

AAUSC 2013 Volume – Issues in Language Program Direction

Individual Differences, L2 Development, and Language Program Administration: From Theory to Application

Cristina Sanz, Georgetown University
Beatriz Lado, Lehman College (CUNY)
Editors

Stacey Katz Bourns, Harvard University
Series Editor





AAUSC 2013 Volume - Issues in Language Program Direction: Individual Differences, L2 Development, and Language Program Administration: From Theory to Application
Cristina Sanz, Beatriz Lado, and Stacey Katz Bourns

Product Director: Beth Kramer

Product Assistant: Daniel Cruse

Associate Media Developer:
Patrick Brand

Executive Market Development
Manager: Ben Rivera

Rights Acquisitions Specialist:
Jessica Elias

Manufacturing Planner: Betsy
Donaghey

Art and Design Direction,
Production Management, and
Composition: PreMediaGlobal

© 2015, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored, or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For product information and
technology assistance, contact us at **Cengage Learning
Customer & Sales Support, 1-800-354-9706**

For permission to use material from this text or product,
submit all requests online at **cengage.com/permissions**
Further permissions questions can be e-mailed to
permissionrequest@cengage.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013948412

ISBN-13: 978-1-285-76058-2

ISBN-10: 1-285-76058-1

Cengage Learning

200 First Stamford Place, 4th Floor
Stamford, CT 06902
USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, and Japan. Locate your local office at **www.cengage.com/global**.

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by Nelson Education, Ltd.

To learn more about Cengage Learning Solutions, visit
www.cengage.com

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our preferred online store **www.cengagebrain.com**

Chapter 7

Finding the Right Combination for Spanish Oral Proficiency Development: Individual Learner Characteristics and Study Abroad Program Features¹

Jeff Connor-Linton, Georgetown University

Background and Design

In 2003–2004, researchers at Georgetown University and the University of Minnesota led a large-scale, multi-year study of U.S. student learning abroad. One goal of this project was to identify relationships between oral proficiency development and different learner characteristics, on the one hand, and particular study abroad (SA) program features, on the other. The oral proficiency of nearly 1,000 students was tested at the start and end of their SA using Spanish Simulated Oral Proficiency Interviews (SOPI) (Stansfield, 1991, 1996) which were rated on the ACTFL scale (ACTFL, 1999). 830 students from 190 U.S. home institutions were participants in 61 programs abroad, while 138 students were in control groups at Georgetown, Dickinson, and the University of Minnesota. The main report on this project (VandeBerg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009) presents results from all seven target languages included in the study: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. While VandeBerg et al. (2009) did draw some distinctions between target languages, especially between more and less commonly taught languages, the subsample of 362 participants studying Spanish in 15 SA programs in Spain, Central, and South America (see Table 7-1) affords a more controlled, focused analysis.

Sample

Most previous research on language acquisition during SA has studied much smaller samples of learners, who are typically in one or a few SA programs (and often from only one home institution in the U.S.). (Exceptions include Carroll, 1967; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; and Davidson, 2010.) The large sample analyzed in this study allows variation in learner and program characteristics, and their relations to oral proficiency development, to be compared more directly.

¹This research was supported by a Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Table 7-1 Study Abroad Programs

SA Program
CIEE/Chile/Santiago
CIEE/Chile/Valparaiso
IES/Chile/Santiago
CIEE/Dom Republic/Santiago
GU/Ecuador/Quito
UMBC, Taxco
UMBC, Mexico City
CIEE/Dom Republic/Santo Domingo
CIEE/Spain/Seville
GU/Spain/Madrid-Complutense
UMN/Spain/Toledo
GU/Spain/Salamanca
GU/Spain/Madrid-Autonomia
UMN/Spain/Cuernavaca
RU/Spain/Granada

This sample also provides a good geographical cross-section of Spanish SA programs: 53 percent of students studied in Spain, 38 percent in South America, 11 percent in the Caribbean (Dominican Republic), and 3 percent in Mexico. 247 (68 percent) of the students in the study were female, and 86 (32 percent) were male, reflecting the predominance of women studying foreign languages in the U.S.

Measurement of Oral Proficiency

This study analyzes oral proficiency development with a holistic measure: ratings on the ACTFL scale of oral performances elicited in SOPIs. The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is “a standardized procedure for the global assessment of functional speaking ability” (Swender, 1999, p. 1). The SOPI is a tape-mediated analog to the OPI, shown to be valid and reliable, which has been in widespread use since the Center for Applied Linguistics developed the first version in the mid-1980s (Stansfield, 1991, 1996). In the SOPI, an audio tape or MP3 file directs the test taker to carry out a series of oral tasks, referring to a booklet whose sections visually correspond to each of the recorded tasks. The students’ oral responses are recorded on a second tape or via digital recording. After the test is completed, a trained rater scores the performance of each subject, using oral proficiency guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 1999).

Staff at each SA program administered the SOPI to students who volunteered for the study within several days after their programs began, and again several days before their programs ended. Once the pre- and post-SA SOPIs had been

completed at each site, trained SOPI raters scored them. At the end of each program, staff also administered a questionnaire, on which students reported demographic information, their prior language learning and intercultural experience, attitudes toward the host country and culture, and the amount of interaction they had with people from the host country, the U.S., etc.

