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AAUSC Issues in Language Program Direction

Insights from Study Abroad for Language Programs

Sharon Wilkinson
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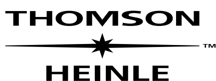

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Chapter 7

From the Learner's Perspective: A Case Study on Motives and Study Abroad

Kate Douglass

Abstract

As we attempt to better understand the study abroad experience from the perspective of the participants, we must examine individual learners' motives for language study and for study abroad and the role of social history in shaping these motives. Framed by an activity theoretic perspective, this study explores the language learning motives of one learner of French as they are shaped and reshaped in anticipation of and during a one-semester undergraduate study abroad program in Paris. Findings reveal that this learner's motives for learning French and for studying abroad are initially shaped by her social history, including her previous language learning experiences, her parents' early pressure to succeed, and her personal life goals, as well as by her parents' and her own perceptions of the use value of language learning. Over time, the strengthening or weakening of these motives in response to the shifting material circumstances in the Parisian context (including the academic program, her daily encounters in French society, and her degree of access to certain French communities of practice) impacts her strategies and behaviors and her success overseas. The results of this study demand a return to a focus on the individual learner in teaching and in research on language learning contexts at home and abroad and suggest further investigation of the role of motives and social history in shaping learners' goals in language learning, their decisions to study abroad, and their experiences once overseas.

> I don't even remember what I ordered but ((sigh)) whatever I said [the waiter] just like <u>laughed</u> at me and was like sort of <u>mocking</u> me and I was just like ready to cry because I hadn't ate in like a <u>day</u> + um so I ate- he brought it to me and I ate like real fast and like left and so then until the next day I didn't eat until I was with like the other American students because I didn't want to go through that experience of being mocked again (oral interview, May 2001)

The story of this student's frustrations on her first day in Paris is typical of many undergraduate students beginning a semester or year abroad. They often arrive with a false sense of confidence in their abilities, and many experience a period of linguistic and culture shock as they attempt to adapt to the demands of daily life in the target culture. But while students' initial responses may be quite similar, De Ley (1975), Pellegrino (1998), Wilkinson (1998, 2005), Yager (1998),

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and others point out that what ultimately becomes of their experience abroad can vary greatly. Some are able to overcome their initial anxiety and frustration and succeed in making significant linguistic progress and/or in integrating to some degree in the foreign culture, whereas for others, their limited proficiency and frustrating encounters with native speakers remain an insurmountable obstacle, and they may resist integration and/or experience little linguistic gain. While other researchers have demonstrated that factors such as gender (Kline, 1993; Polanyi, 1995; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995), race (Talburt & Stewart, 1999), and personality and learning styles (Ginsberg & Miller, 2000) play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of study abroad for individual learners, the results of this study suggest that we must also consider learners' motives for language study and for study abroad, which are shaped by their social history and their perceptions of the usefulness of language learning and which in turn shape their strategies and behaviors and ultimately their success overseas.

This study traces the experiences of Claire,[1] a beginning language learner, over the course of a one-semester undergraduate study abroad program in Paris in an effort to contribute to the search for answers to important questions regarding study abroad. For instance, what influenced Claire's decision to study French and to study abroad? How did her motives and personal goals shape her efforts at language learning and at integration in the French culture? How did the Parisian context itself (including the material circumstances in that context) shape her motives and efforts and ultimately her success overseas? What can home-country instructors and program directors learn from Claire's experiences abroad and her perspectives on these experiences, and in what ways can a deeper understanding of her motives for language learning and for study abroad contribute to a rethinking of the design and implementation of basic-level language programs?

Design of the Project

This study was informed by an activity theoretic view of motivation, which argues that motives are multiple and malleable, developing in the process of activity and shaped by the contexts in which they are situated (Lantolf & Genung, 2000, 2002). Unlike traditional perspectives (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), which conceive of motivation as a unitary and stable construct capable of being externally and objectively measured, manipulated, and used to predict second language achievement, activity theory argues that motives are unique to individuals and shaped by their social histories and that since they are constantly shifting and not always positive, they cannot be measured at any one moment (e.g., via self-report questionnaire) in an effort to predict later success.

