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An Interventionist Approach to Language Study Abroad: Exploring Metalinguistic Awareness in the Acquisition of Spanish through Digital Portfolio Documentation and Expert Mentorship

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Hispanic Studies

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Abstract

Language study abroad sojourns offer the possibility of acquiring a multitude of competencies, linguistic and otherwise. As a context for extracurricular language learning, focus of scholarly interest, and subject of empirical research (Carroll, 1967), this discipline has evolved in the decades since it began to emerge in the late 1950s and more widely in the 1960s. While historically study abroad research has emphasized linguistic gains in isolation or “post-treatment abilities” (Collentine, 2009, p.219), by the mid-1990s it had endeavoured to move towards a more postmodern, sociocultural approach whereby individual factors and intercultural competencies are seen as integral to the process of acquiring knowledge of a language (Freed, 1995). With remaining gaps in the literature, and as new instruments emerge, so too do new opportunities for investigating and measuring learning outcomes in innovative ways. The present study, framed by the intervention hypothesis and sociocultural theory, and implemented using digital communication tools, examines the acquisition of Spanish in sojourners studying at The University of Costa Rica during a semester abroad. Utilizing the social media platform Google+ as a space to develop participant-managed electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) for the purposes of in-depth metalinguistic reflection, paired with entirely online participant-researcher mediation, this study builds upon the body of knowledge pertaining to second language acquisition in study abroad including pragmalinguistic awareness while also adding to the research available on its intersections within a 24/7 digitally connected world. Data for this study were gathered from three sources: 1) participant e-portfolios, 2) one-on-one participant-mentor conversations (both qualitative sources), and 3) diagnostic testing performed at the beginning and end of the semester abroad for both experimental and control group participants to quantifiably assess their performance levels from start to finish. Analysis of the data suggests that the act of developing an e-portfolio and engaging with a mentor throughout the study abroad term may be contributory in enhancing a variety of linguistic capabilities including metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness as well as heightened Spanish language proficiency.

Keywords

Second/foreign language acquisition, language learning, Spanish, sociolinguistics,
sociocultural theory, e-portfolio, digital technologies

Dedication

For Samuel for his encouragement and support in taking on and achieving this milestone,
and for Stella Paz, our little girl, who slept while I wrote.

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There are several people I would like to thank for their support throughout my doctoral studies.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

Students who choose to study a foreign language abroad often do so with the intention to immerse themselves in the language and learn in ways thought not possible in their home community or within the confines of a traditional classroom. This narrative is widely supported by university program directors, language practitioners, stakeholders, family members, among others with the expectation that these students will come back transformed and more skilled in their target language than ever. For these reasons, credit is often granted in lieu of rigorous course study at home. Fortunately, for many, significant gains are made, and all things considered the overall experience may be deemed successful and worthwhile. Unfortunately, however, students are typically left to their own devices with little sociolinguistic preparation for their endeavors, and this makes for an incomplete learning experience. Simply being immersed in a speech community is not a guarantee that these students are acquiring linguistic competencies in line with the expectations of their institutions or the expectations they have for themselves, and this is truly doing a disservice to these students by not providing them with more structured support. It is a missed opportunity to guide them through what can be a rich and deeply formative experience and one that can elevate language learners to a higher level of consciousness/awareness of their learning process. Ideally, students would be provided with an occasion to prepare well in advance of their language study abroad, have access to expert guidance throughout their sojourns to promote the metalinguistic awareness necessary to examine their experiences critically, and follow up their time abroad with in-depth reflection and further study (see DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2011; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Pérez Vidal, 2014 for related recommendations). While this comprehensive interventionist approach is one that requires resources that may or may not be available to university departments, there are ways that they can be made accessible, and this thesis addresses that issue. Furthermore, from a research perspective, it is through this interventionist approach that a deeper understanding can be attained of how individual identities and pragmatic acts are negotiated within interlinguistic contexts. Knowledge of these applied linguistic

processes during language study abroad is limited, as they have been little explored in the literature, but a greater understanding is necessary in order to continue to support the acquisition of language in both form and function, and to build on the conventions of study abroad programming.

The central argument in this project is that language learners in study abroad can benefit significantly from intervention to guide them in navigating the process of acquiring language competencies. It is worth the investment to work with these individuals and offer them a framework with which to build upon their metalinguistic faculties so that they can make the most of the immersive language learning opportunities presented to them. Without this, we are conceding to the myth that language acquisition is something effortless that automatically happens to a person while studying abroad when in fact variability tends to be the rule rather than the exception in language gain due to a number of influential and individual factors (Anderson, 2014; Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, Martinsen, 2014; DeKeyser, 2010; George, 2014; Grey, Cox, Serafini, & Sanz, 2015; Magnan & Back, 2007, among others). Notable inconsistencies and even a “nongainer effect” (Ginsberg & Miller, 2000, p.249) have been well documented. Further, in spite of the fact that evidence suggests study abroad can hold an advantage in terms of improved oral proficiency (Jochum, 2014; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Martinson, Baker, Bown, Johnson, 2011; Regan, Howard & Lemée, 2009) including heightened “lexical breadth and narrative ability” (Collentine & Freed, 2004, p. 164), at home instruction has been shown to be comparable to study abroad language gain, in particular in terms of tested knowledge of grammar (Llanes & Serrano, 2014) and morphosyntactic control (Collentine & Freed, 2004), and it has been shown that L2 linguistic knowledge prior to studying abroad leads to more in situ use of the target language (Valls-Ferrer & Mora, 2014) and greater overall gains in study abroad in terms of L2 speaking competency (Leonard, 2017). Committing to a process of exploring how language gain occurs in study abroad, concurrent to a study abroad experience can heighten a sojourner’s ability to assign meaning to their experiences, and, furthermore, it creates an opportunity to bridge the gulf between abstract linguistic knowledge and individual learning patterns. This can be achieved by carrying out meaningful but not onerous, reflective tasks and working with a mentor for the purpose of engaging in defining,

supportive conversations along the way, and this can all be done via digital communicative tools that are open-source and easily accessible, transcending time and space. Contemporary study abroad exists in the digital age, meaning that study abroad students are no longer exclusively immersed in one single community. They can freely reach people back home at a moment's notice, or seek refuge in other online activities, affording them the opportunity to remain disengaged with the host community if desired. However, it is possible to meet study abroad sojourners where they are and leverage these digital technologies gainfully (Mikal & Grace, 2012) including for the benefit of reflective, guided learning, as seen in the present project. Also, this approach not only presents the opportunity to participate in this meta process of learning to 'know what you know', but it also, by virtue of digital documentation, culminates in a product of chronicled experiences that can then be stored, shared, or revisited for future purposes.

Surprisingly, however, the interventionist approach, beyond the standard pre-departure orientation, is infrequently put into practice in a comprehensive way. From the findings gathered thus far, it is clear that study abroad could be enhanced through reinforcement by means of formal preparation and continued guidance on strategies for acquiring both language and intercultural skills in order to further legitimize the implementation of such programming. As will be discussed, the emphasis in the literature in this area has until now been placed mostly on intercultural communication and there is a gap in the research in terms of investigating the effectiveness of training to successfully support language acquisition abroad, particularly in the area of linguistic pragmatics. Moreover, in line with the trajectory of study abroad and how it has been framed, moving from thinking about the context and its rich potential to thinking about how the individual can thrive within that fluid context, this project is designed to emphasize the individual as an agent in the process of acquiring language. This study represents the middle piece, or the "during" component of the more complete prior to, during and post study abroad intervention model mentioned above. It presents an intervention concurrent to the study abroad sojourns, combining ongoing mentoring to university-level participants learning Spanish abroad, with regular documentation and reflection of critical learning experiences through an individually managed digital portfolio. This sustained approach intends to provide participants with both support to complement their learning

experiences and the opportunity to become more metalinguistically aware of what they are learning, how they are learning it, and the choices they make throughout that journey. Presenting language study abroad participants with support to guide their language learning experiences goes beyond the fixed predictors of language gain because this approach equips learners with the resources to appropriate in situ experiences. It has the potential to facilitate and cultivate awareness that can be utilized within any fluid, ever-changing study abroad context.

Following this line of argument, this project is based in the Intervention Hypothesis (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009) whereby language study abroad is mediated by reflective exploration and expert guidance to facilitate intentional learning, and by Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory, which argues that higher mental faculties are developed through input of cultural tools (i.e. language being the most relevant example to the current project) and through mediation by and collaboration with a “more capable” other (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Essentially, more can be achieved when working with another person to make sense of the input, consolidating understanding, and this is referred to by Vygotsky (1978) as the Zone of Proximal Development. Further, this study is framed within a modern study abroad context in the digital age that acknowledges the significant global reach afforded in today’s wired societies through regular online access. Finally, the current project acknowledges the inherent singularity of study abroad experiences, viewing each individual sojourner holistically so as to focus on their discrete, agentic capacities as language learners and unique decision-makers. In doing so, it is possible to detect differences in their approaches to acquiring language competencies and also extract from these differences, patterns in how sojourners go about navigating their study abroad experiences.

This project differs from previous interventionist studies in that it is designed to probe into the sorts of actions language learners take as agents of their own learning, which will allow for a more in-depth examination of this variation across learners. Kinginger (2013) has highlighted some of the gaps that currently exist in pragmatics research in study abroad, including: understanding of access to learning opportunities that study abroad participants are able to procure, how they evaluate identity performance in language learning contexts, and “which elements of language they choose to attend to

and/or incorporate into their own communicative repertoires” (p.352). These are all queries that are addressed in the current project through guided use of an electronic portfolio and one-on-one mentorship. The intention of this research project is to test the Intervention Hypothesis with a view to assisting study abroad sojourners in their endeavours, and to explore the role of sociopragmatic decision-making in the acquisition of Spanish, while focusing on the valuable observations made by language learners in study abroad. It aims to provide study abroad participants with the opportunity to reflect upon and document their experiences, and to engage in ongoing mentorship to assist in cultivating greater awareness about what and how they are learning. In this way, the project tests the Intervention Hypothesis by taking a socioculturalist approach through current digital means, in order to assess whether or not this type of intervention, which is of relatively low resource intensity, can make a difference in sojourners’ acquisition of language. The approach adopted for this study includes assessment of the acquisition not only of Spanish language forms, but also of sociopragmatic skills. In addition, the objective is to draw on the productive nature of this style of intervention and extract data to gain further insight into the behaviour of language learners navigating in situ learning experiences while studying a foreign language abroad.

While different approaches to intervention have proven successful in different ways, particularly the mentoring component, the present study presents an innovative design in that the intervention is carried out exclusively through digital means. The “mentor-researcher” and participants engaged through online means only, testing the viability of these communicative digital tools for intervention without the benefit of in-person contact. The participant reflections, carried out using the online platform (Google+) for the purpose of creating an electronic portfolio, permits students to observe their progression in acquiring Spanish from start to finish of their sojourns. This is particularly relevant in the current climate of online culture and will allow participants to store and share in their experiences as desired. This, combined with ongoing mentorship, leverages the technological capabilities now available while also incorporating human interaction. It is the combination of such online communicative software and on-going accountability and engagement that has been shown to result in positive outcomes in studies on communicative digital tools and language acquisition (Hitosugi, Schmidt &

Hayashi, 2014). Such a strategic use of this pairing provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of this innovative solution to providing support from a distance as necessary, which makes it a more accessible design and one that could be replicated in other language institutions. This design is also unique in that it affords participants the opportunity to reflect upon and document their language learning experiences within a digital forum, the e-portfolio, that offers accessibility to public dissemination. In constructing their e-portfolios participants end up not only with a chronological record of their reflections, providing the opportunity to observe their evolution throughout their stay abroad, but also with a potentially highly dynamic and interactive product which can be readily shared with others outside of academia at their discretion.

Chapter 2

2 Literature Review

This chapter will explore the literature applicable to the current project, in addition describing the theoretical bases that make up its foundation. To begin, this chapter will provide a brief background on the evolution of research in second/foreign language acquisition (SLA). Subsequently, it will focus on the known affordances of studying language within a study abroad context, and then examine the inherent variability of language gain that has been found in the research to date. In order to explain this phenomenon, a discussion of the immersion fallacy will follow. Next, there will be an exploration of the modern SA context as it stands in contrast with years past, and the influence connectedness has had on students' intentions and experiences in studying abroad. Finally, the research available on e-portfolio use and digital communications as tools for reflective, in-depth learning and the limited research on language acquisition in this particular field will be summarized, highlighting notable gaps in the literature. In the second half of this chapter, the theoretical bases for this project will be discussed in detail, beginning with the Intervention Hypothesis for providing language learners with guidance in their language learning experiences. This will be followed by a discussion of the value in viewing the language learner as an individual being rather than one defined by generalizations about SA experiences as a whole. Last but certainly not least, a theory central to this study, Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory including the Zone of Proximal Development will be described and examined as one of the primary bases of this project, looking at cognitive development and dialogic, social interactions to enhance learners' meta-awareness of what they are learning and how they are learning it.

2.1 Language Acquisition and Study Abroad as a Discipline

As a context for extracurricular language learning, and focus of scholarly interest, SLA in SA has evolved in the decades since it began to emerge in the late 1950s and more widely in the 1960s (Abrams, 1963; Catford, 1969; Durnall, 1967; Sander, 1965, among others). It was not until Carroll's 1967 study on language proficiency scores of upper-level

college students and variational factors, however, that second language acquisition (SLA) and study abroad (SA) became married as the subject of empirical research. While historically SLA and SA research has emphasized linguistic gains in isolation or “post-treatment abilities” (Collentine, 2009, p. 219), by the mid-1990s and beyond it had moved towards a more postmodern, sociocultural approach whereby individual factors and intercultural competencies are seen as integral to the process of acquiring knowledge of a language. By this period the research on this discipline had expanded significantly with its focus having moved to fill the existing empirical gap on “actual linguistic experiences” (Freed, 1995, p. 6). However, interestingly, this claim to have moved to a new paradigm in examining SLA in SA towards a more nuanced, individual, experiential perspective is one that continues to be made even in the last five years (Fernandez, 2013, p. 326). Evidently, there continues to exist room in the literature for more innovative approaches to gaining a deeper understanding of how languages are acquired during a sojourn abroad, and as new instruments emerge, so too do new opportunities for tracking and measuring learning outcomes.

2.2 Affordances of Study Abroad

Without a doubt, SA sojourns have a myriad of opportunities to offer interested students, and there is no denying SA’s continually growing popularity in this modern age of unprecedented global reach. Aside from its central purpose (study), the allure of spending time in a foreign country is made even more enticing by the prospect of accruing meaningful life experience and global perspective, while also strategically positioning oneself for future career prospects, and the like. A number of publications note the benefits of SA, and they cover a range of proficiencies. Among the most these, of course, is the possibility of developing language competency, most relevant to the present study, but there is a significant body of work that should be mentioned initially, demonstrating that SA can usher in a wide variety of skills in support of linguistic competencies. For example, one study has shown enhanced academic achievement through increased grade point average following SA (Holoviak, Verney, Winter, & Holoviak, 2011). Another study cites heightened global awareness and locally active citizenry well after returning home (Keese, 2013). Professional as well as cognitive development have also been

associated with SA (Kelleher, 2013), as have improved reading comprehension (Dewey, 2004), lexical gain (Fitzpatrick, 2012) and even emotional resilience (Earnest, Rosenbusch, Wallace-Williams, & Keim, 2016). Intercultural competencies and the associated knowledge, skills and attitudes (see Byram, 1997) and the processes involved (see Deardorff, 2009) can be easily linked to international sojourns, as has been noted by many researchers (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Ballestas & Roller, 2013; Martinsen, 2011; Martinsen & Alvord, 2012; Ruddock & Turner, 2007; Williams, 2005, among others). However, while SA is a uniquely engaging opportunity that extends beyond what may be taught in the conventional classroom and something that may be deemed as having an overall positive impact on learning, language competence, including sociocultural and sociopragmatic ease, are by no means guaranteed gains. Outcomes have been known to be consistently inconsistent, and some of the reasons for this will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 Variability and Predictors of Gain in Study Abroad

Linguistic and/or cultural enrichment is not necessarily assimilated, and one of the reasons is because, like any skill, consolidation is acquired through pairing both theoretical and practical application. In fact, in its report “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” under the “Continuing Priorities” section, the Modern Language Association (2014) states, “Classroom study and study abroad should be promoted as interdependent necessities: the classroom is an ideal place for structured learning that first sets the stage and later reinforces and builds on learning absorbed in study abroad”. This statement, as well as further commentary within the report, suggests a greater emphasis should be placed on course study both prior to and following SA endeavours. Although the passive description here of SA learning being “absorbed” is a preeminent message that adds to the mistaken belief that SA offers an inherently magical learning experience without emphasizing the importance of personal responsibility for one’s own learning, this quote does promote the idea of an inherent interaction between study and preparedness on the one hand, and SA on the other. Specifics on how such courses should be designed or defined, unfortunately, are not provided, but this is likely due to the variable nature of SA and the individuals who

participate in it. Nevertheless, the notion that SA is not meant to be a stand-alone endeavour is implicit.