While a few studies have analyzed excerpts from interviews (face-to-face or simulated) to measure students' oral proficiency development during SA, most have focused on particular components of oral proficiency (e.g., fluency) or acquisition of particular phonological or morphosyntactic features (e.g., Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; O'Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, & Collentine, 2007; DeKeyser, 1991; Marqués-Pascual, 2011). An assessment of the validity of ACTFL ratings of oral proficiency is beyond the scope of this report, but a few considerations are relevant to understanding the results that follow. First, while the validity of the ACTFL scale has been challenged (e.g., Bachman & Savignon, 1986), it is a reliable direct measure (e.g., Surface & Dierdorff, 2003) which is widely used by language teachers and program directors in the U.S. Second, as a holistic measure, the ACTFL scale is more general and less granular than measures of fluency or accuracy of use of particular grammatical features, and therefore is less able to show smaller degrees of oral proficiency development. However, it is a broader, more familiar scale for comparison, which many language programs in the U.S. refer to in their curricula and learning goals.

The ACTFL scale is hierarchical (i.e., it describes successive levels of oral performance) but non-numeric. To allow statistical analysis of students' oral proficiency, like a number of previous studies beginning with Kenyon and Tschiner (2000), the ACTFL levels were assigned numeric values as in Table 7-2.²

Table 7-2 Conversion of ACTFL Ratings to Scores

ACTFL Ratings		Score
Superior		3.0
	High	2.8
Advanced	Mid	2.3
	Low	2.1
	High	1.8
Intermediate	Mid	1.3
	Low	1.1
	High	0.8
Novice	Mid	0.3
	Low	0.1

²Kenyon and Malabonga (2001) use a 10-point intervalic scale, with one point for each sublevel. In interpreting the quantitative findings (oral proficiency gains), it is important to "translate" numerical equivalents back into their respective qualitative rating levels. See ACTFL Rating Level Descriptors at: <http://www.actfl.org/files/public/Guidelinespeak.pdf>.

The scores in this conversion represent the relation between the four major levels of the ACTFL scale (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior) as equal intervals (Novice Mid = 0.3, Intermediate Mid = 1.3, and so on). But the intervals between the sublevels on the scale are unequal and ordinal. In particular, the interval between the Low and Mid sublevels is represented as smaller than the interval between the Mid and High sublevels. This reflects ACTFL descriptions of the relations among these sublevels; e.g., an Intermediate Low student is one who demonstrates most but not all of the proficiency features of the Intermediate Mid rating level, while a student rated Intermediate High is one who demonstrates all Intermediate Mid and many Advanced features.

While some conversion to numeric values, or scores, is necessary for statistical analyses, no conversion algorithm has been empirically tested. In fact, although the scores above have been used in a number of previous studies, they actually misrepresent the “inverted pyramid” design of the ACTFL scale. Put simply, the ACTFL scale assumes that development in foreign language (FL) proficiency is not linear, but rather that each successive level of proficiency is broader than the previous level in terms of both the range of language features that the learner can use and the range of communicative function situations he/she can handle. The ACTFL scale is hierarchical but not intervallic; the “distance” between each successive level on the ACTFL scale is not equal. It is assumed that improvement from a low level to the next is easier (and takes less time) than from a higher level to the next. The non-intervallic nature of the ACTFL scale makes it difficult to test the relatedness of SOPI gains to most measures of learner and program characteristics because a gain of one (sub)level on the ACTFL scale does not represent the same amount of improvement for learners who started their SA with different SOPI ratings (Brecht et al., 1995; Meredith, 1990).

For that reason, in some of the analyses of SA program variables below, the 229 students who began their SA with SOPI ratings of Intermediate Low (IL), Mid (IM), and High (IH) are analyzed separately from the 121 students who began with SOPI ratings of Advanced Low (AL), Mid (AM), and High (AH). This approach respects the non-intervallic nature of the ACTFL scale’s “inverted pyramid” and allows the relation of each program variable to oral proficiency gain to be tested in relation to the two different groups of learners.

Learner Characteristics

Several studies comparing language learning at American universities, during SA and in language immersion programs—reported in a 2004 special issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (Collentine, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 2004; Dewey, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Segalowitz & Free, 2004)—found that no one context of learning is “uniformly superior to another for all students, at all levels of language learning, and for all language skills” (Collentine & Freed, 2004, p. 164). They proposed development of a research agenda “that addresses the interaction of individual cognitive abilities and the differential aspects of learning contexts” (Collentine & Freed, 2004, p. 165).

A variety of learner characteristics were measured in this study to determine their relation to oral proficiency development during SA. Oral proficiency at the

beginning of SA (Pre-SA SOPI Rating) is often used as a measure of “readiness” for SA; here it is also used to compare the efficacy of SA for students with different levels of beginning oral proficiency. Students’ gender and academic major are included as potential predictors of oral proficiency development that could help LPDs in advising students who are considering SA options. Some studies have focused on students’ prior language learning (e.g., Carroll, 1967; Brecht et al., 1995), and several measures (early FL exposure, prior instruction, and international experience) are included in this study.

Other studies have focused on learners’ behaviors, such as interaction with people in the host country, again with varying results. For example, Ginsberg and Miller (2000, p. 237), analyzing the diaries of 85 Russian students studying abroad, found no relationship between frequency of interaction with native speakers and oral proficiency gains, but argued on the basis of four case studies that “language gains depend on complex interactions among learning strategies, the students’ ideas about language and how it is learned, motivation, and the learning support provided by their Russian contacts.” Isabelli-García (2006) emphasized the role of learners’ attitudes and social networks in the oral proficiency development of four SA participants. In the current study, students reported on their interaction patterns during SA, as well as their attitudes toward aspects of Spanish culture and their feelings about interacting with Spanish Speakers.³

SA Program Characteristics

To identify SA program variables that might influence student learning, VandeBerg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (2009) drew on the classification system of Engle and Engle (2003), which identifies seven critical SA program components:

- program duration;
- pre-departure target language proficiency;
- the language of instruction abroad;
- the academic context abroad (whether students take classes with other U.S. students; with host country students; with other, non-U.S. international students; or with a mixture of international, host, and U.S. students);
- where students are housed (with other U.S. students, with host country students, with international students, or with a host family);
- whether they participate in guided/structured experiential activities abroad;
- and the frequency with which resident faculty or staff provide “guided reflection on student experience” (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 8).