The activity theoretic perspective on motives requires a methodological framework that is capable of focusing on individual learners (i.e., through a case study format) and of tracing the historical development of their motives over time (i.e., through an ontogenetic, or historical, approach). The case study format was selected to provide access to an in-depth understanding of Claire's complex motivational structure, the longitudinal nature of the study served to demonstrate the

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dynamic and situated nature of her motives, and the use of open-ended and introspective means of data collection, including a language learner journal and open-ended interviews, was intended to provide access to Claire's perspective on her experience of learning French and on the various motives that shaped, and were shaped by, this experience. In focusing on the experiences of one language learner, this research is situated within a long tradition of studies on single individuals, from Freud and Piaget in psychology to Halliday (1975) and Scollon (2001) in first language acquisition to Lantolf and Genung (2000, 2002) and Kinginger (2004) in second language acquisition.

Data were collected over a period of six months, but follow-up interviews continued for a period of three years after the end of the study abroad program.[2] During the four months she lived in Paris, Claire maintained a language learner journal, in which she was asked to record any thoughts or experiences that she deemed relevant to the language learning process and the overseas experience. In addition, interviews were conducted both via e-mail and in person before, during, and after the program, and materials were collected from her courses, including her notebooks and assignments and some of the other written work she produced. Journal entries and interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed for emergent themes and patterns. The coursework was primarily used to elaborate on the course content and as supporting evidence of her linguistic progress.

Claire

Claire began the study of French as a college junior in a year-long Accelerated French course in an American university. Prior to this course, she had had minimal exposure to French or other foreign cultures, and she had never traveled outside of the United States. Raised in a small town of little diversity but with a strong industrial tradition, Claire was taught early on the importance of hard work and excellence in education. Pressure from her parents (and particularly her father) to achieve and maintain high grades and a high class rank in school eventually led her to internalize a strong drive for excellence, which would later impact her approach to language learning. Her first exposure to foreign languages came through her junior high and high school Spanish classes, where there were few occasions for communicative language use and where she was "tormented" by a classmate who ridiculed her attempts to speak. She abandoned Spanish as soon as she had met her high school requirements.

When she learned midway through her college education that she would once again need to satisfy a language requirement, Claire chose French because she was interested in communicating in French with several French-speaking friends and because her high school and college history courses had led to a growing interest in French history and a strong desire to study history in Paris. With the hope of attending a study abroad program in Paris in the fall of her senior year, she enrolled in an accelerated French course that would allow her to complete the university language requirement in the two semesters preceding her planned study in Paris. The course was taught with an innovative pedagogical approach

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that involved a special focus on cultural analysis and an exchange with a class in France (including one-to-one e-mail pairings, weekly real-time chat between the two classes, and a trip by each class to visit the other class' school). As it turned out, Claire experienced great frustration in this course as she felt that the focus on culture led to insufficient opportunities for language instruction and practice, as she judged her keypal (e-mail partner) to be immature and minimally engaged in the exchange and the discussions, and as she observed that the pace of the course was slowed down by her classmates who, despite their greater previous experience, were frequently unable to handle the course material and who in Claire's view were "unmotivated" and rarely invested the effort she deemed necessary for linguistic improvement. In response, she made the decision to ignore the attitudes and behaviors of her classmates and refocus her attention on herself and her personal goals, and she began to engage in independent study in an effort to compensate for what she felt she was not gaining in the course. In the end, as a result of her ability to redirect her motives and strategies in response to the circumstances, Claire excelled in the Accelerated French course, ending her second semester of French study with approximately fifth-semester proficiency. She had exceeded her goal of achieving the linguistic proficiency necessary for study in Paris, and in this regard she felt well prepared for a semester abroad.

The AEI Program

Claire had chosen the Contemporary French Studies program offered by AEI (Academic Exchange International) because it offered a focus on contemporary French history and culture and because it was open to students with zero to four semesters of college-level French. The 15-week program offered courses in contemporary French literature, film, history, philosophy, and art history, all with an emphasis on Paris, and was designed for "beginners and near beginners," like Claire, "with an interest in contemporary France but who lack[ed] the ample background in French language to participate in [the more advanced program offered by AEI]."[3] The Contemporary French Studies program was described as providing "a rigorous academic program," through which participants would "gain a thorough introduction to contemporary French studies while acquiring firsthand knowledge of contemporary French society and Parisian culture." Students enrolled in the program would take intensive French language courses (six hours of grammar instruction and four hours of conversation class each week) in addition to content courses taught in English. (Claire had selected the History of Post-War France, the Literature of the Belle-Epoque, and Parisian Architecture and Urbanism.) The AEI brochure advised potential students that self-discipline and independence would be required in the program since there were fewer contact hours than in most American universities and due to the formal relationship between French professors and their students.

