmatics may help them gain a greater appreciation of real language use, expanding their skill set and their sense of what is involved in being a competent L2 speaker. As Kinginger (2013b) comments, we expect study abroad students to “broaden their repertoire of speech acts, become more aware of register and style, develop greater autonomy as conversationalists, and incorporate fluency-enhancing formulaic language into their speech” (p. 4). By paying attention to language pragmatics, through themselves noting and analyzing in their blogs or journals the interactions they experience, students gain insight into what aspects of language are most crucial for effective communication and participation in social communities.

It is likely that in many programs, student journals or other online writings are used for formal assessment of student learning, measurement of progress in linguistic or pragmatic performance, as well as development of intercultural communication competence. As Kinginger (2013a) points out, it is not just knowledge of the correct pragmatic forms that should be considered:

Assessments based on performance alone are not sufficient. Assessing student knowledge of L2 pragmatics should take into account not only what students can do, but also what motives and meanings are assigned to this performance, and the degree to which these reflect a sophisticated interpretation of their use in the local contexts the students have experienced. (p. 353)

Students may be aware of the culturally normative practices and patterns, but for personal or cultural reasons may elect not to use them. Some US female students in Japan, for example, were reluctant for reasons of personal integrity and conviction to use the self-effacing language typical of many Japanese women (Kinger, 2013a). Kim and Brown (2014) point to the importance of students learning not only frequently used pragmatic forms (i.e., pragmalinguistic resources), but also the range of options and situations in which they can be used (sociopragmatic awareness). They provide examples from a Korean context of the limited usefulness of students simply learning idealized L1 norms in this area, as actual use tends to be fluid and personal.

In gaining pragmatic language abilities, students move away from nativist views about language; that is, the idea that native speaker characteristics are the goal of language learners. Nativism, as Kramsch (2014) comments, is still prevalent in our classrooms, textbooks, and study abroad brochures. Briggs (2015) points to how this is perpetuated through marketing by private language schools, as in this example from [Eurolinga](#): “No matter what your level, you will soon be speaking fluently, with understanding, ease and confidence. By taking part in one of our study abroad programs...you will be armed with an authentic accent” (p. 129). Nativist views are likely ingrained in a student’s own view of language. One hopes that study abroad will help to break the stranglehold that grammar, vocabulary, and native-like pronunciation seem to have over the popular view of language learning and help students “break away from inhibitory perceptions of accuracy and its effects on intelligibility” (Müller & Schmenk, 2015, p. 16). For many US students, successful communication in the L2 echoes the findings of Miller and Ginsberg (1995) for students having studied abroad in Russia: “Success in Russian means producing grammatically correct utterances” (p. 302). Such beliefs “exclude many of the features of language for which study abroad is particularly advantageous” (p. 295). Depending on the profile of the students in the program, discussing

and changing learner beliefs about language remains today an area that could benefit from explicit instruction, before and during the period abroad (see Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004).

The intercultural awareness, language skills, and knowledge students gain through study abroad can be a life-changing experience, moving students to subject positions as global citizens and confident L2 speakers. One of the students in Shively's (2011) study of US students in Spain commented: "I like myself better when I speak Spanish well" (p. 1833). The experience of learning the language through study abroad has strengthened her self-confidence and created a new positive identity as a Spanish speaker. This is the kind of outcome we hope to see from study abroad: both enhanced language proficiency and an awareness of the benefits of a new subject position. Case studies of student experiences demonstrate the kinds of unique experiences students undergo, which provide them special insights into their own cultural roles and identities. That might include using one's whiteness and status as a native speaker of English to gain entry into an Egyptian community, in order to then use that connection to practice speaking Arabic (Trentman, 2013a); or the realization of a student's inevitable "foreigner" identity when correctly using Japanese deprecating gift-giving language, only to be laughed at by native speakers (Kinginger, 2013a). Making sense of such experiences is assisted by sharing with others and comparing experiences across cultures. That is not something that happens on its own. As DeKeyser (2010) comments: "No magical implicit learning process takes over when the students go abroad" (p. 89). This is equally true for language learning and cultural awareness. It is particularly important for students to gain an understanding of the dynamics of their own identity formation, and how it is shaped by context and experience. Ushioda (2006) calls for language teachers to "develop [their] students' critical awareness of the very barriers, constraints and ideologies in the surrounding social context that limit their autonomy and motivation" (p. 159). This is of particular relevance for language students in study abroad environments. To provide maximum benefit from the study abroad experience, it is important for programs to prepare students adequately, linguistically and culturally, and to supply engagement opportunities and mechanisms for reflection and sharing. In that process, networked and mobile technologies are likely to play an ever-increasing role.

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