To be sure, a number of factors must be considered in order to predict language SA learning outcomes. Certainly in-class study performance beforehand has been shown to be a strong indicator of language acquisition in SA (Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, & Martinsen, 2014; DeKeyser, 2010; George, 2014; Magnan & Back, 2007; Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011), as well as language use, language contact and social engagement during the sojourns (Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, Martinsen, 2014; Dewaele, 2002; Ginsberg & Miller, 2000; Nagy, Blondeau and Auger, 2003; Ranta, & Meckelborg, 2013), intercultural awareness and pragmatic competence (Bacon, 2002; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Martinsen & Alvord, 2012; Shively & Cohen, 2008), external programmatic variables such as the nature of the SA design (Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, & Eggett, 2014), as well as individual traits (age, gender, attitude, etc. and individual behavior, including personality, motivation, and self-esteem, among others). Davidson (2010b) emphasizes the impact of individual variables in learners within social environments stating that “If structural and cognitive factors can be shown to account for no more than half of the documented variation in learning outcomes in the SA context” then we must assume that “other individual and social variables” must account for the rest (p. 4), which is a significant portion to consider. Dörnyei (2005), an authority on the psychology of language acquisition and individual differences, has researched extensively on the individual language learner and characteristics associated with personality, as well as aptitude, motivation, learning styles, self-regulation, and a number of other individual factors such as anxiety, creativity, willingness to communicate, self-esteem and learner beliefs. He cites the “Big Five Model” of personality factors with the acronym OCEAN: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion-introversion, agreeableness, neuroticism-emotional stability (p. 15) as a discussion point for language use but cautions against isolating one single factor encouraging a “combined effect or interrelationship of personality traits” (p. 30). Working with personality factors and other independent variables requires attention to context and sensitivity to individual competencies. For example, to assume that an extrovert will necessarily demonstrate greater success in language learning than an

introvert is unfair, as language involves more than talking, and introverts may display other advantages as learners (p. 27). However, personality research can be a rich field from which to draw conclusions about learnability in SA. For this reason, more in-depth discussion of taking a holistic approach to researching language learners will follow within the theoretical bases discussion behind this project. It is the combination of individual traits, and assuredly other individual, circumstantial and in situ factors, that makes for a complex web of variability within the body of knowledge on acquisition of language competencies in SA. This, compounded by the diversity (rather than categoricity) of SA sojourns in terms of length of study, program design, group demographics, location, etc. means that there is no one universal SA experience to speak of.

Other individual learner beliefs should also be considered. Yang and Kim (2011) state that such beliefs are constantly being renegotiated and that learner agency is central to the process of second language acquisition. Throughout a SA experience, from start to finish and beyond, participants will go through different stages, and beliefs and understanding will most certainly evolve. As learners progress, ideally they will be able to develop a muscle for self-awareness so that they may exact greater control over their individual experience and shape it into the experience they desire. This may be accomplished through consciously accessing resources such as contact with native speakers or somehow widening other social networks, or dedicating more time to formal study. Both of these indicators mentioned in the above studies and have been shown to be influential in the literature. The setting is ripe for learning, but the opportunities must be seized, and that can be largely a matter of choice. This notion of learner control over the learning experience is also tied, even “presupposed” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 65) to motivation. It is what drives individuals to participate, but it must be sustained (p. 84), which may depend on other variables, both internal and external. One internal variable is attitude, which is linked to cultural understanding, and has also been associated with language acquisition. In their study on oral and written competency in Spanish students studying in the United Kingdom, Serrano, Tragant, and Llanes (2012) asked whether or not interaction while abroad could be tied to attitude, and their findings show that both attitudes towards the language itself and native speakers of the language could be

correlated with acquisitional outcome including increased accuracy and “lexical richness” (p. 153). Furthermore, motivation to learn may also be a factor because depending on the purpose behind language learning, a learner may or may not choose to participate in certain linguistic circles. If the goal is to achieve success on an academic level, a student may not be so inclined to exercise informal language skills, for example, hindering the development of popular, more vernacular forms. Likewise, a particularly social person may possess a more categorical desire to fit in and sound more native-like in order to facilitate communication and/or deeper relationships with peers, therefore, espousing more colloquial register. These scenarios and studies point to the idea that an approach inclusive of individual goals and characteristics is an appropriate way to support acquisition in SA in order to encompass fluid individual perceptions and how they are parlayed into language learning. In fact, Kinginger (2008) states, “[f]indings revealing individual differences in achievement outcomes have emerged in studies of varied scale and foci throughout the history of research on language learning abroad” (p. 3). These studies point out some of the trends associated with SA achievement, which is helpful in making generalizations about language gain. However, the inherent variability across the experiences and achievements of SA participants is problematic in that these trends are nothing more than predictors within a very complex process grounded in individual lived experiences. In addition, as will be explored further in the next section, participation in SA as a predictor of language gain itself has been called into question.

2.4 Immersion Fallacy

The above predictors of gain are important pieces of what can be a very complex learning venture, and arguably more awareness surrounding these factors is needed in making decisions about designing SA programs for a more comprehensive approach to language acquisition in SA. However, even if all of these variables were successfully incorporated into a SA experience, a more nuanced approach would still be missing. Outcomes would still prove inconsistent, as has been evidenced by a number of studies. The Georgetown Consortium Project (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009), a very well-known study on immersion and intercultural and language learning abroad, the largest of its kind, found that although sojourn duration and prior proceduralized language knowledge

are important, the most salient contributing factor to intercultural competence gain and oral proficiency was expert mentoring to guide the learning experience before, during and after the SA sojourns. Furthermore, it found that factors such as homestay and guided experiential activities were not shown to have a significant effect on to how students progressed in engaging with the target culture or target language.

One of the reasons there continues to be an enduring mythology surrounding SA and its potential learning outcomes, is the way SA has been framed throughout its evolution. Vande Berg, Paige, and Hemming Lou (2012) point out three “master narratives” surrounding practices in SA: positivism, relativism, and experiential/constructivism (p. 15-19) in order to understand how programming for SA has been shaped over the years. The *positivist* paradigm emphasizes the home and abroad dichotomy and suggests that some societies are naturally superior to others. Here, students should demonstrate academic achievement in order to be able to succeed abroad, they should learn what to do and not to do in the other environment, and learning is acquired from the outside in (recall the above reference to “absorbing” knowledge in SA). *Relativism* acknowledges all cultures as being equal but promotes immersion to “transform” students, encourages longer stays and homestay living circumstances to ensure greater engagement. Finally, the *experiential/constructivist* view perceives the world as ever-changing. The emphasis is not on acquiring knowledge per se, but on shifting behavior and adapting effectively to new cultural contexts. Hence, experiential/constructivism is characterized by strategies in intervention to assist students in becoming more aware. Relativism as well as some features of positivism arguably represent the paradigm that still dominates mainstream SA program development, and they shape how SA is perceived as a strategy for learning. Characteristics of both are easily detected in standard SA programming. For example, many institutions require high academic standing in order to be eligible to participate in SA, assuming that a strong student at home will learn effectively while abroad. Length of stay and homestay, while important factors, are often emphasized to ensure a student’s ability to acquire knowledge within an authentic, immersive environment. Envisioning SA as a more fluid experience, however, that offers occasion for on-going, holistic learning opportunities through guided intervention, means students are agents of their own experiences. This explains why

much of the data on SA varies. Being immersed is not a guarantee because immersion in and of itself does not facilitate awareness. Students may have reportedly transformative experiences, but the inconsistent outcomes of SA according to the research are evidence that these pillars of program design are not enough. In fact, as Vande Berg, Paige, and Hemming Lou (2012) note, “put differently, the data show that students learn and develop considerably more when educators prepare them to become more self-reflective, culturally self-aware and aware of ‘how they know what they know’” (p. 21). This means that there is evidence to suggest that immersion or any other factor of SA design is not enough to procure “transformation”. It must be cultivated.

This can be seen in studies such as the one carried out by Trentman (2013). She calls attention to “inadequate linguistic and cultural preparation” in her work on American and European students studying Arabic in Egypt, noting that “...students often struggled to develop local friendships, and spent more time using English than Arabic” (p. 468). Unprepared for the immersion experience and possessing insufficient language competency, students often turn to their international student counterparts for social engagement, speaking their native language as opposed to the target one. This can result from frustration at not being able to express oneself satisfactorily, from rejection felt from the host community, or from a combination of the two. Ranta and Meckelborg (2013) propose an alternative explanation reporting on Chinese graduate students studying English in Canada stating, “...some of the students in this study appeared to view English knowledge as a tool for their academic and career pursuits, rather than as a personal goal” (p. 23). In such a case, students may not be inclined to do more than focus on their academics, viewing social interaction within the target language community as peripheral to their main goal of passing courses. In this study, although combined daily English reception and production was greater than the participants’ Mandarin Chinese use due to arduous study, overall contact with the target language was found to be less than what was shown in results from Ginsberg and Miller’s study (2000) carried out on American students studying in Russia (p. 22). It is interesting to consider how students’ nationalities (and by extension their cultural backgrounds) and where their native languages fall within the social hierarchy when assessing student outcomes. Ongoing geopolitical activities, race relations, and other social matters do influence how people

engage with one another, so how students behave and perceive their surroundings will vary, and this will impact their decision-making and SA experiences. For example, in the Ranta & Meckelborg (2013) study students reported insecurity (also see Juan-Garau, 2014, p. 105 on anxiety) about their listening comprehension, resulting in hesitancy to speak with native speakers (p. 23). This could be due in part to intercultural differences, or how these students felt they were received in the host country/community, which are very valid concerns and add additional layers to their SA experiences. Thus, the immersive experience can be an illusion in that it presents opportunities, but those opportunities may be impeded by significant individual differences in specific contexts. It is important to note that earlier empirical research on SLA in SA emphasized the acquisition of specific linguistic abilities as stand-alone gains (Collentine, 2009). This changed in the 1990s as evidenced with Freed's (1995) book *Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context* that compiled a number of sociolinguistic studies focusing on the individual factors in language acquisition as well as lived experiences in SA documented in diary studies (see Freed, 1995 for a synthesis of these studies, including special attention to future trajectories in SLA in SA research at the time). Without the essential social component to language acquisition that many more contemporary studies cite, the development of language competency can end up stunted, meaning the immersive context provides no real advantage. What some students perceive to be more of a priority (i.e. study versus personal interactions) or succumbing to the fear of interlocutor engagement will inevitably be different from others', so this notion of helping students navigate their SA goals and experiences is an important one. Such assistance affords students the opportunity to look more carefully at what they wish to accomplish and what they need to do to be more intentional in engaging with the target language so that they do not "lack guidance in interpreting their observations" (Kinging, 2011, p. 67), and thus avoid disengaging from the learning experience.

Importantly, greater self-awareness and metalinguistic awareness are essential to success in acquiring language competencies and capitalizing on being immersed in a target language environment. However, Kinginger (2013) provides another perspective on why students studying language abroad may not find themselves seamlessly integrating into a new target language community and why guidance is essential. She

explains that they may in fact be deterred in spite of willingness and preparedness, and in spite of individual goals to engage with the target language:

When students encounter challenges not only to their language skills but also to their sense of self, that is, their identity, simply enjoining them to become more engaged or less judgmental may not be sufficient. Rather, students can benefit from explicit instruction on the pragmatic aspects of language and the relationship between these aspects and the presentation of self (p. 353).

She suggests that it is not only awareness about engaging in the host community, but also an understanding of how that intersects with one's individual identity. First of all, the desire to engage must exist, and that is not always the case (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004, p. 191), contrary to the erroneous assumption that a SA participant will willingly engage in all opportunities to use the target language. Furthermore, it is possible to be acutely aware of social expectations, but those expectations may not align with the desired self-expression. Intervention on engaging with a host community is one thing, but it must also be combined with training on how pragmatic abilities and individual identity markers may be negotiated. This is the recommended path to gaining meaningful contact within an immersive environment, but it is an easier-said-than-done scenario, as it means examining one's own "presentation of self" as Kinginger (2013) puts it. Ways of being within one pragmalinguistic context will almost certainly need to be adapted to a new one, and that is one of the biggest challenges in taking on more advanced linguistic competencies while studying language abroad. Where an individual student is going and what that student wishes to do with the time they have while abroad are important considerations, but how they approach their opportunities to engage with target language community, individual identity, and the compromises they are willing to make in the face of challenges may be more telling of their ability to advance their language skills.

2.5 Modern Study Abroad Context

As an extension to addressing the issue of the immersion fallacy, it is important to also examine the SA context that exists today as compared with one of even ten years ago. The majority of students who go abroad today have the ability to maintain contact with

their home twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week due to Internet access through smartphones and other devices. To say that a student is immersed, without acknowledging the fact that they may at any moment be immersed back in their native language through texting, emails, video chat, etc., only adds to the mythology associated with SA. Today's ubiquity of global communications technologies makes SA much different from what it has been for the majority of the period it has been in existence. Kinginger (2013b) notes that the "triumph of neoliberalism and accompanying consumerist ideologies" seen since the 1950s when SA began have narrowed the gap between the sojourner and his/her home-based social networks (p. 6-7). While more students participate in SA now in part due to this advancement in technology and communication, Kinginger points out that there are now different kinds of participation in SA available and that language learners and their motivations have changed. She states, "[c]learly, study abroad in the age of Facebook is not the same phenomenon it was years ago" (p. 7). Coleman (2013) echoes this point, noting the "profound implications" of social media on "the degree of immersion and engagement with the target language community" (p. 27). This means individuals must be more disciplined in their approach to immersing themselves in an ongoing, meaningful way since they have access to the outside world and can retreat to it at a moment's notice. Kinginger (2008) describes the "electronic umbilical cord" phenomenon that can occur in SA, as illustrated by one student's case study:

A typical weekday, for Deirdre, involved several hours of class time, after which she went immediately to the office of the study-abroad program and spent the rest of the day using the computers there to exchange e-mail and IMs with her friends and family at home. She claimed to devote as much time as possible to this activity, usually about 3 hours per day. As a result, she was able to maintain continual contact with her home social network and did not feel "really immersed in France" (p. 96). She was 'virtually' at home (p. 97).

The contemporary reality of SA is that language learners do not have to remain immersed. Deirdre's experience is likely not all that unique, as many students when faced with challenges such as homesickness will instinctively reach out to familiar social

networks back home. Adequate preparation prior to embarking on a SA experience is key to helping individuals to recognize both the advantages and disadvantages of technology for language acquisition, rather than depending on it as a crutch that can cause them to miss out on the immersion experience offered by study abroad.

2.6 Intervention and the Use of Digital Communication

Tools

There is, however, an opportunity in this digital age to leverage the available technology accessed by SA sojourners. Digital technologies as ubiquitous second language learning tools have been evolving rapidly since the early 1990's, serving those who have ready access to them. They have passed through a number of phases since, emerging from the periphery to more centralized usage within the language-learning paradigm. The stimulus for this has been the introduction of ritualized Internet use into daily activity, therefore, normalizing and encouraging its use within learning environments, even becoming the learning environment itself through the use of online learning platforms and blended learning approaches (Blake, 2011). The ability to retrieve information and engage in communicative practices via the Internet is (almost) at all times mainstay within the consciousness of those who participate in wired societies, and this is the case for the participants in this study. Frequency of use, however, can create the illusion of expertise and purposefulness. Just because technology is available does not mean it is fully understood or that it is being utilized to its fullest, most effective potential. Something that has yet to be emphasized extensively in the literature on interventionist approaches to SA (with the exception of Cohen & Shively (2007), Lou & Bosley (2008), Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard (2002), Stewart (2010), and Vande Berg, Quinn & Menyhart (2012), who have successfully incorporated some online components to their programming – probably Lou & Bosley (2008) and Stewart (2010) in the most integrated way) are more diversified methods of carrying out interventions via digital tools that permit students to reflect upon, document, and share their SA experiences within the dynamic, participatory Web 2.0 forum. One such tool, which has only begun to appear in the research on measuring learning outcomes, is the e-portfolio (EP) (Rhodes, Chen, Watson, & Garrison, 2014). An EP, much like an analog portfolio, allows an individual

to generate a collection of personal artifacts representing their contributions and achievements. The benefit of digitized portfolios is that they allow for not only text, but also images, audio/video recordings, and other multimedia output, housed online where they can be readily viewed and shared. Combining this sort of platform with ongoing mentorship can not only allow language learners to only cultivate greater self-reflection and metalinguistic awareness as they navigate life in immersive environments, hence, contributing to their linguistic inventories, but also allow instructors or other practitioners to observe processes in individual language development over time via EP postings. Previously, researchers have not had access to the kind of or amount of content that can be produced within EP spaces, so this is an area that represents what could be a revolutionary approach to exploring language development over time (Cummins & Davesne, 2009, p. 856). The Council of Europe has done pioneering work with the development of their European Language Portfolio (ELP), and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSL) has adopted a similar model in their *LinguaFolio* and *Global Language Portfolio*. Notably, Cheng & Chau (2009) looked at the acquisition of English as a foreign language. In their words, “The project is designed to establish a web-based system to help university students record, showcase and reflect on both their language learning experiences and accomplishments in digital format” (p. 340), with a special interest in the reflective aspect of the learning process (see also Brandes & Boskic, 2008 on the topic of EPs and scaffolding/reflection). However, this is a growing body of research that has not yet been explored fully, in particular from a North American gaze.

In a meta-analysis of the publications available on EPs, Bryant & Chittum (2013) looked at a sample of 118 studies, categorized into four categories: descriptive, empirical (affective), empirical (outcomes), and technological. Interestingly, Bryant and Chittum’s findings demonstrate several gaps in the literature in this field of study. The majority of the publications were descriptive in nature, describing how EPs have been implemented, providing advice to practitioners who might be interested in doing the same. Thus, the majority were not developed within specific theoretical frameworks, a similar pattern that has been noted in research on digital technologies and language acquisition (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). Of the empirical articles in Brant and Chittum, most were affective,

detailing EP user perceptions or feelings. Importantly, the outcomes-based empirical studies included a variety of outcomes and a variety of methods for collecting and analyzing the data, but they found that of all the outcomes-based empirical studies, only two included control groups for comparison (Desmet, Miller, Griffin, & Balthazor, 2008; Filella, Gine, Badia, Soldevila, Moltó, & Del-Arco, 2012) and, furthermore, of the total 118 studies, only two “empirically evaluated student outcomes utilizing valid and reliable measures in addition to a comparison/control group” (p. 193). It is important to note that the aforementioned outcomes-based empirical studies that included a control group (Desmet, Miller, Griffin, & Balthazor, 2008 and Filella, Gine, Badia, Soldevila, Moltó, & Del-Arco, 2012) did not focus on second language learning but rather on progress in L1 writing skills (see also Acker & Halasek, 2008 on this topic), and academic progress and motivation in carrying out a final Engineering project, respectively. The smallest category in Bryant and Chittum’s analysis, technological articles, were also found, which focused mostly on specific EP platform usability or EP models.