As she anticipated the program, Claire was eager not only to make great linguistic progress but also to integrate in French society and make new French friends during her semester in Paris. She did not anticipate having difficulty

reaching these goals since the brochure promised that contact with French students at the university would be "natural and easy" and that program directors would assist in "integrating participants into the local student population through residence in dorms, and extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs." In addition to university dormitories, a variety of housing options were available to students on the AEI program, including lodging in apartments and with host families, and while Claire acknowledged that living with a host family would potentially provide more opportunities for linguistic practice and improvement, she had chosen a private apartment for the independence it afforded.

Findings

In order to understand the significance of Claire's experiences in Paris, particularly in terms of her various motives and goals for learning French and for studying abroad, we turn to activity theory, which focuses on the historical and sociocultural origins of learners' orientations to language learning. Gillette (1994) argues that it is a learner's social history (including his or her social environment, his or her previous history as a language learner, and his or her personal life goals) and the use value ascribed to language learning by the community, the learner's family, and the learner himself or herself that determine the learner's motives and goals and, in turn, his or her language learning strategies. She presents the participants in her study in two groups, effective learners and ineffective learners, and claims that the differences in their achievement are a result of their divergent goals for language learning, which are rooted in their different social histories. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) reexamine Gillette's data and build on her analysis through the concept of *agency*, arguing that for the successful students in her study, languages and language learning "matter" and are significant in their lives, whereas the unsuccessful students see little personal value in language learning.[4]

Although they view foreign cultures as exotic and exciting, there is little evidence to suggest that the members of the community in which Claire was raised attribute any particularly strong value to foreign languages or language learning. This viewpoint could perhaps be explained by the lack of diversity in the community, the limited international travel experience of its members, and/or the minimal emphasis on post-secondary education.[5] Even in a community with little access or exposure to foreign cultures, the educational experiences of Claire's parents (including her mother's desire to study Spanish in college and her father's continued interest in the French language, culture, and literature beyond his education) demonstrated that language learning was indeed a "worthwhile pursuit" (Gillette, 1994). Furthermore, prior to the beginning of her language learning experience, Claire herself saw value in language learning, since she believed that learning French would allow her to study history in Paris, to communicate with her French-speaking friends, and eventually to pursue a career in international law. Based therefore on her parents' experiences, her friendships with native speakers, and her short- and long-term goals, Claire had developed a perception of language learning as a useful endeavor.

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Gillette (1994) argues that learners' previous experiences in language learning also play an important role in determining their motives and goals, but that these experiences are often less powerful than their attributions about the relative value of language learning. Thus, learners who view language learning as a worthwhile pursuit will often persist despite negative experiences, while positive experiences may not affect the orientation of those who see less value in language learning. In Claire's case, although her previous experiences in learning French and Spanish were largely negative, her orientation to language learning was sufficiently strong (i.e., she saw enough personal value in language learning) to enable her to pursue the study of French.

In addition to contributing to a positive orientation to language learning, Claire's history influenced her approach to learning in general. Her parents' (and particularly her father's) pressure throughout school to achieve and maintain excellence was eventually "internalized" until Claire would accept nothing less than 98% in her schoolwork. Noels, Clément, and Pelletier (1999) call this "introjected extrinsic motivation" and argue that the internalization of external pressure to succeed leads to a desire to impress others with one's performance. Although she may have initially strived to impress her father, Claire later became more focused on keeping up with others, leading to a strong feeling of competitiveness. Originating as early as grade school, when her parents had put such emphasis on class rank, for Claire, it was not enough to succeed; she had to be the best. This drive was formed early in her education and would continue to have a strong impact throughout her language learning experience.

According to activity theory, social history plays a principal role in shaping human activity, which "arises from concrete, historically formed motives and is always goal-directed and, most importantly, dynamic" (Lantolf & Genung, 2002, p. 191). Specifically, all activities originate in some *need* or *desire* and are oriented to some *object* (concrete or ideal). This object is then projected to a specific *goal* or *anticipated outcome* in an effort to satisfy the need or desire. It is in the projection from object to anticipated outcome that the *motives* for activities are found (Lantolf & Genung, 2000, 2002; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).