³Although recent research on the relation of internal cognitive resources to language development during SA has been promising (e.g., O’Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, & Collentine, 2007; Sunderman & Kroll, 2009; Tokowicz, Michael, & Kroll, 2004), it was not feasible to administer working memory tests for the 61 SA programs in this study.

Pre-departure target language proficiency is treated as a learner characteristic in this study. Program duration has been the focus of several studies (e.g., Davidson, 2010; Dwyer, 2004; Martinsen, 2010; Serrano, Llanes, & Tragant, 2011), but few studies have related all of Engle and Engle's other program features to oral proficiency development during SA.

Results and Discussion

We begin with the overarching question of whether Spanish students' oral proficiency improves during SA, as is widely believed. Next, the relation of oral proficiency development during SA to a variety of learner variables is considered. Finally, the relation of oral proficiency development to a number of study program design features is measured and discussed. It should be noted that many of the findings that follow report "non-significant results." Although much research only reports positive evidence of relationships between variables, it is just as important for LPDs to know where no statistical evidence for a relationship between various learner or program characteristics and oral proficiency has been found.

Q1. Does the Oral Proficiency of Spanish SA Participants Improve?

The answer to this first question uses the converted scores from Table 7-2 for all SA participants (SAPs). Table 7-3 indicates that the participants in this study began their SA experiences with an average SOPI rating of 1.7, just below Intermediate High on the ACTFL scale. Their average SOPI rating improved by 4/10 of a level, to Advanced Low by the end of their SA. (The small standard error (SE Mean) indicates that these students' scores are reliable to 1/10 of a point.) This average gain is statistically significant: $t = 15.119$, $df = 361$, $p < .05$.⁴ In comparison, Davidson (2010) found average gains for Russian SAPs in one semester programs from Intermediate Mid to Intermediate High.

Learner Characteristics

Q2. Do Spanish Students Who Begin SA with Different Levels of Oral Proficiency Make Equal Gains?

This question is first addressed using the converted scores from Table 7-2. (SOPI Gains = Pre-SA SOPI rating minus Post-SA SOPI rating.)

Table 7-3 SOPI Gains during SA ($N = 362$)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	SE Mean
Pre-SA SOPI rating	1.7	0.5	0.03
Post-SA SOPI rating	2.1	0.5	0.03

⁴ The assumptions of normal distribution and equality of variance were met for Pre-SA and Post-SA SOPI scores. Assumptions of homogeneity of variance were tested with each ANOVA; when Levene's statistic is significant, Welch's adjusted F is reported.

Table 7-4 SOPI Gains of SAPs Beginning at Different Levels of Oral Proficiency

Pre-SA SOPI Rating	<i>N</i>	Mean SOPI Rating Gain
IL	70	0.8
IM	44	0.8
IH	115	0.3
AL	75	0.2
AM	33	0.2
AH	13	-0.2
Total	350	0.4

A one-way ANOVA of SOPI Gains shows that SAPs who begin at different levels of oral proficiency (see Table 7-4) do not make equal gains in oral proficiency as rated on the ACTFL scale ($F = 29.295$, $df = (5, 344)$, $p < .001$). Students who began SA with SOPI ratings of IL and IM improved, on average, 8/10 of a level on the ACTFL scale—i.e., from IL to about IH, or from IM to AL. The gains of those students with the lowest ratings were significantly greater than the gains of students who began with SOPI ratings of IH, AL, and AM, who gained about one sublevel, on average—i.e., from IH to AL, from AL to AM, and from AM to (nearly) AH. All of these students gained significantly more than those who began with a SOPI rating of AH, who actually dropped nearly a sublevel (from AH to just above AM), on average.⁵

Another way to answer this question is to measure the proportion of students who began at each major level on the ACTFL scale (Intermediate and Advanced) whose SOPI ratings fell, stayed the same, or rose over the course of their SA.

Table 7-5 shows a significant relation between Pre-SA oral proficiency level and oral proficiency development ($\chi^2 = 35.881$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). The relation is moderate (Kendall's tau-b = $-.281$). Not surprisingly, more students who began their SA at the Intermediate level, who had more room for improvement, improved their SOPI ratings. Conversely, more students who began their SA at the Advanced level saw their SOPI ratings decline. Interestingly, the 11 Pre-SA

Table 7-5 Categorical SOPI Gains of Pre-SA Intermediate versus Advanced Students

	Pre-SA Intermediate	Pre-SA Advanced
SOPI Rating Fell	11 / 5%	30 / 25%
SOPI Rating Same	42 / 18%	29 / 24%
SOPI Rating Rose	176 / 77%	62 / 51%

⁵ The nine SAPs who scored Novice High and the three SAPs who scored Superior on the Pre-SA SOPI were excluded from this analysis because these subsamples were too small.

Intermediates whose SOPI ratings fell had an average rating decline of 6/10 of a point—the equivalent of a change from IH to below IM or from IM to below NH (Novice High)—a dramatic fall. The 30 Pre-SA Advanced students whose SOPI ratings fell had an average rating decline of only 4/10 of a point—from AL to just below IH or from AM to just above IH. The difference may be explained by a greater stability of the interlanguage system of students with Advanced oral proficiency.⁶

Tables 7-4 and 7-5 suggest that the lower the student's level of oral proficiency at the start of SA, the greater his/her oral proficiency development, on average, as measured with the SOPI on the ACTFL scale. (The inverse relation between Pre-SA SOPI and SOPI Gains is also attested by a significant negative correlation: $r = -0.52$.) However, these results must be interpreted in relation to the "inverted pyramid" of the ACTFL scale. If, in fact, it does take more time and effort to improve to each successively higher (sub)level, this pattern of relative improvement is to be expected. In addition, it is possible that students who begin SA with higher levels of proficiency may not feel as strong motivation to improve their oral proficiency (to the extent that their level of oral proficiency meets their communicative needs), and/or they may be able to develop other aspects of proficiency than students who begin with lower oral proficiency.⁷ So while the results of this analysis certainly support the benefits of SA for students with lower initial oral proficiency, they do not argue against SA for students with higher initial oral proficiency.