Thus, very few empirical studies have been conducted that involve EPs, and, more relevant to this study, even fewer that include objectives specific to measuring or analyzing language acquisition. The above meta-analysis as well as the other studies named here demonstrate that there is significant room for research in the area of how EPs can serve as a tool for concretely augmenting learner outcomes in language acquisition. The present study has been designed not only to qualitatively examine the participants’ SA experiences through guided mentoring and EP usage, but also to measure Spanish language proficiency gain in participants in both an experimental group and control group, to assess whether or not EPs can play a role as a reflective, collaborative tool while also having a potential effect on augmenting specific language competencies over time.

From the research available to date, it is apparent that the EP can offer a number of advantages to learners, and thus, is a potentially highly effective tool. First of all, being digital, an EP can be accessed anywhere, at any time, as long as there is a computer or online connection, so it may be used flexibly, over time. Secondly, essential to SCT, EPs afford the opportunity for in-depth reflection (Lin, 2008; O’Keefe, 2012), especially to “recognize” one’s “own learning” (Johnsen, 2012, p. 147), that may be carried out

through a variety of media. They provide learners “a space to construct a reflective narrative” (Ehiyazaryan-White, 2012, p. 184). In this way, learners are “co-constructors of assessment information” (Sanford, Hopper, & Fisher, 2014, p. 73), actively negotiating their learning and assessing their progress, a skill that contributes to more independent, committed (p. 78), and sustained learning habits. Also, as Desmet, et al. (2008) point out, “reflection is both process and product” (p. 19), so in developing an EP, a learner is in effect participating in a process of learning but can then also look back at it as an entity and explore the evolution of their learning experiences. For Millis (2009), this reflective component is an EP’s most “telling feature” and the “‘heart’ of an effective portfolio” (p. xix). Thirdly, EPs offer the potential for collaboration. Daunert and Price (2014) state that learners can use EPs to “direct and manage own learning as well as to easily collaborate with others if the learner decides to use e-portfolio for group learning purposes” (p. 248). Collaborating and giving/receiving feedback provides a dialogic Vygotskian experience as described earlier and has the potential to enrich learner knowledge significantly, while also heightening critical thinking skills. In addition to these advantages, EPs have also been shown to enhance creativity and offer a “stress-free” space for learning (Huang, Yang, Chiang, Tzeng, 2012, p. 33) as well as develop metacognitive abilities (p. 32).

The advantages notwithstanding, there are several obstacles that present themselves when learners and instructors attempt to utilize EPs as a tool for acquiring and measuring competencies of any kind. One major concern is access in many parts of the world. To speak of access and not acknowledge that some societies are more digitally connected than others is a mistake. To be able to engage in the creation of an EP is to be in a privileged position, so not just anyone can participate. Another concern is the digital literacy of the learner (Levy, 2009; Warner, Koufteros & Verghese, 2014). Research has shown that the level of familiarity an individual has with digital technologies and with the concept of an EP can vary (Williams, Chan, Cheung, 2009), and correlate with the quality of the end product and with their ability to take away from the experience. Brandes and Boskic (2008) conclude, “When students understand technological tools and how to use them, their ePortfolios are richer, more complex in the ways in which they illustrate learning” (p. 14). This point is echoed by Cummins & Davesne (2009), as well, as they explain that training for students and faculty is needed, as well as more interdisciplinary

collaboration across computer-assisted language learning (CALL) scholars (p. 859). In addition, while the collaborative potential of EPs is very attractive, collaboration can be problematic. Web 2.0 affords multimedia sharing, so today's EPs can be easily shared among a community of people, but the potential for concerns over privacy is important to consider. In addition, Cummins & Davesne (2009) point out that technology for exporting EPs as a product (p. 859) is still limited, so using EPs collaboratively does not present itself as a perfect scenario, but there is still certainly the potential for engaging with others to gain feedback (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Cheng & Chau, 2009; Parker, Ndoye, Ritzhaupt, 2012) and thereby participate in a model of distributed knowledge. Aside from technological problems and concerns over privacy, one other challenge to EPs as a tool for learning has to do with the learners themselves. Several studies have reported issues with overall enthusiasm and motivation (Sulaiman & Kassim, 2010; Williams, Chan, Cheung, 2009) of learners, as well as frustration (Lin, 2008) in developing EPs. Whether or not an individual is truly engaged in the process is an important factor, and one that is difficult to control. EPs can be perceived as a burden, presenting as time-consuming (Lin, 2008) and potentially useless to employers, as noted by participants in Parker et al. (2012, p. 104-105). Learner buy-in is of course a concern, but that is arguably the case in any learning scenario, so it is by no means exclusive to EP usage or indicative of its validity as a learning tool. Overall, the benefits of EPs do seem to outweigh their drawbacks, as the primary disadvantages that have been presented in the literature seem to have solutions to them, i.e. further training and troubleshooting technological limitations. However, EPs should be implemented in a way that attempts to maximize the benefits and minimize the disadvantages. In this way, there is endless potential for learners, including language learners, to take responsibility for their own learning and experience growth in knowledge both in depth and breadth.

2.7 Theoretical Bases for Study

2.7.1 Intervention Hypothesis

As noted earlier by Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige (2009), intervention has been shown to significantly support learning outcomes in SA. This is echoed by Kinginger's

(2013) observations on explicit pragmalinguistic instruction as it relates to the self. A number of studies, all with somewhat different intervention approaches, have produced significant findings. In them, intervention prior to, during, and post SA through student-centered curricula, guided study, and expert mentorship have been shown to facilitate both intercultural, and to some degree linguistic, gain. This select yet significant body of research on interventionist approaches has sought to investigate mediated learning in SA while controlling for the variability seen across participants, as described above. Studies have typically been carried out in the form of guided coursework before, after, or during the SA period, and the results have generally showed very positive effects. Although the research has focused primarily on the acquisition of intercultural competencies in SA (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012; Doctor & Montgomery, 2010; Engle & Engle, 2004; Lou & Bosley, 2008; Pedersen, 2010; Vande Berg, Quinn & Menyhart, 2012), there has been some noteworthy work carried out on intervention to specifically support the acquisition of language skills in SA, namely the on-going research within the CARLA center (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition) at the University of Minnesota and their Maximizing Study Abroad (MAXSA) project (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002). This study provided participants with a student guide as a resource to support their knowledge about language pragmatics and speech acts. The study included a group with access to in-person teacher intervention and a group with access to a teacher through electronic means only. Both groups in this case demonstrated statistically significant but modest linguistic and intercultural gains with the e-group outperforming in many ways including making requests, introductions, and fitness of vocabulary. Additionally, the Georgetown Consortium Project (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, Paige, 2009) at Georgetown University has also demonstrated the influence of mentoring for both intercultural and linguistic gain. This project included both individual and group mentoring and showed that this socioconstructivist approach, to be discussed in greater detail in the section to follow, had the strongest statistical effect on participants' intercultural competencies and that it made a difference for language as well. Most importantly, this mentoring proved more significantly effective than immersion itself and pre-departure orientation, which are currently the two most familiar components of SA programs.

The socioconstructivist approach whereby an expert mentor, instructor, or facilitator is positioned to initiate and support sustained, in-depth, dialogic (Compernelle, 2014) reflection throughout the SA experience has been used effectively in virtually all of the aforementioned interventionist studies (as well as Henery, 2014) and is frequently cited as one of the most influential and meaningful components of the interventionist approach, accounting for greater progress than any other type of intervention in both intercultural and metacognitive advancement. Kinginger (2004) highlights language SA as a social practice, noting that the role of the individual must be explored. She writes: “[f]oreign language learners are people too; people whose history, dispositions towards learning, access to sociocultural worlds, participation, and imagination together shape the qualities of their achievements” (p. 241). Mentorship and intervention on the whole provide an opportunity to engage with the individual, recognizing their SA experiences as unique to their own worldview, and this has been shown to augment linguistic gain. Throughout these studies, however, sociopragmatic understanding and its relationship to individual identity has been less of a focus. The aforementioned study by Cohen and Shively (2007) is an exception to this, as their work targeted self-guided curricular intervention for requests and apologies in Spanish and French combined with one face-to-face orientation and ongoing e-journaling. It is this study that provides further evidence suggesting that an intervention such as the one presented in the current project can produce positive results to improve language gain in SA. From the findings gathered thus far, there is clear evidence that language SA benefits from reinforcement through formalized intervention to facilitate gain, mentoring in particular, and that there are sound reasons to justify the implementation of such academic programming for students studying in an international setting.

2.7.2 Holistic View of Language Learner

Many of the previously mentioned studies highlight the importance of recognizing individual differences across SA participants. However, there is a tendency to frame SA as a collective experience, rather than a highly variable, fluid context. How individuals interpret their experiences, their individual goals and pursuits in SA, as well as unique identities, nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic repertoires all vary from

person to person. Therefore, it is important to use the term “study abroad experience” with caution, as it tends to erase these nuances. Coleman rightly challenges “the legitimacy of the expression ‘the study abroad context’”, arguing that both contextual and individual variation contribute, together with social networks, to the essential fluidity and complexity of the SA experience” (p. 17). He states, “...individual trajectories are in fact the essence of recent SA research, in which the focus has shifted from quantitative to qualitative, from product to process, from a search for generalizability to a recognition of complexity and variation” (p. 25). Kinginger (2013b) expresses a similar sentiment but one that is specific to the acquisition of language in SA. She states, “...ethnographic and other qualitative studies have the potential to illuminate findings about language related outcomes by probing the nature of students’ experiences and dispositions toward their hosts and host communities. However, these studies rarely involve documentation of those outcomes” (pp. 7–8). Investigating more deeply why learners choose to engage with a language in a host community in certain ways is important to understanding the variability of language gain in SA. Kinginger’s and Coleman’s comments represent an important theoretical basis for the current project. SA research has moved towards a more qualitative approach, as previous study results have proven to be so variable. While quantitative approaches to research are necessary and have revealed important findings in the SA record, what is problematic about quantifying gains or non-gains (Ginsberg & Miller, 2000) in SA is that it ignores in large part these “individual trajectories” that Coleman alludes to. Coleman points out that each individual presents uniquely in terms of cognitive, affective, and biographical variables, and he concludes that they “can be infinitely subdivided,” with each of them being “fluid and context-dependent” (2013, p. 26). This presents a highly pluralistic view of SA, which is why he calls for identifying patterns rather than taking on a more “determinist perspective” (p. 29). Many other scholars have called for similar approaches to SA and language acquisition research. Kinginger, as a leader in this field, has said of language learning research that it should be framed “as a dialogic, situated affair that unfolds in intercultural contexts and includes significant subjective dimensions” (2013b, p. 5). This means that there is no one context and no one SA dimension to speak of. Ushioda (2009) calls for a person-in-context

relational approach, as opposed to a linear one, to motivation in language acquisition. She states,

I mean a focus on real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions; a focus on the agency of the individual person a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals and motives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective intentional agent, and the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and in inherently a part of (p. 220).

Ushioda's comments here and those of the other scholars cited in this section encompass the inherent singularity of people and highlight the need to design studies that recognize and account for this as a rule. In this way the research can move beyond mere observations of variability, to the identification of patterns that explain it. Working with individual language learners not only allows researchers to help support them in their SA endeavours, with the potential to render better outcomes, but it also provides opportunities for gaining further insight into the fluidity of how language acquisition is negotiated. In this way patterns may be detected and leveraged for better design of SA programming and efforts in preparing students prior to departure.

2.7.3 Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory

In examining the linguistic (including pragmalinguistic) gain and individual experiences and observations of language SA students, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) is of particular relevance. Thus, it represents one of the major theoretical bases for this project. The Vygotskian notion that cognitive development and the processes involved in higher-order thinking are born of language-based, social interactions between individuals and the people and/or media around them means that acquiring any skills, including language skills, necessarily involves a social component, a dialogue, or culturally mediated activities (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). Compernelle (2014), who has written on sociocultural theory and L2 pragmatics instruction sums up SCT by explaining that "[h]uman

consciousness, for Vygotsky, emerged from the unity of biologically specific mental abilities and the internalization of culturally constructed mediational means” (p. 10). According to Vygotsky, education is at its core a cultural activity that is an “artificial” method of reconstructing mental capacities (Lantolf, 2008, p. 16). This is not to say it is an inadequate form of acquiring knowledge. It is quite the opposite in fact, as it affords growth that is otherwise not possible. The point is simply that it differs from everyday “natural” development (Vygotsky, 1986) in that it is intentionally and culturally constructed. In order for an individual to acquire a language, they must engage in the language within the target language community, but in order to “know what you know” as it were, at a more metacognitive level, a learner must construct knowledge through the “culturally constructed mediational means” that Compernelle describes. This can be done through making sense of the experiences, including “rich points” (Agar, 1994) or particularly meaningful experiences, that take place in the target language and/or culture by taking the learner to a deeper understanding of the skills being acquired. That deeper understanding can be achieved, in part, by assigning meaning through language, or other “psychological tools”, such as signs and symbols (Kozulin, 1998). This process of making sense of one’s experiences is explained by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that while an individual can learn on their own, it is possible to learn more with the help of someone else. The learner has a certain level of ability alone, and the potential for greater capability when assisted. The gap between these two states, current knowledge and potential knowledge, is what Vygotsky described as the ZPD. A more knowledgeable other (MKO), or a “mediator of meaning” (Daniels, 2016, p. 18) can play the role of mediator by teaching the learner new information and/or engaging with the learner to assist in their understanding of experiences. Social interaction with a guide, with fellow peers, or with other media is how the SCT suggests that higher order psychological processes may be consolidated. Compernelle further explains,

In a sense, ZPD activity in dialogic verbalized reflections is not merely about supporting a learner’s completion of a task (e.g. arriving at a correct interpretation of a concept), but instead centers on assisting the learner in developing a deeper,

and more personally meaningful understanding of the concept as part of the internalization/personalization process (p. 113).

Thus, it is not an exercise in memorizing right or wrong answers, but rather a way of supporting a learner individually to be more deliberate about making sense of the input being received.

It is important to note, however, that the MKO, does not have to be a living person, but rather can be any media with which the learner can engage. Warschauer (1997) elaborates on Vygotsky's (1962) *Thought and Language* work, explaining how students can "advance through the ZPD" either by observing teacher modeling or through text mediation (p. 471), with the latter being of special interest for the present study. Text mediation, as a concept for learning whereby texts are used to promote reflection and develop new meanings, has evolved over time (p. 471). Bayer's (1990) Collaborative-apprenticeship Learning Model emphasizes mediation through collaboration among peers and among students and teachers, among other principles. Together, individuals can build on their knowledge, hence, working through the ZPD. Crucially, Vygotsky made only general comments about the type of "collaboration and direction" in this approach and did not specify "the forms of social assistance to learners that constitute" a ZPD (Moll, 1990, p. 11). This leaves Vygotsky's work open to interpretation about the kind of guidance or scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) that could be provided to a learner, and, in this age of advanced technology, the kind of mediation that is available. Vygotsky (1978) identified both internal and external mediating tools, but as Thompson (2013) points out, many sociocultural theorists now use the term "cultural tool" for both physical tools, which could be, for example, a computer, and psychological tools, such as language (p. 249), as noted earlier. These tools could come in the form of any number of artifacts and could represent any form of mediating interaction. Moll (2000) explains that "human beings interact with their worlds primarily through mediational means" and that that is essentially how people develop their intellectual faculties (p. 257). The tools and forms of mediation available are always changing, and as Daniels (2016) points out, a broad definition of mediation is most appropriate. He declares, "The concept of mediation has developed far beyond the original notion of psychological tools" (p. 28), and goes on to say, "A model of dynamic interplay between

discourses and other artifacts, mental representations and patterns of neurological activity in the formation of human thought has started to evolve” (p. 28). The original Vygotskian principle regarding social interaction with different types of tools for the purpose of developing higher mental faculties remains the same, however, and what is interesting is to examine how emerging digital technologies may be utilized to carry out this process of forming and acquiring knowledge.

SCT is embedded in the present study in a number of ways. Firstly, and most obviously, the social nature of SA as an opportunity for engaging in and acquiring a new language is central to this project. Secondly, the first type of intervention implemented in this study, mentoring, represents the collaborative function discussed above, affording learners the opportunity to discuss their observations, and be guided through some of their experiences in SA. Thirdly, the second form of intervention, the development of an individually managed e-portfolio, serves as an additional form of mediation or “cultural tool” for the participants to potentially build on their knowledge and augment their learning experiences by reflecting on the questions posed to them and by sharing their experiences within a social forum. This project sets out, in part, to examine whether or not electronic portfolios have the potential to serve as cultural tools to mediate language gain. Light, Chen, & Ittelson (2012), in discussing EPs and their contribution to the acquisition of higher order knowledge, stress the importance of agency in constructing a deeper understanding of oneself and others stating, “...learners need to understand what they know and are able to do but, more important, how they know what they know in addition to what they do not know, as a way of strategizing where to learn next.” (p. 8). Their point here about knowing what they do not know is especially poignant, as it is in the question-asking and reflecting either in interaction with a mentor or through the use of another form of sounding board that individuals may begin to identify gaps in their own knowledge and take on a more agentive role in filling those gaps (see Stewart, 2010 on e-journaling). Cambridge (2010) likens e-portfolios to personal blogs and social networking sites in that they are individually focused and personal, but notes that EPs tend to be much less developed in terms of the social aspect. Herein lies potential for EPs: to be made more socially connected so that EP creators may tell their stories widely and have the enriched experience of engaging, dialoguing, and collaborating with the

online community in the way sociocultural theory describes. This desire to document and share personal stories, as is done frequently in blogging, according to Cambridge, raises “important questions for educators committed to supporting lifelong and lifewide learning” (p. 162). If there is something inside many people that compels them to keep a record of their lived experiences, then EPs certainly have the capacity for facilitating learning and motivating individuals in the long term, transcending space and time.