As Claire prepared to enter a new context for learning, three new or reshaped motives influenced her decision to study abroad and her efforts once overseas. The first arose from her desire to study history in Paris, which now found its object in the AEI program. Given her history as a successful language learner, Claire anticipated success in what was presented in the brochures as a "rigorous academic program" that would provide a "thorough introduction to contemporary French studies." She felt that such a program would prepare her well for the French courses she intended to take in her final semester of college and later as she pursued a graduate degree in European history. She was prepared to work hard, often independently, as the brochures had warned, and she expected as a result to develop her knowledge of French history and to improve her linguistic skills.

Claire's second motive had also originated in her desire to study history in Paris, but over the course of the Accelerated French course and particularly now that she was on her way to France, this dream had been transformed into an urgent

need. Claire's need to survive in Paris found its object in the French language and culture and continued to be directed at the goals she had established during the Accelerated French course: being able to survive on a day-to-day basis and being able to interact fully in French society. Although she hoped that she would be successful in reaching these goals, based on the communication difficulties she had experienced during the trip to France with the Accelerated French class, where she had had trouble understanding young French people and where native speakers had made fun of her accent and her simple vocabulary and had forced her to repeat her utterances until they were perfect, Claire was not entirely confident in her ability to succeed and consequently continued to experience a certain amount of anxiety as she anticipated the program.

As she looked ahead to a minor in French, continued language study during graduate school, and a career in international law, Claire placed great importance on further developing her proficiency in French, and she was determined to take full advantage of the program in order to achieve this goal. From an activity theoretic perspective, her third motive arose from her desire to continue to improve her linguistic skills, which, in turn, found its object in the French language. Given her history as a successful language learner, Claire anticipated success as she continued to work to meet two additional goals she had set during the Accelerated French course: being able to hold an intelligent conversation in French and being able to communicate with ease with native speakers.[6]

These were the motives that had pushed Claire to enroll in the AEI program and that influenced her determination to succeed in Paris, but like all motives, they were far from stable. According to activity theory, motives are not only historically rooted and developed in the process of human activity, but they are *variable*, as they change over time and space, and *situated*, or context-dependent. Thus, in response to shifting material circumstances, "new motives constantly arise or change their position and significance, other motives lose their power or fade away" (Lompscher, 1999, p. 12). As Claire arrived in Paris and was faced with the circumstances in that new setting, namely the academic program (including her courses and her classmates), daily encounters in the "real world," and the French people, these motives began to shift, and they would continue to be reshaped as these circumstances changed, or remained constant, over time.

The Academic Program

Claire arrived in Paris expecting a rigorous academic program that would challenge her both academically and linguistically. She had no idea that her failure to review the language prior to the start of the program would have such an impact on her experience in Paris. After receiving a low score on the placement exam, she was placed in the lower of two learning groups, and although she argued that her linguistic skills had improved drastically within a matter of weeks, the program directors refused to allow her to move into the higher group, which was more suited to her level. As a consequence, she was forced to remain in a learning environment that not only failed to challenge her or stimulate her intellectually but in which she became increasingly frustrated by the attitude and limited proficiency of her classmates.

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The Contemporary France program was a small program, and only 12 American students participated that semester. In Claire's opinion, the other students enrolled in the program viewed it as little more than an extended vacation. Most of them seemed to be "just there for fun," and, from what she could observe, none of them were genuinely interested in learning the language or in a future career involving French. Based on the conception of motivation that she had developed during the Accelerated French course, Claire would therefore consider these students, like many of her classmates in that first course, to be "unmotivated." Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) would argue that, because they did not appear to have the goal of learning the language, these students were not engaged in the same activity as Claire and should not be called "learners," and Gillette (1994) would predict that they would limit their efforts at language learning to the minimum required to "get by." In fact, it was Claire's perception that the other students assigned to the lower language level put little effort into learning the language, and she felt that, like the ineffective learners in Gillette's study, they consequently made minimal progress over the course of the semester. Viewing comparison with unmotivated and less proficient classmates as ineffective, Claire began to compete with an "idealized self-image," or "an idealized vision of herself as a fluent foreign language speaker" (Bailey, 1983, p. 81; see also Pellegrino Aveni, this volume). In order to manage the frustration she felt in response to her classmates' attitudes and behavior, she chose to redirect her motives by returning her focus to herself and the improvement she hoped to make as an individual.