Q3. Do Male and Female SAPs Make Equal Gains in Oral Proficiency?

Male and female Spanish SAPs showed equal improvement in oral proficiency, as measured on the ACTFL scale via SOPI ($F = 0.463$, $df = (1, 331)$, n.s.). As Table 7-6 shows, they began their SA with the same average level of proficiency (just below Intermediate High) and concluded with the same average level of proficiency (Advanced Low). (The small apparent difference in Post-SA mean ratings is due to rounding error: Male = 2.081; Female = 2.151.) Davidson (2010) also found no significant relationship between oral proficiency gains and gender among Russian SAPs.

Table 7-6 SOPI Gains X Gender

	<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Male	86	1.7	2.1
Female	247	1.7	2.2

⁶This result should be interpreted cautiously because of the small subsample.

⁷Engle and Engle (2004, p. 234) state, "For most students, roughly successful communication is enough. To progress beyond this point, and to arrive at truly precise, subtle FL expression, means for most language learners a new, significant effort of concentration and attention. If students are more or less comfortable in their language use, and can make themselves understood, they may become complacent."

Table 7-7 SOPI Gains X Academic Major

	N	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Science/Engineering	24	1.5	2.0
Business (not Int'l)	18	1.6	1.8
International Business	19	1.7	2.2
Humanities/Social Science	116	1.7	2.1
Foreign Language	91	1.8	2.3
Other	48	1.8	2.1

Q4. Do SAPs with Different Majors Make Equal Gains in Oral Proficiency?

Table 7-7 compares the oral proficiency gains of SA participants who had declared different majors. Although students who identified themselves as “Foreign Language Majors” (not specifically Spanish majors) improved, on average, 5/10 of a level (from IH to AM), their gains were not significantly greater than those of students in five other categories of academic major ($F = 1.654$, $df = (5, 310)$, n.s.). However, when compared to all other majors (combined), the difference approaches significance ($F = 3.540$, $df = (1, 314)$, $p = .06$). While Foreign Language Majors may enjoy a small advantage in oral proficiency development during SA, students from all majors make similar gains in SOPI ratings of one to two sublevels on the ACTFL scale.

Q5. Is Amount of Prior Language Exposure and Instruction Related to Oral Proficiency Development during SA?

Students were asked if/how long they had lived in another culture and studied abroad. Although more than half of the 322 students responding reported some previous experience living in another culture (from less than 3 months to more than 10 years) and 44 percent of the 317 SAPs responding reported some prior SA (from less than a month to more than a year), no correlations were found with oral proficiency development (i.e., gains in SOPI ratings). (A strong correlation between both measures suggests that students may have conflated the two categories.) However, students’ previous experience living abroad did correlate significantly with students’ Pre-SA SOPI ratings ($r = 0.28$), as did their prior SA ($r = .26$). That is, the SA students in this study who reported prior experience living and/or studying abroad tended to have a higher level of oral proficiency at the start of their college SA experience.

Students also were asked a series of questions about their prior language learning. There was no significant advantage in oral proficiency development during SA for students who reported some exposure to Spanish in elementary or middle school. However, because all but three students reported exposure to some FL in elementary school, and all students reported some FL instruction in middle school, these results suggest only that early exposure to some FL is as valuable for oral proficiency development during SA as early exposure to Spanish. These results do not show the relative value of no early exposure to FL.

Table 7-8 Prior Study of Spanish

	Less Than 1 Semester	1–2 Semesters	3–4 Semesters	5–6 Semesters	7–8 Semesters	> 8 Semesters
High School N = 314	2 / 0.6%	12 / 3%	45 / 12%	68 / 19%	164 / 45%	23 / 6%
College N = 316	4 / 1%	36 / 10%	135 / 37%	120 / 33%	20 / 6%	1 / 0.3%

Table 7-8 shows that 87 percent of the SA students in the study reported some prior Spanish instruction during high school and/or college. (Some subjects may have failed to answer this question.) They reported an average of 4.5 semesters of high school Spanish instruction and 3.4 semesters of college Spanish instruction. However, no significant correlations were found between amount of high school or college Spanish instruction (separately or combined) and either Pre-SA SOPI ratings or gains in oral proficiency during SA. This suggests that amount of prior instruction is not predictive of oral proficiency development (as measured by the SOPI on the ACTFL scale) before or during SA. The good news is that SA appears to promote the development of Spanish oral proficiency equally well regardless of the amount of prior Spanish instruction.

Q6. Are Attitudes toward Spanish Culture and Interaction with Spanish Speakers Related to Oral Proficiency Development during SA?

Students were asked to rate various aspects of Spanish culture (Politics, Economics, Schools, Language, Communication, Customs, Medicine, and Environment) in terms of their relative similarity or dissimilarity to their American counterparts. No significant correlations were found between SOPI Gain and these ratings.

Likewise, no significant correlations were found between SOPI Gain and ratings of feelings of anxiety, acceptance, nervousness, suspicion, awkwardness, confidence, or carefulness when interacting with people from the host country.

Program Features

Q7. Is Duration of SA Program Associated with Difference in Oral Proficiency Development?