A review of the literature on the affordances of SA, and the variability in learner gains, makes it apparent that an approach to research that accounts for individuality in this modern, digitally connected context is necessary. Taking an interventionist approach and framing it with SCT’s dialogic, reflective features allows learners to participate in the process of reflecting to potentially augment their metalinguistic awareness. Crucially, this process results in a product that can be dually purposed by the learners as a body of work to be examined and learned from, and from this, important patterns and qualitative insight may also be drawn for the purpose of better understanding the experiences and decisions being made throughout a language SA sojourn.

Chapter 3

3 Methodology

This chapter will explore the methodology used in this project. To begin, the research questions and hypotheses will be presented. Subsequently, the research site, study participants, data sources, and procedures utilized to collect the data will all be discussed.

3.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were developed in order to design a study that could assess not only Spanish proficiency gain in language SA participants, but also how such gain intersects with documentation and reflection of their experiences through a personally managed e-portfolio as well as one-on-one mentoring sessions. Further, these research questions address the use and function of digital tools for communicative purposes in facilitating the interventions presented in this study and, finally, the observations and insights of individual language SA students as agents of their own learning. These questions, and the answers to them, provide a snapshot of modern-day language study abroad, as experienced by the individual participants in this study, and patterns that emerge. The intention is to leverage the information acquired here to develop more vigorous and comprehensive language SA programming, and better linguistic preparation so that students choosing to study language abroad can do so with better guidance, and, therefore, elevate their ability to make more deliberate use of their SA experiences. Thus, the following three research questions were used to frame the present study and fulfill the above objectives:

1. Does intervention to promote metalinguistic awareness during language study abroad have a significant effect on students' ability to acquire language competencies in study abroad? If so, do any particular tendencies emerge?
2. Can a participant-managed digital portfolio paired with expert mentorship via online communicative tools be used meaningfully to cultivate self-awareness

and/or metalinguistic awareness in the development (and negotiation) of sociopragmatic capabilities, while studying abroad?

3. What emerging trends are seen in the learning strategies used by and in the observations made by language study abroad students about their learning processes and surroundings, and what does this tell us about how to best prepare them for their sojourns?

The first research question targets linguistic competencies and whether or not they may be enhanced through the interventions implemented in this project or whether language study abroad on its own provides sufficient input and stimulus to lead to significant language gain. This is an important baseline question to the study and to comparing the two participant groups on their knowledge of Spanish from a tested perspective. The second research question assesses the two interventions in the present study to determine whether or not there is evidence to suggest that they can have an impact on self-awareness in language learners and, thus, have an impact on acquiring language skills. The mentoring piece has proven effective in a number of previous studies, across disciplines, as detailed in literature review in the previous chapter . The more innovative aspect of this project, and that which is addressed in this research question, pertains to the use of digital technologies for the purposes of individual reflection and conveying information, and the interactivity between the researcher and the participants. This addresses an area of language acquisition and digital technologies that is still in need of further research, which is the potential applications of the interactive capabilities of digital technologies in the language learning purposes (Wang & Vasquez, 2012). A deeper understanding of how digital technologies can facilitate communicative activity has not yet been achieved; thus, this question attempts to build on the body of knowledge in this area. Finally, the third question is an essential one that should be routinely posed to better serve language study abroad students. It takes a learner-centered approach by asking what learners themselves have to offer in informing best practices to prepare language students for their SA sojourns and to support them throughout their journeys. SA language learners themselves are a rich resource in terms of their self-awareness as individuals, and that knowledge should not be overlooked. Accounts of their unique experiences represent tremendous amounts of information (see Kinginger, 2008;

Pellegrino Aveni, 2005 for work on full SA case studies) about their individual needs, learning approaches, interests, concerns, successes, and so much more. Their ability to articulate this information can be cultivated, and the knowledge they provide can be examined and leveraged for improved SA programming moving forward.

3.2 Preliminary Hypothesis

The working hypothesis for this project and for the first research question is that there will be evidence to suggest that intervention to promote metalinguistic awareness during language study abroad can have a significant effect on students' ability to acquire language competencies in SA. Further, as per the second and third research questions, it is predicted that an e-portfolio paired with on-going mentorship would serve as effective methods for documenting and reflecting upon individual identity and the process of acquiring language capabilities including sociopragmatic awareness, and that the chosen digital tools would serve to facilitate meaningful exchange during this project. Finally, it is predicted that several trends, as well as individual anecdotes would emerge from the participants' insights in their e-portfolios and mentoring sessions, providing important direction for the development of future SA preparation initiatives, to promote both linguistic and overall SA gain.

3.3 Research Site

Participant recruitment for this study took place at the University of Costa Rica/La Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) at the San José campus in San José, Costa Rica, drawing on the non-native Spanish speaking incoming international student body that arrived in July of 2016. Costa Rica, a country known for its biodiversity, policies of non-militarization, and relative level of safety for travel among its neighbouring Central American nations, is quite small, with a population of approximately 4.5 million people and area of only just over 51000 km². It is a predominantly Roman Catholic country, leading in education and health among its Latin American counterparts, with a relatively strong economy, although it is still considered a developing nation facing significant concerns over poverty and unemployment rates (“Costa Rica”, n.d.). Costa Rica has been

a popular destination for a variety of SA programs across multiple disciplines for decades, not only for individuals looking to acquire Spanish language skills, as is the case with the participants in this project, but also, and perhaps even more famously, for those interested in studying this nation's rich and unparalleled rainforest flora and fauna. Also, as mentioned, Costa Rica is known for its relative level of safety in contrast to its neighbouring nations and others in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, making it an appealing country to visit for tourism and SA alike.

UCR as an institution has a long history, with origins dating back to 1843, but it was officially created in 1940. It currently has a total population of approximately 39 600 students across several campuses throughout the country and has over 300 different academic programs, including postgraduate study options, to choose from ("UCR en Cifras", 2017). The San José Campus is located in the San Pedro, part of the country's capital city San José's greater metropolitan area in the province of San José. The capital has a population of approaching 300000, excluding the wider metropolitan stretches. The international student program at UCR is facilitated by The Office of International Affairs and External Cooperation, which has long held a strong reputation for receiving international students and maintains robust SA programming, recruits students from several countries abroad as a result of over 200 existing bilateral international exchange agreements with outside institutions. As of April of 2017, UCR had just over 300 international students enrolled. As of 2016, the most recent statistics available, the majority of international students hailed from countries in Europe, followed closely by countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, then Asia, and then the United States and Canada. While numbers have fluctuated in the past few years, these same regions are always represented ("UCR en Cifras", 2017). International students generally enroll at UCR for either one or two semesters, and they are afforded the opportunity to take courses from any of the academic programs on campus, as long as they demonstrate a level of proficiency in Spanish that allows them to understand the lectures and coursework. For this reason, many of the students opt to take intensive Spanish language classes prior to or during their study period. However, others arrive with sufficient proficiency and do not find it necessary to seek formal Spanish language instruction while abroad. Students are routinely offered the option of living in a homestay situation

by the university while studying, and many do take this option, but many also opt for independent living arrangements, renting a place with other university (international/domestic) students.

3.4 Participants and Procedures

The participants in this study were recruited from the incoming international (non-native Spanish speakers) students at UCR in July of 2016. Of the entire cohort (exact number unknown but said to be in the range of 60-80 students total), 30 students volunteered to participate in the study. A total of 18 individuals agreed to participate in Part I of the study, making up the control group, and a total of 12 individuals agreed to participate both Parts I and II of the study, making up the experimental group. Of the initial 18 control group participants, 13 participated in the study to its completion, and of the initial 12 experimental group participants, 10 participated in the study to its completion, for a total of 23 participants. The final control group was made up of both female ($n = 10$) and male ($n = 3$) participants, as was the final experimental group with an equal ratio of 1:1 female to male, or females ($n = 5$) and males ($n = 5$). The participants in the control group were all born between the years 1990 and 1995, with the exception of one participant, who was born in 1986. The participants in the experimental group were on average slightly younger, as all were born between the years of 1992 to 1997, with the exception of one, who was born in 1988.

In terms of native languages, German was represented in the control group in 10 of the 13 participants, as well as 2 native speakers of Czech and one native speaker of French. In the experimental group there were 6 native speakers of French and 4 native speakers of German. All participants reported that both parents spoke their same native language, so there was no indication of any additional native languages noted in the participants' linguistic profiles. Crucially, only 3 of the control group participants indicated that they had had any pre-departure SA training of any kind. Of those 3 individuals, 1 had participated in a cultural workshop, 1 had reportedly done some general pre-SA preparation conferences, and 1 had disclosed having completed a full SA prep course. In the experimental group, only 2 had had any formal pre-SA training, but 1

was said to be simply a briefing on medical warnings, and the other was a workshop including administrative information and culture shock. Three participants in the experimental group reported having known students who had previously studied in CR but did not report any formalized pre-departure education. Full details on the control group participants can be found in Table 3.1 for and full details on the experimental group participants can be found in Table 3.2.

In terms of language repertoires, all control group participants and all experimental group participants reported competency in Spanish, with varying proficiency, as well as English, aside from their native languages. Some reported competency in a fourth and, among the participants in the control group, even fifth, sixth, and seventh languages as well. It is important to note that most participants' reported Spanish proficiency did not match up with their results on the initial proficiency test delivered to them as part of Part I of this study. In most cases, to be detailed more specifically later on, participants reported higher proficiency than their test results indicated. Of the 13 control group participants, 9 had previously spent time (of varying durations) in Spanish-speaking regions, as had 6 of the 10 experimental group participants. All but one of the control group participants were currently taking a Spanish course at the time of initial testing, as were 7 of the 10 experimental group participants. In both the control group and experimental group, reported amount of time using Spanish on a weekly basis varied quite significantly. In the control group, as few as zero hours were reported, up to a high of 20 hours per week, and in the experimental group, as little as half an hour was reported, up to a high of 15 hours per week. Full details on reported Spanish competency and in situ Spanish experience/usage in the control group can be found in Table 3.3, and full details on the reported Spanish competency and in situ Spanish experience/usage in the experimental group can be found in Table 3.

Table 3.1 Control Group Participants' General Information

ID No.	Gender	Birth Year	L1	Mother's L1	Father's L1	Other Languages	Received Formal Pre-SA Preparation
UCR-4	F	1995	German	German	German	Spanish, English	No
UCR-7	F	1990	German	German	German	Spanish, English	Cultural Workshop
UCR-12	F	1993	German	German	German	Spanish, English, Sign Language, French, Italian	No
UCR-13	F	1995	German	German	German	Spanish, English, French, Portuguese	No
UCR-14	F	1986	German	German	German	Spanish, English	No
UCR-15	F	1992	German	German	German	Spanish, English, Portuguese, Latin, Dutch, Turkish	No
UCR-18	M	1993	German	German	German	Spanish, English	No
UCR-19	F	1994	German	German	German	Spanish, English, Italian	No
UCR-21	F	1995	German	German	German	Spanish, English, Latin	No
UCR-22	F	1994	German	German	German	Spanish, English, French, Latin	SA Prep Course
UCR-23	M	1993	Czech	Czech	Czech	Spanish, English, French	No
UCR-25	M	1994	Czech	Czech	Czech	Spanish, English	General Pre-SA Prep/Conference
UCR-27	F	1993	French	French	French	Spanish, English	No

Table 3.2 Experimental Group Participants' General Information

ID No.	Gender	Birth Year	L1	Mother's L1	Father's L1	Other Language:	Received Formal Pre-SA Preparation
UCR-8	F	1997	French	French	French	Spanish, English, Italian	No. Attended conference on admin./culture shock
UCR-9	M	1995	French	French	French	Spanish, English	shock
UCR-10	F	1992	German	German	German	Spanish, English, French	No
UCR-11	F	1995	French	French	French	Spanish, English, German	Briefed on medical warnings
UCR-16	M	1992	German	German	German	Spanish, English	No
UCR-17	F	1995	French	French	French	Spanish, English	No
UCR-20	M	1994	French	French	French	Spanish, English	No
UCR-26	F	1988	German	German	German	Spanish, English, Italian	No
UCR-28	M	1995	German	German	German	Spanish, English	No
UCR-30	M	1996	French	French	French	Spanish, English	No

Table 3.3 Control Group Participants' Reported Spanish Proficiency/Experience

ID No.	Reported Spanish Proficiency	Age of onset	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Time spent where Spanish is a native language	If so, what duration?	Currently taking a course in Spanish?	Approx. # hrs using Spanish per wk	Pre-Sojourns Test Level
UCR-4	B2	18	INT	ADV	ADV	INT	Yes	1 year	Yes	2	LOW
UCR-7	B2	13	ADV	INT	ADV	ADV	Yes	3mo;6mo	No	5	INT
UCR-12	B2/C1	14	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV	Yes	10mo	Yes	0.5	INT
UCR-13	C2	13	C.NAT	ADV	ADV	C.NAT	Yes	11mo;2mo	Yes	6	ADV
UCR-14	B2/C1	15	INT	INT	INT	INT	No	N/A	Yes	2	LOW
UCR-15	B2	18	ADV	ADV	ADV	INT	Yes	1mo	Yes	5	INT
UCR-18	B2	20	INT	INT	INT	INT	No	N/A	Yes	3	LOW
UCR-19	B1	19	C.NAT	C.NAT	C.NAT	C.NAT	No	N/A	Yes	4	LOW
UCR-21	B2	15	ADV	ADV	ADV	INT	Yes	1yr	Yes	20	INT
UCR-22	B1	19	INT	INT	ADV	INT	Yes	3mo	Yes	1	LOW
UCR-23	B2	13	ADV	INT	INT	INT	No	N/A	Yes	1.5	INT
UCR-25	B2	15	INT	INT	INT	INT	Yes	2wks	Yes	5	LOW
UCR-27	Highschool	13	ADV	INT	ADV	INT	Yes	6mo	Yes	0	INT

Table 3.4 Experimental Group Participants' Reported Spanish Proficiency/Experience

ID No.	Reported Spanish Proficiency	Age of onset	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	Time spent where Spanish is a native language	If so, what duration?	Currently taking a course in Spanish?	Approx. # hrs using Spanish per wk	Pre-Sojourns Test Level
UCR-8	B2	14	ADV	INT	ADV	INT	No	N/A	Yes	3	INT
UCR-9	B2	15	INT	INT	INT	INT	Yes	3mo	Yes	2	LOW
UCR-10	B1	15	INT	BEG	INT	BEG	No	N/A	No	5	LOW
UCR-11	B2-C1	7	ADV	ADV	ADV	INT	No	N/A	No	0.5	ADV
UCR-16	C1-C2	21	ADV	INT	ADV	INT	No	N/A	Yes	1	LOW
UCR-17	C1	14	ADV	INT	ADV	INT	Yes	2wks	Yes	2	INT
UCR-20	B2	13	INT	INT	INT	INT	Yes	2mo	No	15	LOW
UCR-26	B1/B2	15	ADV	ADV	ADV	ADV	Yes	2.5yrs	Yes	0.5	ADV
UCR-28	B2	15	ADV	INT	C.NAT	ADV	Yes	1mo	Yes	8	INT
UCR-30	B2	13	ADV	INT	ADV	INT	Yes	1wk	Yes	1	LOW

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. All participants, both within the experimental and control groups were recruited with the knowledge that any and all participation would be voluntary and that they could refuse to participate in any part at any time or withdraw completely. They were also aware that participation in the study had no bearing on their status studying at UCR or as an international student studying abroad from their home institutions. Further, they were aware that they would receive no formal credits or meet any program requirements by participating. They were informed that they would be provided with a small monetary incentive upon completion of both Parts I and II of the study and that partial completion would still result in a prorated amount of compensation.

3.5 Sources of Data

Participants in the control group were only asked to complete what is referred to here as Part I of this study. Participants in the experimental group were asked to complete both Parts I and II. Part I involved filling out a language profile and completing an initial Spanish proficiency test at the beginning of the SA sojourn. Additionally, participants completing Part I were asked to repeat the same Spanish proficiency test at the end of their semester abroad, as well as answer a questionnaire regarding their language learning experiences and overall experiences while studying abroad in Costa Rica. Part II included the completion of an e-portfolio via the online social network platform Google+, guided by a series of prompt questions for each e-portfolio entry. As well, Part II included one-on-one mentoring sessions in which the participants engaged with a mentor, via online communication, discussing their e-portfolio entries and experiences living and studying in Costa Rica. All interactions between the participants and the mentor in Part II took place online, via digital communications. All sources of data in both parts of this study will be described in greater detail to follow.

3.5.1 Part I: Language Profile

The language profile included background questions regarding gender, year of birth, birth place, native language(s), native language(s) of parents, as well as questions regarding formal language education, and language(s) used most often and/or socially to understand the participants' level of comfort in any known languages. In addition, the language profile asked participants to indicate their level of Spanish language skill and any additional languages they are familiar with, reporting their proficiency levels in the four major skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Collecting data on participants' individual and linguistic backgrounds was intended to provide insight on their experiences as language users and language learners. Its purpose was also to ensure that the participants represented relatively homogenous qualities of age and language ability that would permit them to be grouped together for this study. Further, gathering individual information was also an opportunity to see how participants differed and what unique backgrounds they brought with them to their SA experiences and to this study. The full Language Profile document can be seen in Appendix A.