The courses of the lower level, particularly the grammar course, were equally frustrating for Claire. With few exceptions, she found little challenge in the content, and she felt that, like in the Accelerated French course, the pace was unbearably slow. Her frustration eventually led to anxiety, as she grew increasingly concerned that they would never cover the content she felt she needed to learn. She explained:

> when I took the test they put me in the low- the low group and it was frustrating + after a couple of weeks I'm just like + this- we're never gonna get over what <u>I</u> want to learn I know we're <u>never</u> gonna get over what I need to learn to advance in French (oral interview, March 2002)

While she appreciated the in-depth understanding she was gaining of basic concepts, Claire was constantly looking ahead to what had not yet been taught. The unchallenging course content combined with the experience of once again being surrounded by learners whose proficiency she judged to be markedly lower than hers and who appeared to be "unmotivated" to improve was almost more than Claire could endure, as she expressed in another interview a little over a year later:

> I was just like you freaking idiots [...] it just got to the point where it was just way too obvious for me and I just thought I'm wasting my time here I'm paying money for this and I'm not getting anything (oral interview, July 2003)

In response to her frustration, and on the suggestion of her instructor, Claire began to engage in independent study (studying grammatical structures and

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completing grammar exercises and reading novels on her own). She also purchased a small radio and left it on "at all times" in an effort to improve her listening skills. Like the effective learners in Gillette's (1994) study, Claire's strong motives and her positive orientation to language learning led her to invest far more effort than was required for the course.

In this setting, as in the Accelerated French course, there was a clash between the rules of interaction Claire had anticipated when she enrolled in the program and those she encountered upon her arrival. Lantolf and Genung (2000, 2002) report a similar discrepancy in the case of "PG," as she embarked on the study of Chinese. Like "PG," when Claire was unable to challenge the rules of interaction (for example by negotiating a move to the higher level language courses), she experienced a shift in her motives and behaviors. According to Lantolf and Appel (1994), "individuals, as agents active in creating their world, can modify, postpone, or even abandon goals altogether" (p. 19). Thus, feeling strongly that she was wasting her time (and her hard-earned money) and gaining very little from the program, Claire abandoned her initial goal of improving her linguistic proficiency through the program and eventually gave in to the vacation atmosphere as created by the other students. She determined that since she was powerless to change the program or her classmates, she would have to consider it "sort of a break." At the same time, she never gave up on her larger goal of improving her abilities in French. Driven by her history as an individual with a strong work ethic and a need for excellence in learning, she was unable to abandon all hope of benefiting from the experience in Paris. If she could not gain the improvement she desired through the program itself, then she would have to seek it out elsewhere, through independent study and in her interactions within French society.

"Real World" Encounters

For a full year, Claire had anticipated and worried about her ability to survive in Paris and interact in French society. Nearly all of the effort she had put into learning the language up to this point had been directed at this one goal, and while she had already made great (and rapid) linguistic progress, she was still not entirely confident in her ability to succeed. Her early experiences in France (during the Accelerated French class trip) had taught her just how much more difficult interacting in society could be as compared to communicating in the classroom context. Still, the confidence she had gained through her success in the Accelerated French course led her to believe that, with determination and hard work, she could succeed in Paris as well. It was not until she arrived in France, however, that she fully realized how difficult this task would be.

Her first encounters with native speakers left her frustrated and anxious about her ability to use the language in order to satisfy her day-to-day needs and at the same time made her doubly aware of her own limitations, or her "mortality," as she put it:

> I- when I first went over there I was really confident like oh you know ++ um I'd say when I got over there I- I sort of realized that I was like mortal shall we say ((laugh)) you know like I wasn't the best student in

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the class anymore ((laugh)) even- [spoken very quickly] like I was the best student in the class but I mean like out in the real world you know when I was confronted with it every day it like made me feel really bad (oral interview, May 2001)

She gave an example:

Claire: there was one Sunday where I got up to go grocery shopping before the stores closed at noon?

KD: mm-hmm.

Claire: and on the way back to my apartment some guy stopped his car and asked me about some street that was around here and it was either- I didn't know if it was- he said Renauld A-U-L-D or A-U-L-T because they were both streets around there?

KD: mm-hmm.

Claire: so I asked him to spell it ((laugh))

KD: mm-hmm.

Claire: and he just got like all pissed off and like waved his hand up at me and like drove away ((laugh)) and I started crying and

KD: ohhh

Claire: but I mean there weren't too many experiences like that but + I definitely realized how much more I had to learn. (oral interview, May 2001)

Over time, as Claire's linguistic skills developed, interaction with native speakers gradually became easier, but her awareness of each communicative difficulty she experienced drew her attention to the limitations in her proficiency and strengthened her desire to improve. In activity theoretic terms, her need to interact with the French on a daily basis impelled her to continue to develop her linguistic skills, and this need became a motive as she actively sought improvement. Her awareness of her own limitations within the Parisian context only served to reinforce this motive.