Most programs included in the Spanish SA sample lasted either one or two semesters. (Twelve students who attended SA programs lasting 3–7 weeks were excluded from this comparison.)

Because of the non-intervallic nature of the ACTFL scale, comparisons were made between students who began SA with SOPI ratings of Intermediate (IL-IH) and students who began SA with SOPI ratings of Advanced (AL-AH), see Table 7-9. The Pre-SA SOPI Intermediates who enrolled in two semester programs made significantly greater gains in oral proficiency (0.6 points on the converted ACTFL scale) than did the Pre-SA SOPI Intermediates who enrolled in one semester SA programs (0.4 points): $t = 2.21$, $df = 217$, $p < .05$. As noted earlier, students who began SA with higher SOPI ratings had smaller

Table 7-9 SOPI Gains X Duration of SA Program

	1 Semester (13–18 weeks)	2 Semesters (19 weeks–1 AY)
	Mean SOPI Gain	Mean SOPI Gain
Pre-SA SOPI = Intermediate	0.4	0.6
Pre-SA SOPI = Advanced	0.0	0.2

SOPI gains during SA. The students with a Pre-SA SOPI rating of Advanced who enrolled in two semester SA programs made greater gains in oral proficiency (0.2 points on the converted ACTFL scale) than did Pre-SA Advanced students who enrolled in one semester programs (0 points); however, this difference is not quite significant ($t = 1.693$, $df = 43.362^8$, $p = .098$). These results suggest that SA programs lasting two semesters or more do help students to achieve greater oral proficiency gains than one semester programs, although they do not double the gains.

Q8. Is Orientation or Training for SA Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

The oral proficiency of students who attended SA programs with an orientation or training that included a cultural component, prior to departure, improved significantly more than that of students whose programs did not include such an orientation ($F = 8.922$, $df = (1, 303)$, $p < .05$), see Table 7-10. (Orientation or training that included a cultural component, prior to departure, accounted for 10 percent of the total variance in SOPI rating gains.) Interestingly, there is a stronger association between pre-departure orientation and oral proficiency development for Pre-SA Advanced students ($F = 6.651$, $df = (1, 94)$, $p < .05$) than for Pre-SA Intermediates ($F = 1.125$, $df = (1, 184)$, n.s.). Pre-SA Advanced students who had a pre-departure orientation had a gain in SOPI rating of 3/10 of a point, on average—e.g., from AL to just above AM, or from AM to below AH—while Pre-SA Advanced students who did not have a pre-departure orientation had an average SOPI rating gain of only 1/10 of a point. These results suggest that students with Advanced oral proficiency may benefit more from pre-departure cultural orientation, perhaps because they are better able to make use of that orientation once they are in the host country, while students with lower oral proficiency may be focused, of necessity, on more basic issues of comprehension and production.

Table 7-10 Orientation or Training that Included a Cultural Component, Prior to Departure

	<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Yes	189	1.7	2.2
No	116	1.7	2.1

⁸Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was significant.

Concomitantly, students beginning SA with different levels of oral proficiency may benefit from different kinds/foci of orientation.

The vast majority of SA programs sampled in this study had some kind of orientation for students once they had arrived in the host country (and many students who received pre-departure training also received orientation in the host country). However, there is no significant relation between in-country orientation and oral proficiency development during SA ($F = .066$, $df = (1, 303)$, n.s.). Newly arrived students may suffer from jet lag and other distractions that may mitigate the effectiveness of in-country orientations. In contrast with the previous finding, these results suggest that LPDs should direct their students to programs that offer orientations prior to departure whenever possible.

Q9. Is Meeting with a Staff Member to Discuss Cultural Adjustment Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

Although, as Table 7-11 shows, half of the students in this study reported meeting individually with a staff member to discuss cultural adjustments—and more than two-thirds reported group meetings on this topic—there were no significant correlations between oral proficiency development and frequency of meeting with a staff member to discuss cultural adjustment—individually or in groups.

Q10. Is the Student's Living Situation during SA Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

The vast majority of Spanish SA students in this study lived with host families, allowing no conclusion to be drawn on this question.

Q11. Are the Students' Interaction Patterns during SA Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

Students reported the percentage of time they had spent over the last two months of their SA with their host family, people from the U.S., people from the host country, people from other countries, and by themselves. Percentage of time spent with host family and people from the host country were combined to represent greater likelihood and frequency of Spanish input and interaction. This combined measure correlates positively and significantly with oral proficiency development (for the Intermediate and Advanced group combined): $\tau = 0.12$.⁹ Percentage of time spent alone and with people from the U.S. was combined to represent reduced likelihood and frequency of Spanish input and interaction. Not surprisingly, this measure correlates negatively and significantly with oral proficiency development: $\tau = -0.12$. (Percentage of time spent with people from other countries did not correlate significantly with oral proficiency development.)

Table 7-11 Frequency of Meeting with Staff to Discuss Cultural Adjustments

Duration	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Individually	141	103	48	10	3
In group	83	117	84	19	1

⁹Kendall's τ was used because of the many ties on the SOPI Gain measure.

Table 7-12 Location of Classes

	<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
At host university	132	1.8	2.1
Outside host university	30	1.5	2.0
Mixed	200	1.8	2.2

While these results support the somewhat obvious conclusion that more Spanish input and interaction is better than less, simply living with a host family is probably not enough. Many students interact with their host families formulaically and in limited domains. Spending time with Spanish speakers has a small but significant relation with oral proficiency development, and SA programs should consider ways to increase and enhance student-host family/country interaction (Castañeda & Zirger, 2011).