3.5.2 Part I: Spanish Proficiency Test

Following the completion of the language profile, participants in both the control group and experimental group of this study were asked to complete the Spanish Proficiency Test. This test (Bruhn de Garavito & Montrul, 2012), drawn in part from the larger, internationally recognized DELE Spanish proficiency exam as well as another MLA Spanish proficiency test, included two parts, with a total of 50 questions, all multiple choice. The first part included a total of 30 questions, all independent fill-in-the-blank questions with four multiple choice options. The second part, out of a total of 20, was a true Cloze Test, whereby participants were asked to complete the blanks in a passage, selecting from three multiple choice answers in each case. The test targets a range of Spanish language skills including general comprehension, vocabulary, verb tenses, prepositions, as well as more advanced questions involving use of the subjunctive. It ranks results into three levels of proficiency coded by the terms advanced (between 40 and 50 out of a total possible 50 points), intermediate (between 30 and 39 out of a possible 50 points), and low (between 0 and 29 out of a possible 50 points). This test, which has been used in multiple studies (Bruhn de Garavito & Valenzuela, 2008; Cuza &

Frank 2010; Duffield & White, 1999; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003, among others), holds up as a valid tool for participant Spanish proficiency assessment, and as such, was selected for use in the present study to measure participants' proficiency and test achievement (see Tarone, 2015 on diagnostic language testing assessing proficiency outcomes for online language learners) at the beginning of their time studying in Costa Rica. Then, at the end of one semester, just under four months in duration, participants in both the control and experimental groups were asked to repeat the exact same test. Although there was no time constraint implemented, all participants were able to complete the test in under 30 minutes. They were encouraged to avoid over-thinking their answers, responding as spontaneously as possible. The full Spanish Proficiency Test can be found in Appendix B.

3.5.3 Part I: Post Study Abroad Questionnaire

Finally, to complete Part I of this study, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences as international students studying at UCR. Questions were related to their living circumstances in Costa Rica, and their Spanish language learning experiences, as well as reported Spanish proficiency gain in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and pragmatics. The questionnaire also asked participants about the reception they received in Costa Rica as an international student and if they would change anything about their SA sojourn. Specific to the experimental group, participants were asked to comment on their perspectives on the use of an e-portfolio as a tool for learning and on the mentoring sessions they participated in. The questionnaire was intended to elicit information from the participants on their experiences while abroad and to gain a sense of what kind of lifestyle they had constructed for themselves in engaging with the host community (Dewey, Belnap & Hillstrom, 2013). Also, the intention was to determine whether individual approaches might correlate with linguistic gain, as per the proficiency test results. This self-assessment approach to language use and development, as well as engagement within a host community, has been used successfully in previous SA studies (Dewey, Belnap & Hillstrom, 2013; Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz, & Halter, 2004; Magnan & Back, 2007; Murphy, Sahakyan, Yong-Yi & Magnan, 2014; Trentman, 2013, among others). Furthermore, feedback from the participants was also desired so that any

recommendations could be passed along to the host institution, UCR, to improve programming for future international students coming to study. The complete Post Study Abroad Questionnaire document can be viewed in Appendix C.

3.5.4 Part II: E-Portfolio

Part II of this study involved two treatments, which were the development of an individually participant-managed e-portfolio and one-on-one mentoring sessions with the researcher (me). It is important to note that recruitment and delivery of the components in Part I of this study were carried out by a research assistant. As a result, none of the participants in this study ever met the researcher in person. All communications and interactions for the intervention portions of this study took place via online communication. This distance is worth noting, as it added an element of dependence on the modes of communication named here. As a result, this approach was positioned to uniquely test these modalities and their viability as tools for authentic interaction to carry out the type of engagement necessary for meaningful intervention without influence from any prior in-person context. The two interventions are described in detail below.

The first of the two interventions that underlie this study is the e-portfolio. The experimental group participants were asked to develop an e-portfolio throughout the duration of their semester abroad, documenting and reflecting upon their experiences in both learning Spanish and in living in Costa Rica as an international student. In this way, the objective was to construct both a progressive and reflective e-portfolio, eliciting participant observations and reflections (see Cheng & Chau, 2009; Williams, Chan & Cheung, 2009 for studies on e-portfolios for language learning including coursework). The platform chosen for the e-portfolio was Google's Google+. This was chosen for a number of reasons, namely its open source, free accessibility, its user-friendliness, its ease of access as part of the Google Suite available on a computer or through its cellular device application, its potential for familiarity and repeated use among the participants (Levy, 2009, p.778), and its dynamism as a tool permitting multi-media output. While Google is certainly not the only company that allows users to post and share via a portfolio-like platform (arguably Facebook, Twitter, and other like social-networking sites can act as tools to do the same), many people are familiar with the Google brand,

and it presents a high-quality product that is slightly lesser-known compared to the usual social-networking sites frequented by so many people and, therefore, provided a space for participants to explore their SA experiences without feeling as though it would impede or somehow be connected to their personal, social interactions. Ethically, this was important to the study in that it helped to assure participants that their reflections would not be shared with others without their consent and that their e-portfolios would be separate from daily social interactions but more focused on their observations in language learning. As well, using Google+ meant using a platform that might be thought of less as a social networking site and more of a tool for constructing and later showcasing the story of the participants' time abroad. Google itself promotes this platform as an "interest based" site, rather than a social media site, so it seemed most appropriate given the content participants would be developing. That said, the platform is designed to allow for peer viewing and commenting (see Cheng & Chau, 2009 for a study looking at e-portfolios for language learning with a greater focus on peer feedback), so there is an optional social component to it. Finally, Google+ is used by several users to showcase interests such as travel, acting as a blog where experiences are shared in prose and through multi-media posts, such as photos or videos. These examples are readily available to view and follow, and they provided samples for the participants to see the potential for their e-portfolios.

To guide their e-portfolios, participants were provided with tasks including prompt questions they could answer in their different posts. This was intended to help guide them in constructing their e-portfolios. Also, this guided them in answering some of the questions connected to the research questions posed in this study. Participants were informed that they could be selective about the questions they answered and about what they shared in their e-portfolios. They were encouraged to be creative and utilize multimedia tools, such as photographs or videos to complement their posts. As Costa Rica is now a relatively wired country with wireless internet access readily available, especially in San Jose on the UCR campus, participants had ongoing access to the internet to add to their e-portfolios as time permitted. Participants were given 5 e-portfolio tasks for the duration of their semester abroad, and they were asked to complete as many of the tasks as they could/desired on an on-going basis to develop their e-

portfolios and reflect on their SA experiences. The first task was to think about 3 SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) goals for their semester to come, related to their language learning and SA experiences. The second task was to share a linguistic autobiography and discuss their language backgrounds and language learning experiences, including challenges they have faced in learning a language and approaches they found have worked for them to acquire language skills. The third task was to discuss the linguistic landscapes (see Piller, 2011 on language and embedded ideologies) around them living in Costa Rica and studying at UCR. Participants were asked to observe their surroundings and discuss the language they saw, for example, on billboards and signs, in advertisements, etc. They were asked to think about any messages they saw in the language around them: political, religious, economic or other ideologies, and think about similarities or differences between these and messages seen in their home surroundings. They were encouraged to capture examples through pictures or video and include them in their e-portfolios. The fourth task asked participants to share a typical day in their lives as international students studying abroad, discussing language use, interpersonal interaction, and other daily activities. The fifth and last task focused on the participants' communication in Spanish. As the last task, it asked participants to reflect on their abilities in the language after some time in Costa Rica. It asked them to think about aspects of the language they find they can use with ease, as well as things that present challenges, miscommunications they have had, and aspects of the language they either cannot or choose not to incorporate as a Spanish language user. Full details on the e-portfolio tasks can be found in Appendix D.

3.5.5 Part II: Mentoring Sessions

The second intervention piece to this study is inspired by a number of previous interventionist studies, as it features a mentoring component, which has been shown to repeatedly garner positive findings. As mentioned previously in the literature review chapter, mentoring as a strategy for intervening in SA sojourners has been demonstrated as being the most salient contributing factor to intercultural competence and oral proficiency gain (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). In this study, in addition to their e-portfolio, participants were asked to engage in online discussions with a mentor

(myself) regarding their SA experiences, including pragmatic aspects of language use as well as participant identity as international language study abroad students, and to further discuss their e-portfolio contributions. Each participant engaged in a total of 3 one-hour mentoring sessions (one per month of their semester abroad) with the mentor. All interactions took place online via digital communications including both video and chat formats of communication. During these sessions, the mentor provided the participants with several questions to address, and the participants were also encouraged to ask any questions they had regarding any aspect of their learning process studying and living in Costa Rica. These interactions were meant to be informal in nature but also topical, and were intended to provide an opportunity for the participants to receive support, as per the Vygotskian notion of the Zone of Proximal Development described in the theoretical framework for this project. What makes this mentoring model more innovative than known previous studies in language acquisition in SA, however, is the leveraging of digital technologies to test their viability as tools that can effectively facilitate mentor-mentee engagement combined with the above-described reflective documentation via the e-portfolio. Further, the emphasis on pragmatic decision-making and identity performance, as per the gaps highlighted above by Kinginger (2013), widens the scope of how the interventionist approach is being tested. A sampling of some of the prepared questions for the mentoring sessions can be viewed in Appendix E.

3.6 Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analyses

The data sources, as described, represent both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Each of the research questions in this study were analyzed using a combination of the data sources for a mixed methods approach in order to examine them from several different perspectives.

1. Does intervention to promote metalinguistic awareness during language study abroad have a significant effect on students' ability to acquire language competencies in study abroad? If so, do any particular tendencies emerge?

In order to answer this first research question, four sources of data were utilized. Firstly, the pre/post tests were used as the main source of data for this research question, as they represent the most comprehensive testing method in this study and cover the most in terms of Spanish language structures and tested knowledge of the language. In this way, it was possible to gauge participants' level of Spanish language proficiency prior to and following their SA sojourn in a direct, quantifiable way. Due to the scope of this test, it was possible to harvest a significant amount of data, with the possibility of analyzing it in a variety of compelling ways. Collectively, it was possible to look at participants' progressive knowledge of Spanish vocabulary and reading comprehension, including idiomatic phrases, verbs and verb tenses, the subjunctive, and prepositions. Furthermore, it was possible to examine the test questions that were most problematic for most participants, and, analogous to that, those that were answered most successfully. It was also possible to look at questions that were most often answered incorrectly initially but then correctly at the end of the study, and vice versa. This last query, as will be discussed in the results and discussion of the results, proved to be of great relevance to this project, revealing significant findings.

The second source of data used to analyze the first research question was a section of the post-sojourn questionnaire, which asked all participants to rate their Spanish language competency in the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking as either near native, advanced, intermediate, or beginner. This self-reported data is different from the test in that it is more vulnerable to personal bias and general inaccuracy, as assessing one's own language proficiency level is problematic in a number of ways. Each individual may define their proficiency differently, therefore, reporting from varying baseline interpretations of what the labels in the questionnaire mean. This is evidenced by the fact that in several cases in the initial language profile where participants were asked to provide their Spanish language proficiency levels, the self-reported data varied considerably from the pre-test data. Many of the participants rated their Spanish language skills much higher than their test results indicated. This does not mean necessarily that self-reported data is entirely invalid or is even wrong, as perhaps some individuals find testing to be more challenging than real-world application (Leclercq, Edmonds & Hilton, 2014) of a language (form versus function), or, as suggested above, testing may be an

assessment of achievement rather than actual language proficiency. However, it is likely that a validated test, such as the one used here, is at least more accurate in some measure than self-assessment. Nevertheless, the self-reported data drawn from the post-sojourn questionnaire is important in that it provides insight into whether or not, and to what extent, participants felt that their language skills had improved over the course of the semester. It was also important to compare this to the tested data, as in some cases participants may have underestimated their progress. Furthermore, it was relevant to compare the two participant groups' self-reported data to examine how they compare and how they answered similarly and differently, as the post-sojourn data may have been affected by this study's interventions.

By extension to the self-reported data from the post-sojourns questionnaire, the third and fourth sources of data utilized to answer this first research question were the e-portfolio and mentoring session conversations. Within the content extrapolated from these two interventions emerged several relevant insights about how the experimental participants felt that they had progressed in developing their Spanish language capacities. Further, they communicated here areas of deficit in their linguistic capacities that they felt they wanted to improve upon. Being attuned to these perceived gains and shortcomings demonstrated that the participants were paying attention to their Spanish language competency as agents of their own learning, and their accounts in regards to this provided valuable data for this first research question. In the e-portfolio specifically the participants' reflections stemmed from the prompt questions, which were constructed to elicit commentary about a number of topics including language-specific competencies over the arc of the semester. As a result, the potential for rich revelations in this area was there by design. The mentoring sessions also provided grounds for discussion on topics specific to language competencies, with the added benefit of dialogue and follow-up questions to qualify the participants' comments and provide support to enhance their understanding of their experiences.

2. Can a participant-managed digital portfolio paired with expert mentorship via online communicative tools be used meaningfully to cultivate self-awareness and/or

metalinguistic awareness in the development (and negotiation) of sociopragmatic capabilities, while studying abroad?

The second research question was addressed through three different sources of data. First of all, the data collected in the e-portfolios created by the experimental group participants provided a plethora of information regarding the participants' self-awareness as SA sojourners and language learners. Secondly, the mentoring sessions provided complementary information to the e-portfolios, as they enabled the researcher to clarify some of the e-portfolio content through direct conversation with the participants, allowing them also to extend upon their ideas. These two sources of data provided qualitative data obtained through one-on-one interaction on participants' specific thoughts and behaviours as SA language learners. While several studies have looked at learner-to-learner engagement and the development of sociopragmatic competencies through the use of online technologies (Abrams, 2013; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Kim & Brown, 2014; Prichard, 2013, among others), this study emphasized the research-learner relationship with the possibility, but without any expectation, of learner-to-learner interaction via their e-portfolio, so instead of examining the potential for group dynamics and learning through a mode of broader, more distributed knowledge, the focus was on how technology for intervention can serve a purpose. The objective was not to simulate input for practicing and acquiring competency of pragmatic norms but rather reflection and discussion to augment metapragmatic awareness so that it could be successfully implemented in a real-world context.

Additionally, the second research question was addressed through a series of five questions presented to the participants in the post SA questionnaire. These questions covered a variety of topics including self-reported pragmatic ability in Spanish, the reported amount of time spent engaging with native speakers of Spanish while abroad, as well as time in contact with home-based friends and family members, sense of welcomeness into the host community, and self-reported confidence in communicating in the target language. These questions revealed a holistic picture of how the participants engaged in the host community with the target language, including how they felt about it. This provided insight into their approaches as language users and into how they were able

to negotiate their interactions in situ. What was interesting, and most relevant to this study, was how the two groups reported different answers and how the treatment in this study of the participants in the experimental group may have affected that.

Finally, this second research question was examined through responses from the experimental participants to the final three questions of the post SA questionnaire regarding the e-portfolio and mentorship experience they had, as well as the use of technology for purposes of communication in this study. Through these questions, participants gave individual feedback on their firsthand experiences utilizing these tools and methods of research. This was essential to answering this question because only the researcher and the participants themselves could assess the use of these tools and what function they had in facilitating meaningful exchange, whether positive or negative.

3. What emerging trends are seen in the learning strategies and observations made by language study abroad students about their learning processes and surroundings, and what does this tell us about how to best prepare them for their sojourn?

The final research question was addressed by the qualitative data drawn from the e-portfolio, the mentoring sessions, and the post SA questionnaire. The e-portfolio, designed to provide participants with a space to document and reflect upon their SA experiences, intentionally featured several important themes associated with this study. Participants were asked to discuss their individual goals from beginning to end of their semester abroad, their linguistic background, language learning and language usage approaches, observations within the host community surroundings, and engagement with native speakers in the host community. Further, specific focus on identity performance, including metalinguistic awareness, pragmatic decision-making, and agentive capacities as international students learning Spanish abroad was threaded into the e-portfolio design. As an extension of this, the mentoring sessions included more in-depth discussion of the content provided in the e-portfolios by the experimental participants, so several emerging trends, as well as specific individual insights, and the intersections between them and the acquisition of language in SA were detected and analyzed.

In summary, the methodology described here was applied in order to collect data with the purpose of answering the three guiding research questions in this project. All participants in this study were asked to complete Part I of this study, including a pre and post-sojourn Spanish language proficiency diagnostic test, as well as a questionnaire in regards to their experience studying abroad. Participants in the experimental group only were asked to complete Part II of this study, which involved a two-part intervention: developing an e-portfolio and one-on-one discussions with a mentor about their in-situ experiences. The first research question, regarding whether or not an intervention to promote metalinguistic awareness could have an impact on the acquisition of any language competencies, was answered through an analysis of all four data sources. The second research question, addressing the two primary interventions in this study and their potential impact on self-awareness, metalinguistic awareness, and sociopragmatic abilities, was answered through an analysis of the data extracted from the e-portfolios and mentoring sessions, as well as the post-sojourn questionnaire. Likewise, the third research question, concerning learning strategies and participant observations as language study abroad students, was addressed through an analysis of the data from the e-portfolios, the mentoring sessions, and the post-sojourn questionnaire. These data sources combined provided both qualitative and quantitative data in an effort to provide a robust exploration of these research questions from several different perspectives.

Chapter 4

4 Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the results will be presented and described in the context of the three research questions that make up the foundation of this study. Each research question will be addressed, outlining the results from the sources of data that were utilized to answer each question. In all cases both quantitative and qualitative data will be presented. In addition, taking a holistic view of each language learner within their individual study abroad contexts, individual experimental participant profiles will be explored in detail.

4.1 Results from Research Question 1

Research Question #1:

Does intervention to promote metalinguistic awareness during language study abroad have a significant effect on students' ability to acquire language competencies in study abroad? If so, do any particular tendencies emerge?

Several sources of data were used to address the first research question: the pre/post Spanish Proficiency tests, the participants' reported Spanish language proficiency improvement drawn from the Post Study Abroad Questionnaire, and from the e-portfolio contents and mentor session discussions pertaining to specific goals set in regards to language acquisition. Blending all of this data together, interesting results in specific areas of Spanish language competency have emerged.