The French

Another of the goals that Claire had set at the beginning of the Accelerated French course, as she anticipated study abroad in Paris, was to be able to interact fully in French society. She hoped to be able to make new French acquaintances, and, like "Alice" (Kinginger, 2004), she dreamed of participating in various communities of practice in France. Yet, as the experiences of many sojourners abroad have revealed, such integration is often negotiated with difficulty and not always fully achieved. As Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) explain, it is largely the "nature and extent of access offered to the individual by the community of practice" that determine whether the individual achieves *full participation* in this community or is forced (or in some cases, chooses) to remain on the *periphery* of the community (p. 149).

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In her first long-term stay in France, Claire wanted desperately to become a part of French society; in fact, she wanted to *be* French. In the beginning, she attempted to reach this goal through observation and imitation. After closely observing the French and their behavior, she began to imitate the dress of French women, their habit of afternoon *promenades*, and the way they held their mouths when they spoke. At the time, she believed that acting French or pretending to be French was an integral part of language learning and that her linguistic skills would improve as a result. But she was never fully successful in playing the role, as she felt that her American identity was revealed each time that she opened her mouth to speak.

Her long-time friendship with a political science student named Gilles eventually allowed her access to a community of young people, but this access was temporary and limited. At his birthday party, for example, she was the center of attention in an extended intellectual conversation with a group of young French men, but she soon realized that they were only focused on her because she was the "funny American girl." She recorded her thoughts in her journal:

> I sort of felt like I was a joke to them though because it was obvious they liked talking to me, but I think it was only to laugh at what I was saying. I felt like they were all sitting on the edge of their chairs just waiting to hear what I would say next, and then as soon as I would say something they would all laugh. (November 2000)

In an interview six months later, she described the situation a little bit differently, as she blamed the wine for what happened:

> I had been ((laugh)) drinking a little bit too much and like I couldn't- I started to like lose control of the muscle tension in my face and I couldn't hold my mouth you know right here [pointing at her mouth] and like so I couldn't really say the words although like I thought I was perfectly clear you know I- I could tell they didn't know what I was saying and were sort of making jokes like "oh good luck understanding that one" you know so like I got so upset and I told them "do you know how hard I am trying to speak in your language do you know how hard I have worked the last year and a half? you have no clue and you're mocking me" ((laugh)) and I like started crying at this party (oral interview, May 2001)

Gilles took her aside to comfort her and explained that as long as she was in France she would be the "funny American girl" and that she just had to "get used to it and play the part." Claire was angered by his remarks because they reinforced her impression that she "wasn't being appreciated" and that "people weren't noticing how hard [she] was trying." The experience at this party only added to the pattern of others mocking her attempts to speak French, and she considered this evening to be one of the lowest points in her semester abroad.

Claire also found that while she was capable of engaging in lengthy conversations with young French people at cafes and other social functions, it was difficult to maintain contact beyond an initial conversation. She felt that, as a foreigner, it was nearly impossible to penetrate this barrier and create new friendships with the

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French. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) describe the experiences of a Russian student in an American university who tells of similar difficulties in integration due to constant reminders by Americans of his Russian identity:

> They never let you forget, because they treat you like a Russian person, the fact that you may have that little accent, you know, they keep bringing it up, so it is really hard for you to forget that you are Russian, that you are not from over here... they remind you that you are Russian and you can't get away from that. (p. 154)

Like this Russian student, Claire found it difficult to conceal her identity as a foreigner. She had tried to dress like the French, behave like them, read what they read, go where they went, but in the end, it was her identity as a foreigner that forced her to remain on the periphery of the communities of practice she so wished to join. Gilles' friends and the other native speakers she encountered, not Claire, had the power to determine whether or not she was granted access to these communities. When this access was denied, Claire was forced to abandon her goal of full interaction in French society.