Q12. Are Class Location and Composition during SA Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

Table 7-12 shows that students in “sheltered” SA programs (outside a host university) tend to enter with lower oral proficiency ratings, but there is no significant relation between oral proficiency development and where classes are held ($F = 1.498$, $df = (2, 359)$, n.s.); in fact, the oral proficiency gains of the small group of students who took classes exclusively outside the host university suggest that sheltered programs can effectively develop students’ oral proficiency. Perhaps counter to expectations, Pre-SA Intermediate and Advanced students did not differ significantly in the location of their SA classes, and there was no significant relation between location of classes and oral proficiency development when Pre-SA Intermediate and Advanced students were analyzed separately.

The relation between oral proficiency development and class composition (whether the students’ classes were mainly with other American students, with host university students, or with a mix of American, Spanish, and other international students) approached significance ($F = 2.501$, $df = [2, 359]$, n.s. [$p = .08$]). Surprisingly, Table 7-13 suggests that classes with host university students, which are most likely to provide the most exposure to and interaction in Spanish, were associated with the least oral proficiency development (although no pairwise differences were significant). However, 348 (of 362) students reported taking content courses in Spanish, so this variable may not discriminate very well among levels of Spanish input. On the other hand, these results do suggest that the many

Table 7-13 Class Composition

	<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Mainly U.S. students	37	1.5	2.0
Mainly host university students	221	1.8	2.1
Mixed (U.S., host, international)	104	1.7	2.2

Table 7-14 Spanish Language Instruction

		<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Pre-SA Intermediate	Yes	175	1.5	2.1
	No	54	1.5	1.9
Pre-SA Advanced	Yes	89	2.3	2.4
	No	32	2.2	2.4

demands of taking courses at a host university may be in competition with oral proficiency development.

Q13. Is Spanish Instruction during SA Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

The results presented in Table 7-14 support the value of Spanish language instruction during SA for the oral proficiency development of students who begin SA at the Intermediate level. The oral proficiency of Pre-SA Intermediates who received Spanish language instruction improved—from just above Intermediate Mid to Advanced Low, on average—nearly 50 percent more than those who did not—from just above Intermediate Mid to just above Intermediate High, on average ($F = 4.903$, $df = (1, 227)$, $p < .05$). The support and scaffolding of explicit Spanish instruction during SA appears to allow students beginning at the Intermediate level to leverage opportunities for input from and interaction with Spanish speakers. The lack of a significant relation between Spanish language instruction during SA and the oral proficiency development of students who begin SA at the Advanced level ($F = 0.520$, $df = (1, 119)$, n.s.) may be due, in part, to the nature of the ACTFL scale (which makes rating increases from higher levels more difficult).

Q 14. Are Internships and Community Service or Field Experience during SA Associated with Oral Proficiency Development?

There is a strong, but largely untested belief that students' opportunities for meaningful interaction (and therefore L2 development) may be enhanced by activities like internships, community service, fieldwork, and research projects in the host country.

Those students who did *not* participate in an internship or community service in the host country experienced significantly greater oral proficiency development ($F = 4.649$, $df = (1, 304)$, $p < .05$), although, as Table 7-15 shows, the difference

Table 7-15 Internship or Community Service in the Host Country (SAPs only)

	<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Yes	138	1.8	2.1
No	168	1.7	2.2

Table 7-16 Field Experience in the Host Country

	<i>N</i>	Pre-SA SOPI Mean Rating	Post-SA SOPI Mean Rating
Yes	70	1.7	2.1
No	168	1.8	2.2

is only 1/10 of a point on the converted ACTFL scale. It may be that some and perhaps many internships and community service tasks during SA do not encourage or require much verbal interaction in the target language. In fact, because of their limited proficiency, SA participants may be given tasks that shield them (and host country clients) from interaction in Spanish (or even utilize their English—e.g., assisting in EFL classes or offering tours for English-speaking tourists). (A non-significant relationship between participation in an internship or community service and percentage of time spent with people from the host country ($\chi^2 = 7.038$, $df = 5$, n.s.) suggests this might be the case.) In any case, it does not appear that any and all kinds of internships and community service during SA are conducive to oral proficiency development.

There was no significant association between oral proficiency development and field experience in the host country ($F = .209$, $df = (1, 304)$, n.s.), see Table 7-16. It may be that time with Spanish speakers during SA is a “zero sum game,” and time spent doing fieldwork during SA results in less time spent participating in other interactions with Spanish speakers. A nearly significant relationship between participation in field experience and percentage of time spent with people from the host country ($\chi^2 = 10.248$, $df = 5$, $p = .07$) suggests this might be the case. These results suggest that “special” forms of study like these are not a panacea for oral proficiency development, and that future research needs to consider variation in opportunities for verbal interaction across these learning opportunities.

Conclusions

Language Program Directors are often responsible for evaluating SA programs and advising students planning to SA. The results of this study identify Spanish SA program characteristics and Spanish language learner characteristics that are associated with oral proficiency development. Many of the findings of this study are not novel or shocking, but they do provide empirical support, with broad generalizability across both Spanish SA programs and students, for beliefs about SA which have been long held with little evidence. And some findings challenge a few of those long-held beliefs. However, it is important to remember that all results relate only to the development of oral proficiency, as elicited by a SOPI and measured against the ACTFL scale. This study provides no evidence about the effects of SA on other facets of language learning—L2 academic literacy, cross-cultural competence, or even (directly) listening comprehension.

Most importantly, the study found that the oral proficiency of Spanish language learners who studied abroad improved, from an average ACTFL rating of just below Intermediate High to Advanced Low on the ACTFL scale. The gains of those students with the lowest oral proficiency at the start of SA were significantly greater than the gains of students who began with higher SOPI ratings. Considering the “inverted pyramid” of the ACTFL scale, which assumes that it takes more time and effort to improve to each successively higher (sub)level, this pattern of relative improvement is not surprising. In addition, the study suggests that students who begin SA with higher levels of oral proficiency may develop other aspects of proficiency; e.g., Pre-SA Advanced students seem to have responded to and benefited from pre-departure cultural orientation. So the results of this analysis support the benefits of SA for students with both lower initial oral proficiency and higher initial oral proficiency.