4.1.1 Pre/Post Spanish Language Proficiency Tests

The quantitative results from the proficiency testing revealed some similarities between the two groups (N = 23), but also some significant differences from beginning to end of the semester. Explanation of the proficiency test results will be broken down into three

categories: Part I, out of a total of 30 points, Part II out of a possible 20 points, and the total test scores out of a possible 50 points. The average control group ($n = 13$) score moved from 19.46 out of 30 or 64.86% ($SD = 6.98$) to 23.76 out of 30 or 79.2% ($SD = 3.67$) in Part I, as can be seen in Figure 4.1. The average experimental group ($n = 10$) score moved from 20.3 out of 30 or 67.66% ($SD = 5.75$) to 26.0 out of 30 or 86.66% ($SD = 3.19$), as can be seen in Figure 4.4. This denotes a percentile increase of 14.34% in the control group and a 19.0% increase in the experimental group, a difference of 4.66% between the two groups. The average control group score moved from 10.84 or 54.2% ($SD = 3.21$) down to 10.46 or 52.3% ($SD = 2.25$) out of 20 in Part II, as can be seen in Figure 4.2, and the average experimental group score in Part II moved from 10.8 or 54% ($SD = 2.89$) to 12.6 or 63% ($SD = 3.06$), which can be seen in Figure 4.5. This denotes a percentile decrease of 1.9% in the control group and an increase of 9% in the experimental group, a difference of 7.1%. For the overall test, the average control group score moved from 30.30 or 60.6% ($SD = 9.49$) to 34.23 or 68.46% ($SD = 5.27$) out of 50, and the average experimental group score moved from 31.1 or 62.2% ($SD = 8.04$) to 38.6 or 79.2% ($SD = 5.31$). This denotes a percentile increase of 7.86% in the control group and an increase of 14.92% in the experimental group, a difference of 7.06%. These overall average mean scores for the control group and the experimental group can be seen in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.6, respectively.

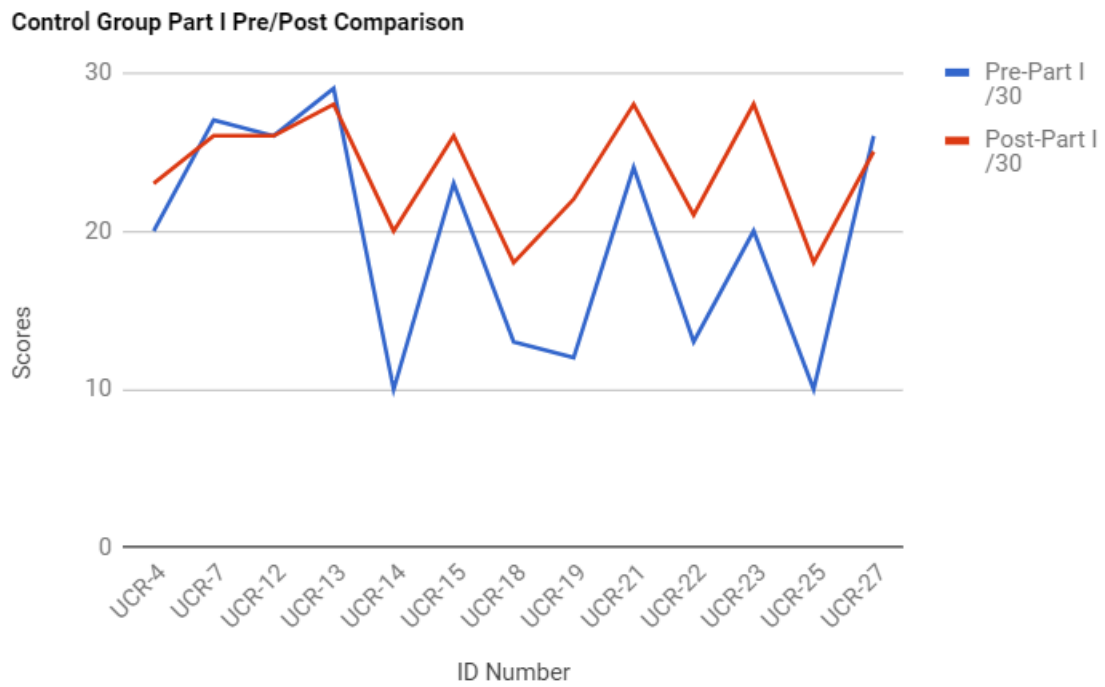


Figure 4.1. Comparison of control group pre/post-sojourns Part I test scores

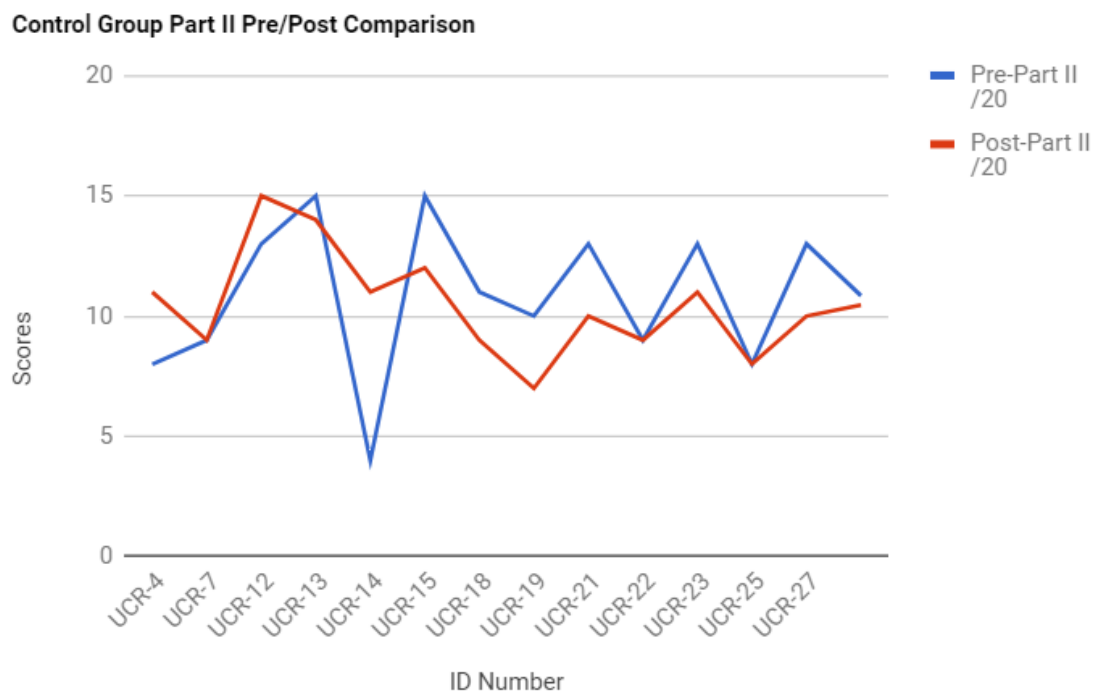


Figure 4.2. Comparison of control group pre/post-sojourns Part II test scores.

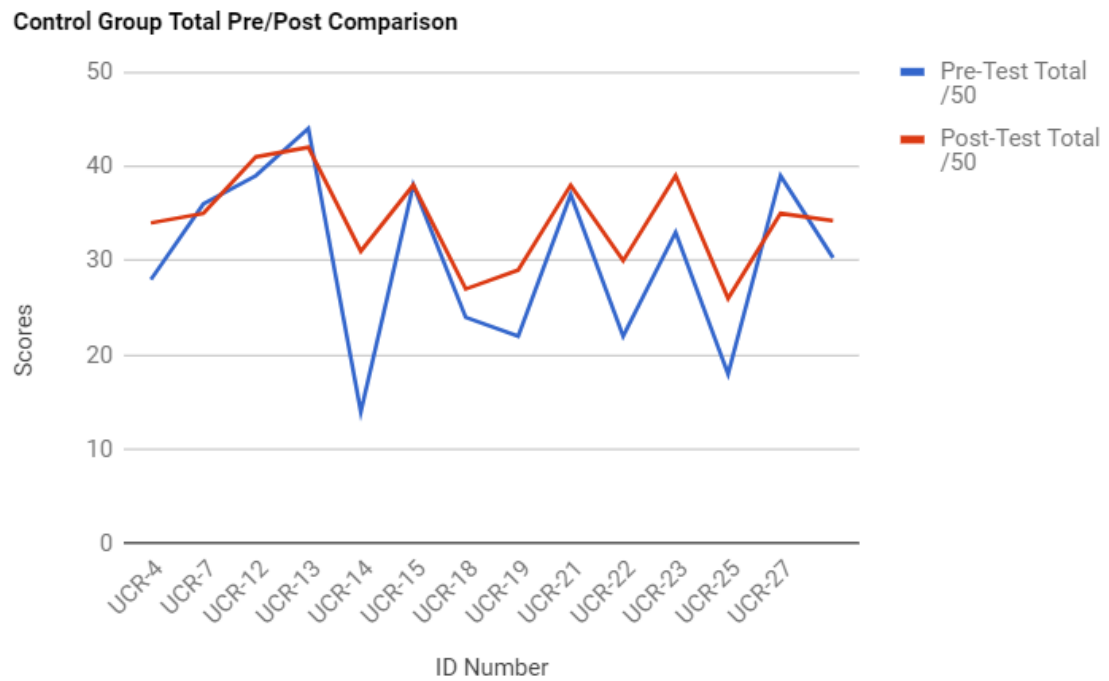


Figure 4.3. Comparison of control group pre/post-sojourns total test scores.

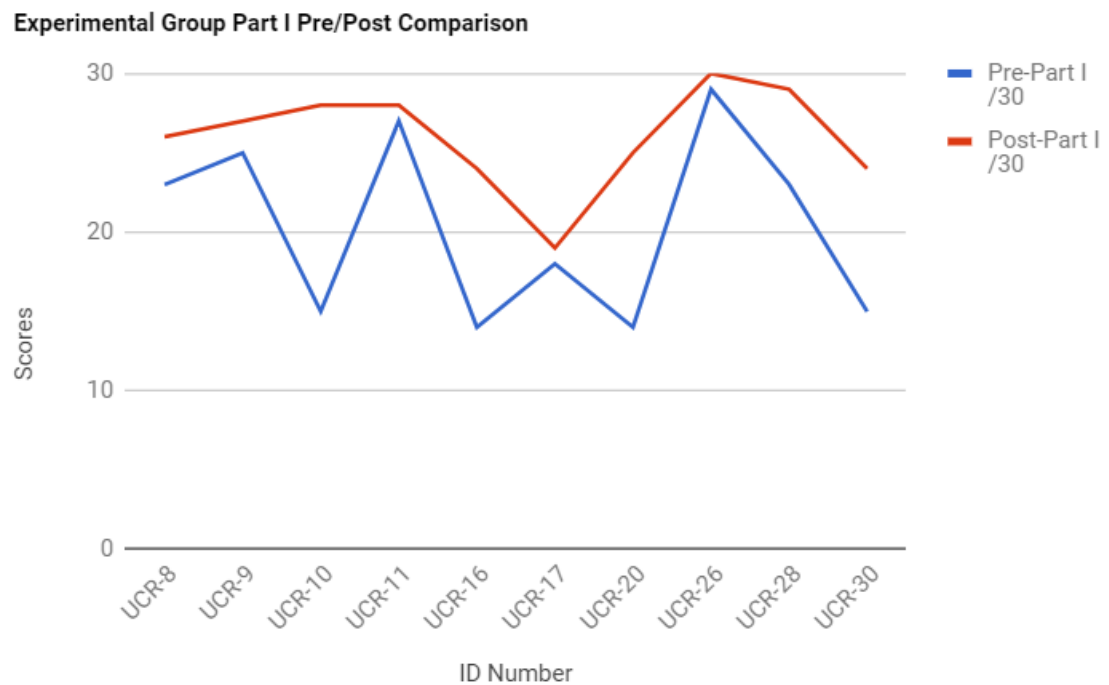


Figure 4.4. Comparison of experimental group pre/post-sojourns Part I test scores.

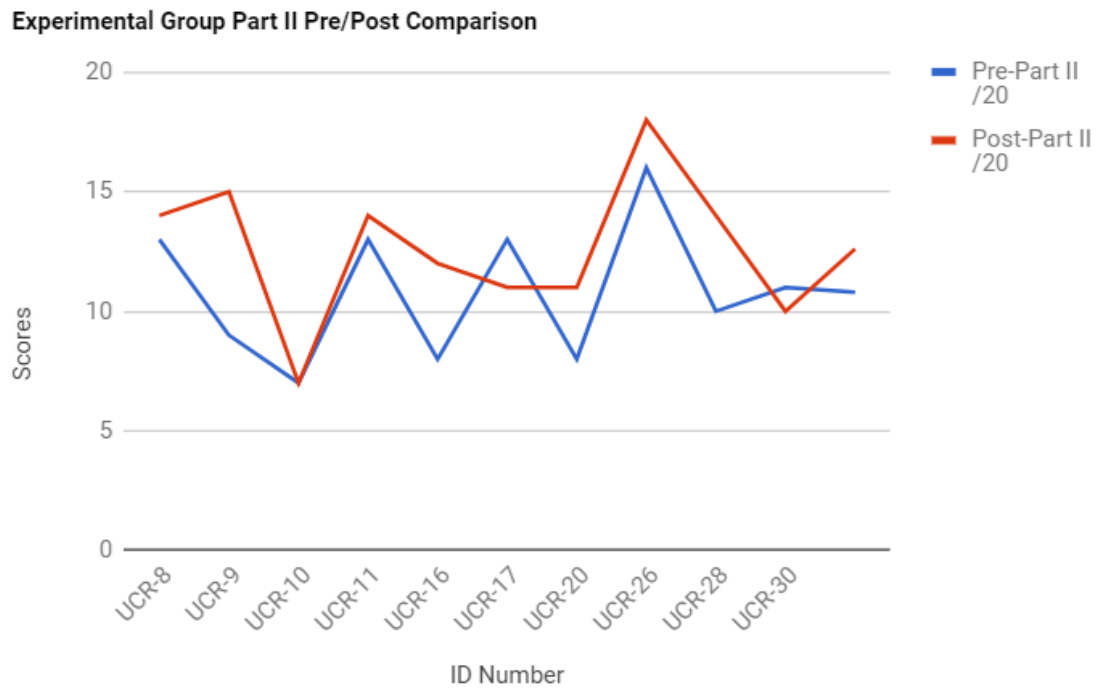


Figure 4.5. Comparison of experimental group pre/post-sojourns Part II test scores.

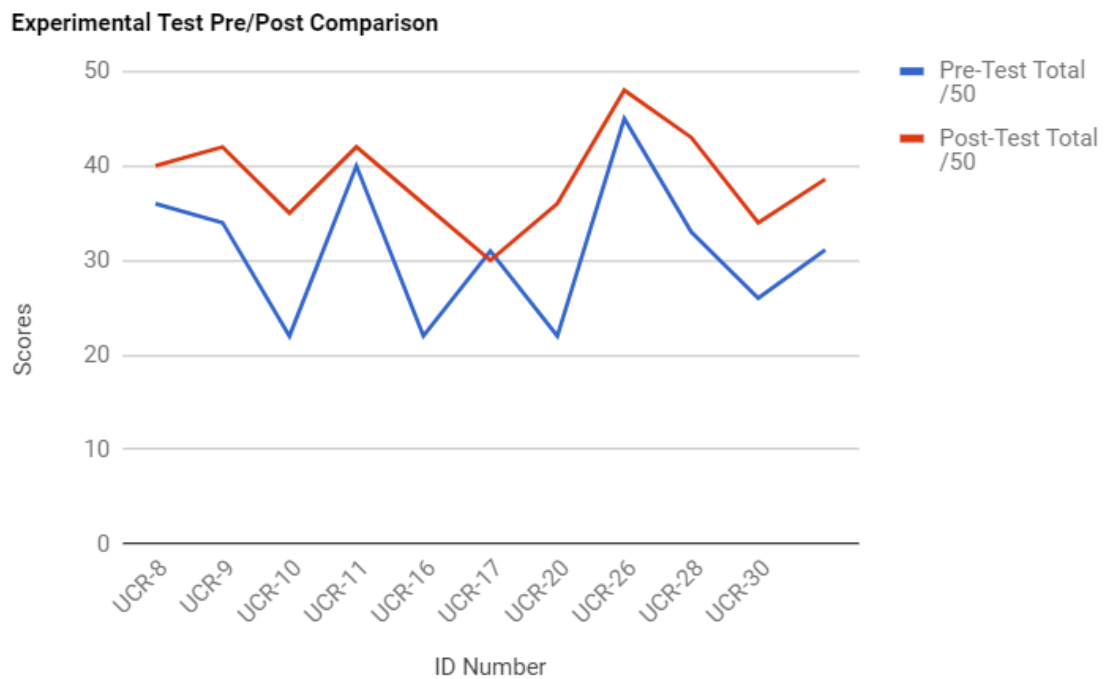


Figure 4.6. Comparison of experimental group pre/post-sojourns total test scores.

A series of independent samples and paired samples *t*-tests was conducted to see if the

two groups differed significantly in their scores for the Pre-Test and Post-Test. In interpreting results of the statistical analyses, I considered not only significant results that emerged, but also those approaching significance, noting that both offer interesting findings that either support the hypotheses in this study, or indicate trends that could be explored further in future research. In comparing the pre-sojourn test scores between the two groups, no significant results were found for test Part I, $p = 0.762$, test Part II, $p = 0.972$, or total test, $p = 0.835$. Such a lack of significant difference between the two groups is essential to the integrity of this project, as this reflects desired homogenous testing performance at the onset of this study. There was not a significant difference between the scores of the control group and those of the experimental group in the post-sojourn test either in Part I of the test, $p = 0.142$; however, for Part II of the test and in comparing the overall scores, there was an apparent difference that was not significant in terms of the $p < 0.05$ threshold: $p = 0.067$ and $p = 0.063$, respectively.