As her motives related to this goal shifted, so did her strategies. Claire turned once again to observation (only now with new motives) and to a "compatriot island" (Wilkinson, 2005). The entries from Claire's journal present a poignant example of an individual who was forced to remain on the margins of a community of practice. As she took her *promenades* around Paris, as she recorded ethnographic-type observations of the individual employees and the lunchtime routine at her favorite restaurant, and as she watched from her apartment window the activities of the tenants in the buildings across the street, Claire was clearly an outsider. At the same time, she had become a member of a different community of practice, as she and her American friends, like many foreigners abroad (Kline, 1998; Wilkinson, 2005), had created a compatriot island. Seeking the security of the familiar within a foreign culture, they stuck together, speaking mostly English and primarily frequenting a bar known to be popular among Anglophones. Although in her journal she expressed guilt about such behaviors, which she knew would not improve her linguistic skills or help her to integrate in French society, she continued to spend the majority of her free time with this group of friends. In the end, Claire felt caught between the two cultures, no longer feeling that she quite belonged to her own culture, yet not quite feeling that she belonged to the French culture either.

Conclusions and Implications

Claire had entered the AEI program enthusiastic about what she would learn and optimistic about her ability to meet her goals (taking full benefit of the program, being able to survive on a daily basis, and being able to interact fully in French society). But the rules of interaction she encountered in Paris were not those she had anticipated upon enrolling in the program. Instead of a "rigorous academic program," she found herself in insufficiently challenging courses that proceeded

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at a frustratingly slow pace and surrounded by "unmotivated" learners whom she judged to be well below her proficiency level. Her difficulties managing day-to-day interaction in French society only served to emphasize what she was not gaining in her courses. Furthermore, despite the promises in the brochures that contact with French students would be "natural and easy," Claire found it impossible to achieve her goal of full interaction in French society. It could be argued that she would have been less isolated had she chosen to live in the dormitories or with a host family, but even with her prior French-speaking acquaintances and the opportunities for social interaction they afforded, she was still unable to penetrate that barrier and gain access to the communities of practice she wished to join.

These were the material circumstances that Claire encountered during her semester abroad and that eventually resulted in a shift in her motivational structure and in her strategies. Powerless to challenge the rules of interaction in the academic program or to gain access to certain French communities of practice, Claire was forced to abandon her goals of benefiting fully from the AEI program and of achieving full integration in French society. At the same time, her feelings of anxiety in the face of communication difficulties, her awareness of her own limitations, particularly in society (as opposed to the classroom), her drive for excellence, and her consequent competition with an idealized self-image served to strengthen her motives and pushed her to continue to work to improve both her linguistic skills and her understanding of French culture. Determined to learn regardless of the circumstances, Claire developed the strategies of refocusing on herself and her personal goals (in an effort to avoid the distraction of her classmates and the unchallenging academic program) and independent study (as she attempted to compensate for what she was not gaining from the program). Her frustration, anxiety, and competitiveness in this context were *facilitating* (Bailey, 1983) in that they led to strengthened motives and increased effort. As an individual for whom languages "matter," Claire repeatedly sought to exercise her *agency* (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001), or to reconstruct her language learning experiences to meet her needs. In the end, as a result of her strong motives (originating in her desire to study history in Paris, her need to survive in Paris, and her desire to continue to improve her linguistic skills) and the specific strategies she adopted (including independent study and reading, close observation of the French and their culture, and an effort to refocus her attention on herself), she succeeded in meeting these goals in spite of the academic program.

Although she is but one language learner, Claire's story raises issues that are likely relevant to other language learners and study abroad participants. Above all, her data draw attention to the fact that learners embark on the study of foreign languages and enroll in study abroad programs for a variety of reasons. The motives they bring to the experience are multiple and varied and ultimately unstable. Specifically, their reasons for language study and for study abroad may be strongly impacted by their social history (including their social environment, their previous learning experiences, and their personal life goals) and their own, their family's, and their community's view of the usefulness of language learning. It was Claire's strong motives, her drive for excellence and strong work ethic, and her determination to benefit from the experience despite both the "vacation"

atmosphere and the low level of her courses that pushed her to reshape the experience to meet her needs, and it was her frustration and anxiety in the face of communication difficulties and repeated mocking that encouraged her to persist in developing her linguistic skills. Other students enrolled in the same program may have had a rather different experience as they were driven by other motives and goals, which were shaped by their unique social histories and which impacted in turn their efforts and strategies and ultimately their success.

If we acknowledge that students embark on the study of foreign languages and enroll in overseas programs for a variety of reasons, are we equally attentive to the fact that these motives and their affiliated goals are constantly shifting? And are we designing and/or selecting programs that respond to the varied and ever-changing needs of our students? Claire's story provides an example not only of the variety of factors at play in influencing learners' experiences abroad but also of the many obstacles learners—even highly motivated and highly proficient ones—may encounter and attempt to overcome during the experience overseas. In what ways can we temper the frustrations that often accompany such obstacles?