A number of learner characteristics were not found to be associated with oral proficiency development during SA, suggesting that the benefits of SA (for Spanish oral proficiency development) extend equally to many types of language learners. These results may help LPDs assuage some of their students' fears about SA. Male and female Spanish SA students made equal oral proficiency gains. While females outnumbered males in this study by nearly three to one, LPDs can assure male language learners that their oral proficiency will improve as well, on average, during SA as their female counterparts.

Students who were exposed to Spanish in elementary or middle school made no greater gains than those who were exposed to another FL. Interestingly, nearly all SA participants in this study reported some early FL exposure. While this precludes conclusions about the relative benefit of some versus no early FL exposure for oral proficiency development during SA, it does suggest that early FL exposure may predispose students to SA (in Spanish) during college. In turn, this suggests that LPDs may need to make a stronger effort to encourage Spanish students who have not had early FL exposure to SA.

Nearly half of the students in this study reported prior experience living and/or studying abroad, and they had a significantly higher level of oral proficiency at the start of their college SA experience than those who had no such prior experience. However, this benefit of prior international experience was not apparent in oral proficiency development during SA. These results suggest that prior international experience is not a useful prerequisite for SA during college, and in fact LPDs can assure students considering SA that a lack of prior international experience is not a handicap (at least for oral proficiency development).

On the most direct measure of language preparation and readiness for SA, this study found that amount of prior instruction is not predictive of oral proficiency development (as measured by the SOPI on the ACTFL scale) before or during SA for students with ACTFL oral proficiency ratings of Intermediate or higher. LPDs—and their students—can be confident that their Spanish oral proficiency will develop equally well regardless of amount of prior Spanish instruction. In particular, students who may be apprehensive about SA because they believe they are “slow language learners” can be reassured about the benefit of SA to their oral proficiency development.

A range of attitudinal measures—perceived familiarity of the host culture and feelings when interacting with people from the host country—were not associated with oral proficiency development during SA. These results suggest that there is no (easily quantified) personality type or interactional style that is more likely to benefit from SA (viz Spanish oral proficiency development). The one learner characteristic that was significantly associated with oral proficiency gains was frequency of Spanish input and interaction; the percentage of time a student spent with her host family and people from the host culture correlated positively and the percentage of time spent alone and with people from the U.S. correlated negatively with oral proficiency development. Although the result is not surprising, it bears repeating: LPDs and language instructors cannot emphasize enough to their students the importance of interacting in Spanish during SA. Students should be encouraged to minimize their time with other American or international students and find opportunities for more than simple transactional interactions in Spanish.

While there was little variation across learner characteristics in oral proficiency development during SA, several SA program characteristics were associated with greater oral proficiency gains in this study. Not surprisingly, students in two semester SA programs made greater gains in oral proficiency than students in one-semester SA programs. However, gains in the longer SA programs were not twice as large as in the one-semester programs. On the one hand, some of the benefits of longer SA are probably not measured on the ACTFL scale. On the other hand, these results are relevant to concerns about decreasing enrollments in two semester SA programs; while students enrolling in one semester SA programs may not have as many learning opportunities—e.g., for development of L2 academic literacy and cross-cultural competence—these results should reassure LPDs and their students that one semester SA programs are at least as efficient with respect to oral proficiency development (as measured on the ACTFL scale) as longer programs.

Pre-departure (but not in-country) cultural orientation was associated with oral proficiency development during SA, and the benefit was strongest for students who began SA with higher levels of oral proficiency. Students with Advanced oral proficiency may be better able to make use of cultural orientation, while students with lower oral proficiency may not have the working memory available to attend to finer cultural input. Students beginning SA with different levels of oral proficiency may benefit from different kinds/foci of orientation, and LPDs may want to consider the breadth and emphasis of SA programs' orientation curricula. Although more than half of the students in this study reported meeting with a staff member—individually or in groups—to discuss cultural adjustments, there was no significant correlation between oral proficiency development and frequency of those meetings. (While such meetings may contribute to other aspects of students' SA experience, their frequency did not correlate with students' reported levels of academic, living, or adaptation satisfaction either.)

With respect to educational contexts and curricular choices, where students took classes during SA and with whom were not significantly associated with oral proficiency development, although the results suggest that (a) sheltered programs can be effective in developing students' Spanish oral proficiency and (b) the demands of taking courses at a host university may be in competition with oral proficiency development. On the other hand, the support and scaffolding of explicit Spanish language instruction during SA appears to allow students beginning at the Intermediate level to leverage opportunities for input from and interaction with Spanish speakers and significantly aids the oral proficiency development of students who begin SA at the Intermediate level. While some SA programs emphasize their extra-curricular opportunities, the results of this study suggest that all kinds of internships and community service are not conducive to oral proficiency development and LPDs and students should look closely at how much Spanish input and interaction is allowed in those experiences.

The relations between oral proficiency development and a number of other SA program design features were untestable because more than 90 percent of students lived with a host family and reported that their faculty were from the host country, that content courses were taught in Spanish, and that they had taken a language pledge of some sort. These appear to be default settings for Spanish SA programs, although their relation to oral proficiency development is largely untested.

Finally, we have to ask just how important oral proficiency development is to students who SA. Gains on SOPI ratings were not significantly associated with students' reported levels of academic satisfaction or overall adaptation satisfaction, and had only a very small correlation with students' reported level of living experience satisfaction ($r = .092; p < .05; N = 282$). Clearly, there are many other aspects of the SA experience that are at least more salient to students, some of which (one trusts) entail learning of different kinds.