Following the between-group analyses, within-group analyses were conducted to compare the pre/post-sojourn test scores for each individual group. The control group's scores in Part I of the test showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-sojourn and post-sojourn tests: $p = 0.003$. Similarly, a significant difference was observed between the pre-test and post-test for the total score, $p = 0.026$. However, for Part II of the test, there was no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test: $p = 0.648$. This suggests that the control group did not demonstrate significant change in its responses in the second, more advanced part (the Cloze test) of the proficiency test. Conversely, for the experimental group, there were statistically significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test for all three measures: in Part I, $p = 0.004$, in Part II, $p = 0.048$, and in the total test scores, $p = 0.002$. Thus, while the within-group pre-post-sojourn analyses for the control group did not show a significant difference in test scores in Part II of the proficiency test, those of the experimental group did. This indicates that participants in the experimental group were able to advance their Spanish language proficiency, at least as indicated by the test used on the most challenging aspect of the test, while the control group did not.

Analyzing the test results in another way, by examining the categorical beginner, intermediate, and advanced labels attributed to this proficiency test, we note that the

experimental group also demonstrated greater testing advancement. As an assessment tool out of a total of 50 points, the proficiency test categorizes scores into the following three levels:

Table 4. 1
Test Scores and Corresponding Levels

Test Score	Level
0-29	Low
30-39	Intermediate
40-50	Advanced

As per the initial pre-sojourn test scores, within the control group there were 6 beginner participants (46%), 6 intermediate participants (46%), and 1 advanced participant (8%). Within the experimental group there were 4 beginner participants (40%), 4 intermediate participants (40%), and 2 advanced participants (20%). Thus, there was a higher percentage of beginners in the control group with the possibility of increasing their tested Spanish abilities more rapidly. It is generally accepted that learners who begin at a lower level are able to progress more than those who begin at higher levels simply because greater gains can be made earlier on in the process of acquiring a language, and eventually at higher levels a plateau will occur (Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 46; Juan-Garau, 2014; Saito, 2015). In addition, there is a proficiency threshold (for a summary of research on the Threshold Hypothesis see Collentine, 2009) for linguistic gain at which language learners may progress most optimally (Davidson, 2010a; Warden, 1995). However, as Collentine (2009) points out, “from a linguistic competence perspective” this idea of a threshold level “is probably too broad in scope” (p.221). As outlined in the earlier description of the test means, both groups tested in at very similar average scores overall with comparable standard deviations, so it is unlikely that the greater proportion of beginners in the control group led to a greater likelihood of advancing that much more by the end of the semester, but it is worth noting that the control group had more beginners at the start of the study. In analyzing the categorical

(low, intermediate, advanced) advancement of each group, it can be seen that the experimental group made greater strides in moving up the ranks compared to their control group counterparts in spite of the control group's slightly lower beginning. The post-sojourn test scores moved 3 control group participants out of the beginner category up to intermediate, with 3 remaining in the low category, 5 control group participants remained in the intermediate category, and 1 moved up to advanced. The experimental post-sojourn test scores moved all of the 4 original low scorers out of the low category and into intermediate, 1 intermediate experimental participant remained within the intermediate category, 3 intermediates moved up to advanced, and the 2 experimental participants who tested in at advanced remained in the advanced category. These pre/post-sojourn categorical proficiency level test scores can be seen in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3.

Table 4.2

Control Group Pre/Post Sojourn Categorical Proficiency Levels

Proficiency Level	Pre-Sojourn	Post-Sojourn
Beginner	6	3
Intermediate	6	8
Advanced	1	2

Table 4.3

Experimental Group Pre/Post Sojourn Categorical Proficiency Levels

Proficiency Level	Pre-Sojourn	Post-Sojourn
Beginner	4	0
Intermediate	4	5
Advanced	2	5

4.1.2 Reported Spanish Proficiency Improvement

The reported post-sojourn Spanish proficiency improvement data shows some variability across the participant groups. As Table 4.4 shows, on the whole, the control group rated their improvement in the four skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest improvement) higher than the experimental group participants did. In terms of individual categories, the control group reported more improvement in Reading ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.03$), Writing ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.87$), and Speaking ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.85$) skills compared to the experimental group, which reported means of ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 1.07$), ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.77$), and ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.82$), respectively. The only skill for which the experimental group reported more improvement than the control group was Listening. The control group mean for Listening was ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.01$) and for the experimental group it was ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.74$). From the data described in the previous section, it is clear that, while test results did not show greater improvement in the control group compared to the experimental group, self-reports by participants suggest that the control group did progress more. In particular, it is of value to look at the reported improvement in the skill of reading, as it is one skill that is heavily represented in the proficiency test. Independent samples t-tests comparing the responses of the control group with those of the experimental group showed no significant difference in any of the reported skills improvement data: Reading $p = 0.515$, Writing $p = 0.736$, Listening $p = 0.735$, Speaking $p = 0.280$ with a 95% confidence interval of difference containing zero in all cases; however, the above means indicate that there was some variance in the reported ratings with the control group perceiving their improvement to be slightly higher.

Table 4.4
Control/Experimental Groups' Reported Spanish Proficiency Improvement

Skill	Control Group		Experimental Group		T-Test
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Sig.
Reading	3.69	1.03	3.4	1.07	$p = .515$
Writing	3.62	.87	3.5	0.77	$p = .736$
Listening	3.77	1.01	3.9	0.74	$p = .735$
Speaking	3.69	.85	3.3	.82	$p = .28$

4.1.3 E-Portfolio Contents and Mentoring Session Discussions

Turning to the qualitative data relevant to this first research question, several interesting insights emerged from the e-portfolios and subsequent mentoring sessions that have to do with answering RQ1 and the acquisition of Spanish language competencies. Contents derived from both data sources covered a wide range of topics, as participants were open to discussing their abilities as language users while participating in SA. For example, in her final e-portfolio entry, one participant expressed satisfaction about strides she had made in learning Spanish. She writes, “Tres meses desde mi llegada, yo siento un cambio real. Efectivamente, hoy en día puedo hablar como quiero y entender quasi perfectamente. La prueba es que he hecho mis primeros parciales en Español, y logré sin muchas errores!¹” Clearly she has felt a real change in her Spanish abilities both receptively and productively, and she is able to articulate that while providing the evidence that has led her to this conclusion. Another participant reported that friends she had made in Costa Rica had commented that her Spanish had gotten “heaps better”. This is not an easily quantifiable comment, but it provides insight into how this participant’s language abilities were being perceived from the outside as opposed to a self-reported description.

¹ “Three months since my arrival, I feel a real change. Actually, today I can speak the way I want and understand almost perfectly. The proof is in the fact that I have done my first midterms in Spanish, and I did it without many errors!”

On the other hand, other participants expressed more discerning self-evaluations of their language gains. One participant shared in his e-portfolio that he has made improvements but that he felt he could still advance further. He wrote, “Yo creo que tengo mucha facilidad con los tiempos de verbos y yo sé bastante usarlos, pero pienso que lo que falta con respecto a mi español es una buena réplica, porque todavía a veces no tengo un vocabulario bastante amplio y me cuesta mucho usar las expresiones locales²”. Another comment emerged expressing a similar “could-still-improve” sentiment: “Me parece que mejoré mi expresión oral y escrita. Además tengo la impresión conocer bien mis verbos no obstante debo seguir a trabajar todo esto³”. Another participant felt that he had in fact achieved his initial goal of improving upon his Spanish language skills stating, “Casi todo, mejoré mi nivel de español, puedo emplear los verbos de manera casi correcta y cuando hablo la gente me entiende⁴”. This type of mention of gains in verbs and grammar (albeit using a very general term) was common through the commentary on linguistic competency, both within the e-portfolios and mentor session discussions.

Interestingly, and this will be addressed in much greater detail in answering the second research question, some participants expressed that they had gained significantly in their ability to understand and use the vernacular or local words and expressions, explaining that by the end of the semester they were more often using informal, slang language than before. However, others named this as an area of difficulty where they felt they needed more attention. By the end of the semester one participant noted that it would perhaps be nice to “entender mejor el lenguaje informal⁵” and another stated: “estoy impaciente poder hablar perfectamente español, poder jugar con las palabras, estar sarcástica, decir bromas sutil⁶”. In a more detailed statement, another participant shared

² “I think I’m quite good at verb tenses and I know how to use them quite well, but I think what’s missing with respect to my Spanish is a good replica [review] because sometimes I still don’t have the breadth of vocabulary, and it’s difficult for me to use colloquial expressions.”

³ “I think I improved my oral and written expression. Also I feel like I know my verbs however I should continue to work on this.”

⁴ “Almost everything, I improved my level of Spanish, I can use verbs almost correctly and when I speak to people they understand me.”

⁵ “understand informal language better”

⁶ “I’m impatient to be able to speak perfectly in Spanish, to be able to play with words, to be sarcastic, to say subtle jokes.”

that although he had arrived in Costa Rica with significant knowledge of the structure of the language, while abroad he was able to gain in terms of in situ, spoken abilities, such as: “...formular las frases más informal y todo⁷” and even went on to query, “Lo que me pregunto es si el español que aprendí en Costa Rica será parecido a lo que voy a hablar en otro país o si tendré que adaptarme por los expresiones y maneras de hablar los cuales son diferentes⁸”. This awareness about the variability of language suggests a preparedness for adapting to new challenges in future language-use scenarios, which was not seen as directly stated throughout the reflections of other participants. These comments surrounding different regional variations and types of linguistic register on the whole, however, demonstrate an awareness that there are more layers to Spanish still outstanding to incorporate into these individuals’ linguistic repertoires.

Knowledge about and ability with the subjunctive (Isabelli, 2007) proved particularly popular as a topic of discussion for areas of improvement in both the e-portfolios and mentor session discussions, as almost all of the experimental participants alluded to the need for greater ability in this respect at some point in either their reflections or mentor discussions. Three participants noted specifically that they had gained the ability to use the present subjunctive, but two of them expressed that they still needed more practice to understand it in its other forms. Another participant simply stated that her progress was “very bad” with respect to the subjunctive, and another actually said she could change any of her initial stated goals, it would be to focus on the subjunctive. As an advanced feature of the Spanish language, it is not surprising that the subjunctive represents something of a pain point for many, but their awareness of it and their need to work on it is an important achievement in and of itself. However, in the diagnostic testing data, as described above, we can observe that the experimental group clearly demonstrated better control over the second part of the test that included the more challenging subjunctive questions. Therefore, while many of these experimental participants expressed concern about their subjunctive abilities, they were able to score higher in this domain compared to the control participants. Although their reflections suggest a deficit in this area, they performed well on subjunctive questions on the whole.

⁷ “...formulate my sentences more informally and everything”

⁸ “What I wonder is if the Spanish I have learned in Costa Rica will be similar to what I will speak in another country or if I’ll have to adapt to the expressions and ways of speaking which are different.”

Perhaps they are aware of the challenges that the subjunctive can present in situ, but it seems they were able to demonstrate acquired knowledge about it on a tested level.

4.1.4 Summary and Discussion of the RQ1 Results

As can be seen in the results pertaining to RQ1 presented in the previous chapter, the answer to the question is affirmative. According to comparisons of their proficiency testing performance pre/post-sojourn, yes, intervention during language study abroad to promote metalinguistic awareness can have a significant effect on language learners' ability to improve their knowledge of the Spanish language, as the two groups demonstrated dissimilar performance in their proficiency testing from the beginning to the end of the semester. Although the experimental participants, having received the treatment in this study, reported lower (while not statistically significant) perceived improvement in their language skills at the end of the semester as compared to the control group, their testing scores proved otherwise. The experimental group produced higher average scores in both parts of the test and in the overall test totals. Further, the experimental group demonstrated statistical significance in its test scores in Part II of the test, as well as the overall scores, as compared to the control group. While there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in their performance on Part I of the test, it should be remembered that this was the easier portion of the test. It stands to reason that the participants in this study would not demonstrate differential performance in this less challenging part of the test given their initial levels of Spanish, and their extended time spent in an immersive, SA context. Faced with subjunctive forms, prepositional phrases within the more advanced Cloze test content, however, the experimental group seemed to outperform the control group. In a comparison of the scores for the Pre-test with those for the Post-test for Part II of the test, we find no statistical significance in, suggesting that their competence in the areas of part II did not significantly change, which stands in contrast to the experimental group, which did show significantly better test results for Part II in the Post-test than in the Pre-test. These results, combined with the qualitative data drawn from the experimental participants themselves in their discussion of goal-setting and goal achievement from start to finish of their semester abroad, make a case for the benefits of intervention to coach SA language

learners in metalinguistic awareness. These results could be interpreted in different ways of course. Alternatively, it could be concluded that without intervention, there is greater potential for a lack in progress, but from either perspective, there seems to be an effect worth noting.

4.2 Results from Research Question 1

Research Question #1:

Can a participant-managed digital portfolio paired with expert mentorship via online communicative tools be used meaningfully to cultivate self-awareness and/or metalinguistic awareness in the development (and negotiation) of sociopragmatic capabilities, while studying abroad?

4.2.1 E-Portfolio Contents and Mentoring Session Discussions

The contents of the e-portfolios constructed by the participants in the experimental group, as well as the discussions that emerged from the mentoring sessions, allowed for a number of observations to be made regarding their sense of self-awareness and their metalinguistic awareness in pragmatic decision-making, including identity performance and agentive capacities, and the acquisition of vernacular forms as in situ Spanish language learners.

The topic of identity performance and the way language study abroad students negotiate their social interactions while abroad as individual agents among locals (Kinginger, 2013b) is an interesting one that has been little examined (Kinginger, 2013a). For this reason, questions regarding this theme were incorporated into both the e-portfolio and subsequent mentoring sessions. Some interesting insights were revealed by this study's participants in their e-portfolios and mentoring sessions. In particular, several comments were made with respect to vernacular forms, their meaning(s), and how and when to use them appropriately. One participant observed, "En la calle y la universidad oigo y veo palabras en español de Costa Rica (digo el de Costa Rica porque hay palabras que no son las mismas o formas de decir las cosas que en otros países

hispano-hablantes)⁹”. The fact that this person was becoming more aware of regional differences in Spanish is an important one, not lost on some of the other participants who had noticed this trend as well. Unfortunately, non-standard varieties are routinely skipped over in formal instruction (Nadasdi, Mougeon & Rehner, 2005; Nagy, Blondeau & Auger, 2003; Regan, 2004), leaving language learners to decode on their own commonly used familiar and slang words, and expressions. Several observations noted specific slang terms, such as “mae”, a commonly used term in Costa Rica akin to “dude”. As well, participants noted other terms such as ‘pura vida’, the national saying that is used in a variety of ways including salutations and leave taking, and even for the purpose of affirming exchanges between interlocutors. For example, one person might share some good news, for instance that they are going away on the weekend, and the other might respond “pura vida”. Other colloquialisms that participants noted included: “tuanis”, a common local term meaning something to the effect of “cool”, “por dicha”, a commonly used expression loosely meaning “luckily”, but that can be used in a variety of ways, ‘macho/a’, a term used to refer to a light-skinned person, and “picha”, a vulgar term for a part of the male anatomy but that is used several different ways to express several different meanings. What is interesting is how the participants viewed these words and expressions, and which ones they chose to incorporate into their linguistic repertoires. Some were very aware of their pragmatic meanings, and, therefore, had chosen to use them or not to use them. For example, one participant wrote,

No uso tanto la palabra MAE. Claro hay esa palabra en Alemania también (traducción: viejo o digga o dude) pero no se usa tanto como aquí. Al principio no me gusté tanto la palabra muchacho/-a. Esa palabra conozco de gran canaria. Aquí sólo se dice chacho/-a y es más un palabra de la juventud (por eso no me sentí bien al principio)¹⁰.

⁹ “On the street and at the university I hear and see words in Costa Rican Spanish (I say Costa Rican because there are words that are not the same or ways of saying things compared to other Spanish-speaking nations)”.

¹⁰ I don’t use the word MAE [dude/buddy]. Of course this word exists in Germany too, (translation: buddy or digga or dude) but it’s not used as much as here. At first I didn’t like the word muchacho/a much. I know that word from Gran Canaria. Here they just say chacho/a and it’s more of a word for young people (that’s why I didn’t feel so well at first).

This comment reveals an awareness that this participant has about the pragmatic meaning words carry, and, in this case, the sort of juvenile sensibility attached to “chacho/a”. As a result, the participant had chosen not to use this term. Interestingly, another participant expressed the opposite sentiment, choosing to deliver an identity performance more associated with the youth culture. The participant wrote, “Normalmente uso el lenguaje formal y si hablo con costarricenses el uso cambio un pocito porque también quiero usar las palabras y las frases típicas de la juventud de costa rica¹¹”. Through their reflections these participants demonstrate an ability to articulate their decision-making processes in how they engage with Spanish for the purpose of constructing a desired identity.

Along these same lines, the topic of personal pronouns was addressed several times in the participants’ reflections. In particular, participants mentioned the frequent use of the more formal second person singular “usted” in Costa Rica (which is used with third-person verb forms). One participant expressed disinterest in using it as liberally as she observed to be popular in Costa Rica. She wrote,

No me gusta utilizar el usted para hablar me parece muy impersonal. No me gusta utilizar el usted, pero lo hago con las personas desconocidas... El usted es muy impersonal y para hablar con un amigo, utilizar la tercera persona es muy extraño y perturbante. No podría decir usted en francés a mi novio, a mis padres, a mis amigas y amigos¹².

In Costa Rica it is not uncommon to hear “usted” used as a form of address among family members and close friends (Schmidt-Rinehart & LeLoup, 2017). Clearly, this was viewed as highly formal for this participant, and she did not feel comfortable using it in the same way, as it was not something she would do in her native French language. While she was aware of the appropriate usage, it was challenging for her to adopt the practice, as it did not coincide with her desired identity performance. Another participant with the same L1 French background shared a similar perspective on *usted*. She wrote “Cuando no conozco

¹¹ “Usually I use formal language and if I’m talking to Costa Ricans the use changes a little because I also want to use words and phrases typical of young people from Costa Rica”.