Some of this frustration appears to stem from unrealistic expectations on the part of students and faculty advisors alike, who are often misled by brochures and other advertisements along with common stereotypes that present study abroad as the "magic solution" leading to fluency and (full) integration in the target culture. In truth, the outcomes of study abroad are varied and dependent on many factors: not only students' individual motives, goals, strategies, and efforts, but also the length and type of program and the opportunities for interaction it affords, the context, other individuals, etc. Developing more realistic expectations for study abroad may contribute to diminishing the frustration experienced by learners and may lead to greater satisfaction in the study abroad experience. A closer examination of what can reasonably be expected from overseas educational experiences could also contribute to ongoing dialogue about articulation between the home curriculum and study abroad.

Claire's story also reminds us of the varied and fluctuating proficiency levels of students overseas. Her data make a claim for more flexible models for placement exams and ability groups in study abroad programs, but this attentiveness to individual student levels and the individualization of instruction could be carried over to the home curriculum as well, for instance through independent learning tasks and those that allow students to work at multiple levels. For it is not only in the study abroad environment that students experience shifting motives and proficiency levels, and it is not only during study abroad that we must be attentive to the needs of individual learners. In this study, interviews and a language learning journal were used to gather information about one learner's social history, her motives and goals related to language learning and study abroad, and her experiences overseas. But interviews, journals, and questionnaires need not be limited to use as data collection tools or to use in study abroad contexts. These same instruments could also be used quite effectively by language program directors and individual language instructors in stateside language programs as tools to gather information about students as individuals and to allow for a better understanding of the social history shaping their motives and efforts and the ways in which these

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motives shift over time and space. This deeper understanding of learners and their individual social histories, motives, goals, and needs could significantly impact teaching and curricular planning both at the level of the individual class and at the level of the program as a whole.

The data from this study illustrate the overseas experiences of only one learner, but they provide a rich and holistic account of study abroad through that learner's eyes. Examining Claire's experiences in Paris has not only allowed insight into study abroad from her perspective but has provided evidence of the ways in which her experiences were shaped by her motives, which were in turn shaped and reshaped by the material circumstances in the Parisian context. Additional case studies will serve to further develop our understanding of study abroad as experienced by individual learners and specifically to continue to explore the role of motives and social history and the connection between home curriculum and overseas programs. Longitudinal research documenting the experiences of individual learners before, during, and after study abroad and exploring their various motives will contribute to our understanding of this connection and will enable us to adapt programs at home and overseas to better meet the needs of individual learners.

Notes

1. The names of people, institutions, and places have been changed to protect anonymity.
2. This study is part of a larger project that traces Claire's language learning experiences across three academic years and four contexts for learning, in two American university settings and two separate educational programs abroad.
3. In order to maintain confidentiality, program and university publications are not included in the reference list.
4. Based on the activity theoretic principle that individuals exhibiting similar behaviors but with different motives are not engaged in the same activity, Lantolf and Genung (2002) and Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) choose to use the term "student" since they argue that not all individuals in a classroom setting could necessarily be considered "learners" engaged in the activity of learning.
5. According to the 2000 United States Census, approximately 50% of the residents of Claire's hometown earn high school diplomas, 6% earn bachelor's degrees, and 4% earn graduate or professional degrees. They have primarily German, Irish, and Italian roots, and they are a rather homogeneous community, about 99% white and speaking only English in roughly 97% of the homes (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002).
6. There are clearly contradictions here in terms of the outcomes Claire anticipated from this program. On the one hand, based on her confidence in her pre-departure ability and her belief that with her strong work ethic she could easily improve, Claire felt confident in her ability to meet her goals. But on the other hand, her experiences during the Accelerated French class trip had made her more aware of her limitations and left her occasionally apprehensive about her ability to succeed in Paris.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions

[ ]	nonverbal cues, clarification of unclear meaning
( )	inaudible or unclear utterance
(( ))	sounds (e.g., laughter, coughing, etc.)
+	pause of approximately 0–1 second(s)
++	pause of approximately 2–3 seconds
+++	pause of approximately 4 or more seconds
?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
-	speaker interrupts self
...	lengthened syllable
[...]	portion cut from transcript or written data
underlining	emphasis (pitch and/or volume)
" "	tone of voice indicates quoting of speech

Adapted from Hatch (1992)