In sum, the results of this study suggest that LPDs can recommend SA for oral proficiency development to students with a range of prior language learning and international experience and a range of attitudes toward the host culture and interaction with its people. While there are some program features that LPDs may want to highlight (e.g., programs with pre-departure orientations and Spanish language instruction), SA programs of one and two semesters with a variety of class locations/compositions all are conducive to oral proficiency development. However, LPDs should remember that there are many other facets of SA that are at least as important to students as opportunities for oral proficiency development.

References

- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (1999). *ACTFL proficiency guidelines—Speaking: Revised 1999*. Retrieved September 15, 2012, from <http://www.actfl.org/files/public/Guidelinespeak.pdf>.
- Bachman, L., & Savignon, S. (1986). The evaluation of communicative language proficiency: A critique of the ACTFL oral interview. *Modern Language Journal*, 70, 382–390.

- Brecht, R. D., Davidson, D. E., & Ginsberg, R. B. (1995). Predictors of foreign language gain during study abroad. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp. 37–66). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Carroll, J.B. (1967). Foreign language proficiency levels attained by language majors near graduation from college. *Foreign Language Annals*, 1, 131–151.
- Castañeda, M. E., & Zirger, M. L. (2011). Making the most of the ‘new’ study abroad: Social capital and the short-term sojourn. *Foreign Language Annals*, 44, 544–564.
- Collentine, J. (2004). The effects of learning contexts on morphosyntactic and lexical development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 227–248.
- Collentine, J., & Freed, B.F. (2004). Learning context and its effect on second language acquisition: An introduction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 153–171.
- Davidson, D. E. (2010). Study abroad: When, how long, and with what results? New data from the Russian front. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 6–26.
- DeKeyser, R. (1991). Foreign language development during a semester abroad. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Foreign language acquisition research and the classroom* (pp. 104–119). Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath
- Dewey, D.P. (2004). A comparison of reading development by learners of Japanese in intensive domestic immersion and study abroad contexts. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 303–307.
- Díaz-Campos, M.(2004). Context of learning in the acquisition of Spanish second language phonology. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 249–273.
- Dwyer, M. M. (2004). More is better: The impact of study abroad program duration. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 10, 151–163.
- Engle, L., & Engle, J. (2003). Study abroad levels: Toward a classification of program types. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 9, 1–20.
- Engle, L., & Engle, J. (2004). Assessing language acquisition and intercultural sensitivity development in relation to study abroad program design. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 10, 219–236.
- Freed, B. F., Segalowitz, N., & Dewey, D. P. (2004). Context of learning and second language fluency in French: Comparing regular classroom, study abroad, and intensive domestic immersion programs. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 275–301.
- Ginsberg, R. B., & Miller, L. (2000). What do they do? Activities of students during study abroad. In R. D. Lambert and E. Shohamy (Eds.), *Language policy and pedagogy: Essays in honor of A. Ronald Walton* (pp. 237–260). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Isabelli-García, C. (2006). Study abroad social networks, motivation and attitudes: Implications for second language acquisition. In E. Churchill & M. DuFon (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 231–258). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kenyon, D. M., & Malabonga, V. (2001). Comparing examinee attitudes toward computer-assisted and other oral proficiency assessments. *Language Learning & Technology*, 5(2), 60–83.
- Kenyon, D. M., and Tschirner, E. (2000). The rating of direct and semi-direct oral proficiency interviews: Comparing performance at lower proficiency levels. *Modern Language Journal*, 84, 85–101.
- Marqués-Pascual, L. (2011). Study abroad, previous language experience, and Spanish L2 development. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 565–582.
- Martinsen, R. A. (2010). Short-term study abroad: Predicting changes in oral skills. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 504–530.
- Meredith, R. A. (1990). The oral proficiency interview in real life: Sharpening the scale. *Modern Language Journal*, 74, 288–296.

- O'Brien, I., Segalowitz, N., Freed, B., & Collentine, J. (2007). Phonological memory predicts second language oral fluency gains in adults. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 29*, 557–581.
- Segalowitz, N., & Freed, B.F. (2004). Context, contact, and cognition in oral fluency acquisition: Learning Spanish in at home and study abroad contexts. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 26*, 173–199.
- Serrano, R., Llanes, A., & Tragant, E. (2011). Analyzing the effect of context of second language learning: Domestic intensive and semi-intensive courses vs. study abroad in Europe. *System, 39*, 133–143.
- Stansfield, C. W. (1991). A comparative analysis of simulated and direct oral proficiency interviews. In S. Anivan (Ed.), *Current developments in language testing* (pp. 199–209). Singapore: Regional English Language Center.
- Stansfield, C. W. (1996). *Test development handbook: Simulated oral proficiency interview (SOP)*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Sunderman, G., & Kroll, J. F. (2009). When study abroad experience fails to deliver: The internal resources threshold effect. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 30*, 79–99.
- Surface, E. A., & Dierdorff, E. C. (2003). Reliability and the ACTFL oral proficiency interview: Reporting indices of interrater consistency and agreement for 19 languages. *Foreign Language Annals, 36*, 507–519.
- Swender, E. (Ed.) (1999). *ACTFL oral proficiency interview tester training manual*. Yonkers, N.Y.: ACTFL.
- Tokowicz, N., Michael, E. B., & Kroll, J. F. (2004). The roles of study-abroad experience and working-memory capacity in the types of errors made during translation. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 7*, 255–272.
- VandeBerg, M., Connor-Linton, J., & Paige, M. (2009). The Georgetown consortium project: Interventions for student learning abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 18*, 1–75.