¹² “I don’t like to use *usted* to speak it seems very impersonal to me. I don’t like to use *usted*, but I do it with people I don’t know... *Usted* is very impersonal and for speaking with a friend, to use the third person is very strange and annoying. I couldn’t say *usted* in French to my boyfriend, to my parents, to my friends”.

la persona uso el usted pero muy rápidamente uso el tu¹³” meaning she was aware of the rules of *usted* usage within Costa Rica, but that she would move away from it quickly due to a discomfort with its formality. Another participant still expressed a similar sentiment but specific to the use of “tú”. She noted that she knew it was not really the norm to use “tú” in Costa Rica, but she said sometimes she just didn’t really care and would use it anyway because it was just automatic. Her awareness of the pragmatic norms associated with personal pronouns did not fully impact her choices in situ, which is an important finding because it means that knowledge about local practices is not always the only thing that informs identity performance or pragmatic decision-making.

In addition to the frequent use of “usted”, several participants drew attention to the regional second person singular personal pronoun “vos”, (Quintanilla Aguilar, 2009; Quintanilla Aguilar & Rodríguez Prieto, 2014; Schmidt-Rinehart & LeLoup, 2017), which has seen a significant expansion through a number of countries in Central and South America (Moyna & Rivera-Mills, 2016), and which has come to be somewhat of a national identity marker for Costa Ricans (Quintanilla Aguilar & Rodríguez Prieto, 2014). Crucially, for many participants, *el voseo* was not something they were familiar with or had been formally trained in prior to living in Costa Rica. While it is a mainstay linguistic form in several Latin American countries, it has evidently not made its way into textbooks or formal in-class instruction. As a result, some individuals struggled with it as a form and were unsure of how to use it. One participant, aware of this fact, wrote, “Aquí se usa el “vos” pero lo uso poco porque nunca aprendí la conjugación lamentablemente. El “vos” es muy común en latino américa pero no lo estudiamos cuando nos enseñan el español internacional en la universidad¹⁴”. Another participant, referring to the Spanish in Costa Rica wrote simply, “Se usa mucho el vos también aunque no conozco muy la conjugación¹⁵”. While these two individuals are aware of the “vos” usage, they are unfortunately unable to participate in using it correctly, a problem which could be easily resolved through formal instruction. Another participant suggested that she thought “vos” was confusing but that she thought it was just a slang term since she had never learned it

¹³ “When I don’t know a person I use the *usted* pero I quickly switch to *tú*”

¹⁴ “Here *vos* is used but I rarely use it because I never learned the conjugation unfortunately. The *vos* is very common in Latin America but we don’t study it they teach us the international Spanish at university”.

¹⁵ “*Vos* is used a lot too although I don’t know the conjugation very [well]”.

in class. Another participant still shared, “A mí no me gusta mucho usar el “vos” y decir por ejemplo ‘tienen el libro’ en vez de ‘tenéis el libro’ pero es parte de la cultura¹⁶”. As this quotation demonstrates, the individual is unclear on what “vos” is and how to use it, confusing it with ‘vosotros’, the familiar second person plural used in Spain, which is almost always taught in standard Spanish language classes. While this individual expresses understanding of variation in language, stating that it is something cultural, had this individual had explicit instruction on vos, its form and function, it would have been easier for him to communicate more effectively and eventually adopt this pronoun more readily.

Aside from linguistic forms, further compelling content was revealed by the participants in relation to their identity performance and agentive capacities as SA sojourners. One participant expressed that she would like to maintain her Spanish accent and the grammatical forms that she had learned while living in Spain, as she felt her heart was still there. This suggests that she wished to present an identity defined by the Spanish of Spain and her experience there, rather than the Spanish of Costa Rica, although she did say she was interested in learning new words, formal and informal, while living in Costa Rica. This is an interesting topic, as it touches on adopted national identity, as well as inherent characteristics of hierarchy even within languages and their variation from region to region. Language learners as individuals have the opportunity to make choices about the kind of language they practice, along with its grammatical and phonological variations. The features they choose to take on and utilize say a lot about who they wish to present as. Another participant had noted that he had taken on some of the expression used in Costa Rica to evoke a more relaxed lifestyle. He said he had adopted language such as “más tranquilo¹⁷” and “hay tiempo para hacer todo¹⁸”, which he felt reflected the more laid back culture of the Central American nation. While this suited his presentation of self, certainly not everyone would wish to take on this type of language if they felt it did not represent their values or lifestyle. For example, one participant expressed that “la

¹⁶ I don’t really like to use *vos* and say for example ‘you all have [3rd per. pl., formal] the book’ instead of ‘you have [2nd per. Sing. *vos*] the book’ but it’s part of the culture.

¹⁷ “more relaxed”

¹⁸ “there is time to do everything”

lentitud¹⁹” of Costa Rica was something that he understood culturally, but that it was something that he did not wish to adopt for himself

Furthermore, on the topic of personal identity and agency, the notion of personal and racial identity, as the participants felt it was seen by locals, was a topic that emerged on a number of occasions. The idea that they felt they were perceived as foreigners, whether this experience was projected by them or not, was discussed. Some participants commented that they felt they were viewed as “gringos²⁰” and, therefore, treated differently. For example, one participant described how she felt she was inaccurately perceived in public settings as being North American:

La comunidad me ve muy a menudo como ‘la extranjera’, la gringa como ellos dicen, por el color de mi piel y de mi pelo y a menudo piensan que soy de EE-UU o de America del Norte y empiezan a hablarme en inglés. Así es difícil para mi fundirme en la masa. Por ejemplo, en una feria, cuando pregunto el precio de algo muy a menudo van a decir un precio casi 2 o 3 veces más elevado que el precio normal al que ellos venden sus productos, porque piensan que como soy una gringa tengo mucha plata y también piensan que no voy a darme cuenta de lo que representa esta suma porque está en colones²¹.

She notes the fact that her skin colour is thought to be indicative of a specific nationality, and, therefore, of a specific economic status, which has made her feel that she has been treated differently from others. Another participant expressed a similar sentiment about his appearance, stating that people sometimes automatically speak to him in English and concludes, “Pienso que puede ser por mi cara de gringo²²”. Another participant expressed a similar outsider feeling, but in reference to her speaking Spanish. In describing her experiences communicating in Spanish and how that can vary from person to person, she prefaces her comments by saying, “Primero hay que convencer la persona que se sabe

¹⁹ “slowness”

²⁰ “foreigners” (particularly Americans; may or may not carry a pejorative tone)

²¹ “The community very often sees me as ‘the foreigner,’ the foreign girl as they refer to me, because of the colour of my skin and the colour of my hair and they often think I’m from the United States, or North America and they start to talk to me in English. So it’s difficult for me to blend in. For example, at the market when I ask for the price of something very often they’ll say a price almost 2 or 3 times higher than the normal price they sell the product for because they think that since I’m a foreigner I have a lot of money and they also think that I’m not going to know the difference because the total is in Costa Rican currency”.

²² “I think it could be due to my foreigner face”.

español...²³”. Her comment suggests that she has had the experience of not being able to communicate in Spanish, as fellow interlocutors have assumed she does not speak the language as a foreigner. Or, perhaps more accurately, she has felt she has not been taken seriously as a Spanish speaker within the host community due to prejudices unrelated to her. Navigating these experiences that present inherent power differentials can be challenging for language learners. Being able to reflect upon this is important for understanding the host community, but it also opens up the opportunity to gain a deeper sense of self as an agent of learning. It also allows learners to reflect upon their approach to living in a new community and embodying the “other”. Several participants commented on the importance of knowing how to speak foreign languages, stating that it was a source of pride for them, an opportunity for personal enrichment, a skill to enhance the possibility to future job prospects, etc. These reasons are inherently utilitarian, which is not to say they are in any way inappropriate, but when an outsider is positioned to consume the language and culture for personal gain, they may find they are profiled in a certain way. This is an area of race relations and geopolitical power and influence that expands well beyond the scope of this linguistic project, but suffice it to say that while some participants expressed feeling welcomed openly as foreigners, many did express a sense of not always fitting in in the way they felt they should or that they hoped they would, and this is meaningful fodder for unpacking the way these participants aimed to and were able to engage within their study abroad communities. Sample portions of the e-portfolio contents can be found in Appendix F, and sample transcribed one-on-one mentoring interactions can be found in Appendix G.

4.2.2 Post Study Abroad Questionnaire

To further answer RQ2, data was drawn from several of the questions included in the Post Study Abroad Questionnaire. These questions related to the participants’ reported pragmatic competencies, their self-reported sense of being welcomed into the host community, their self-reported confidence in communicating in the target language with native speakers, the reported amount of time spent engaging with native speakers of

²³ “First you have to convince the person that you know Spanish”.

Spanish while abroad, and the reported time spent daily in contact with home-based friends and family members. The responses gathered from these questions provided interesting insight, from the participants' perspective, into their sociopragmatic tendencies and their sense of agency as international students living within a host community, which is an important part of understanding and developing sociopragmatic skills (Barron, 2006; Kinginger, 2008; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Terui, 2012) throughout the process of acquiring language skills.

The first question analyzed here has to do with the participants' reported sociopragmatic capabilities. Just as they rated their four reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills on a 1-5 Likert scale in terms of improvement over the course of the semester abroad, they were also asked to consider their improvement in pragmatic abilities in engaging with the language in situ. The responses were examined using independent samples t-testing, and although the control group participants appeared to rate their overall pragmatic improvement higher ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.86$) compared to the experimental group ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.94$), the statistical analyses showed that apparent difference was not statistically significant, $p = 0.841$. These results are displayed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5
Control/Experimental Groups' Reported Post-Sojourns Sociopragmatic Capabilities, Feeling of Welcomeness and Level of Confidence and Independent T-Test Analyses

Skill	<u>Control Group</u>		<u>Experimental Group</u>		<u>T-Test</u>
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Sig.
Sociopragmatic Capabilities	4.08	.86	4.0	.94	$p = .841$
Feeling of Welcomeness	3.85	.8	3.9	.74	$p = .87$
Level of Confidence	3.92	.64	3.9	0.57	$p = .929$

Subsequently, participants were asked to report on their perceived sense of feeling welcomed into the host community culture on a 1-5 Likert scale. The averages for the

two groups for this question were almost identical, with the control group's responses having a mean and standard deviation of ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.8$), while the experimental group had a mean and standard deviation of ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.74$). Not surprisingly, the independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between the mean responses of the two groups, $p = 0.870$. These results are also displayed in Table 4.5.

In the final question in the series of Likert scale-like questions, participants were asked to rate their overall level of confidence in communicating with native speakers of Spanish. As was the case in the previous question results, responses of the two groups showed very similar averages, with the control group at ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.64$) and experimental group at ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.57$), an apparent difference that was not statistically significant, $p = 0.929$. The results from this question and the corresponding independent t-test analyses can also be seen in Table 4.5.

In addition to the scale questions, participants were also asked to report on the number of hours they spent daily speaking in Spanish with native speakers. The control group appeared to report spending more hours engaging with the target language on a daily basis ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 2.2$) with responses ranging from 1 to 7 hours per day compared to the experimental group's responses ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.2$), which ranged from 1 to 5 hours per day. However, the independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between these mean responses of the two groups, $p = 0.364$. The results from this questionnaire question can be seen in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6
Control/Experimental Groups Reported Number of Hours Daily Engaging with Native Speakers vs. People Back Home and Independent T-Test Analyses

Contact Group	Control Group			Experimental Group			T-Test
	Mean	S.D.	Range of hrs./day	Mean	S.D.	Range of hrs./day	Sig.
In situ native speakers	3.77	2.2	1-7	3.1	1.2	1-5	$p = 3.64$
People back home	2.27	0.74	<1-10	1.08	1.16	<1-2	$p = 2.12$

The final question from the questionnaire that was analyzed for the purpose of answering RQ2 had to do with the number of reported hours spent daily by participants communicating with friends and family back home. Like the reported number of hours using Spanish each day, the control group appeared to report more hours spent communicating back home, but their responses showed a rather large standard deviation ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 2.74$) compared to the experimental group ($M = 1.08$, $SD = 1.16$). The range of reported daily hours by the control group in this question was between less than 10 minutes and 10 hours, and from 15 minutes to 2 hours from the experimental group. The response within the control group sample indicating 10 hours of daily communication with people back home is a clear outlier, much higher than the other responses. It is possible the participant, with access to wireless internet throughout the day, was suggesting that they had ongoing and regular contact with friends and family back home and, therefore, reported a total much higher than others. In spite of this variation, the independent samples t-testing analyses run for this set of responses indicated no statistically significant differences between the means for the two groups, $p = 0.212$. A presentation of this final questionnaire question can also be seen in Table 4.6.

Furthermore, to answer this second research question, it is necessary to also discuss the utility and functionality of the online communication tools used to carry out the intervention components of this study. This can be addressed in part through the final three questions posed in the Post Study Abroad Questionnaire. These questions asked the

experimental participants to comment on the practice of carrying out the e-portfolio tasks and engaging with a mentor as learning tools, and on the digital technologies used in this study.

As regards the e-portfolio tasks, participants suggested that they had been useful for reflecting and learning. The comments demonstrate an awareness on the part of most of the participants that reflection can lead to consolidated learning, or at the very least that there is some value in the practice of reflecting. For example, one participant stated, “Me gustaron las tareas porque me permitieron observar mis avances y darme cuanto de como cambió mi ambiente en lo cual vivía. También me permitieron escribir y practicar el español²⁴”. Another wrote, “Muy bien. Permitio darme cuanta de mi progresión en el aprendizaje del español y darme algunos retos²⁵”. Another participant still expressed, “Las tareas parecen super bien tambien para reflectarse y establecer objetivos²⁶”. However, there were a couple of comments that suggested some perceived lack of value in conducting the e-portfolio tasks. One participant explained that they felt they were not effective in learning a language. Another commented that they felt the tasks only reiterated ideas that they already knew. However, that same participant also commented that the goals were a valuable component of the e-portfolio, which really was central to the e-portfolio, as they anchored the themes developed throughout the reflections and observations. As far as the mentoring sessions were concerned, the comments were also generally very positive and most often associated with opportunities to reflect. One participant wrote, “Tal como las tareas, el chat con el mentor me permitió reflexionar sobre mis capacidades en español y las metas que tenía a principio de mi viaje. Pude ver así el evolución de mi conocimiento en español²⁷”. Another wrote, “Estas conversaciones permitieron de comunicar de manera mas abierta sobre mi experiencia²⁸”. Further, the word “interesting” came up several times. For example, one participant stated, “Tener un intercambio mas instantáneo y tambien creo que el hecho de hablar de sus experiencia

²⁴ “I liked the tasks because they allowed me to observe my progress and notice how the environment I was living in changed”. They also allowed me to write and practice my Spanish”.

²⁵ “Very well. It allowed me to notice my progress en the learning of Spanish and give me some goals”.

²⁶ “The tasks seem super good too for reflection and to establish goals”.

²⁷ “Like the tasks, the chat with the mentor allowed me to reflect on my abilities in Spanish and the goals that I had from the beginning of my trip. I was able to see the evolution of my knowledge of Spanish”.

²⁸ “These conversations allowed me to communicate in an open way about my experiences”.

permite una cierta introspección entonces, fue interesante²⁹”. Another example can be seen in the following comment: “La conversacion de chat siempre estaba super personal y interesante. No podría cambiar nada³⁰”. The only negative comment provided here had to do with time management. One participant expressed that the mentoring sessions were difficult to manage due to time constraints stating, “Mayoríamente me estresaron las conversaciones. No por el contenido sino por poder integrarlos en mi vida diaria, ya que ya tenía muchas otras cosas³¹”. Clearly the participants saw value in these conversations, combined with the e-portfolio tasks, but of course time is always a consideration.

In reference to the digital technologies specifically, the participants used words like “flexible” and “easy” and said things like, “Ningún problema, muy buen contacto, muy buena experiencia³²” and “A mi punto de vista es muy adecuado y sencillo³³”. The participants shared that they had perceived these tools to be useful for the most part, but they did suggest in some cases that there was a bit of a learning curve using them. For example, one participant commented,

Creo que google+ era un buen medio de comunicar y publicar mis redacciones y observaciones. Usar google+ era nuevo para mí, fue un poco difícil al inicio entender como todo funcionaba pero al fin todo fue bien. Quizás tuve que tener más indicaciones al inicio sobre google+ para entender como funcionaba más rápido. Por el otro lado, el chat era muy cómodo para comunicarse tal como los correos electrónicos³⁴.

The suggestion to improve the initial training in the use of Google+ is a valid one. This concern regarding digital technology literacy is a theme that has emerged in other studies featuring digital technologies for similar purposes (Brandes & Boskic, 2008; Wang &

²⁹ “To have an instantaneous exchange and also I think that the fact of talking about one’s experiences allows a certain introspection so it was interesting”

³⁰ “The chat conversation was always super personal and interesting. I wouldn’t change anything”.

³¹ “The conversations mainly stressed me out. Not because of the content but rather because of integrating them into my daily life, since I already had many other things”.

³² “No problem. Very good contact, very good experience”.

³³ “From my perspective it’s adequate and simple”.

³⁴ “I think that Google+ was a good means of communicating and publishing my writing and observations. Using Google+ was new for me, it was a little difficult at the start to understand how it all worked but at the end everything was fine. Maybe I had to have more instructions at the beginning about Google+ to understand how it worked more quickly. On the other hand, the chat was very comfortable to communicate, as were the emails”.

Vasquez, 2012; Williams, Chan & Cheung, 2009). This could certainly be addressed in future iterations of this study to ensure that participants feel more prepared to access the technologies and use them to their potential. Another participant expressed some frustration in using technology without seeing the person (although the possibility of seeing one another during the mentoring sessions was always present), but indicated that that feeling improved over time. “Muy bien, aunque puede ser frustrante de no ver la persona, pero para mi no fue un problema, creo que era mas facil asi al final³⁵”. Only one participant expressed true disinterest in using technology, generally for its perceived lack of functionality stating that there are always things that do not work and that instead of Google+ they would have preferred using e-mail or paper to carry out their reflections and observations. This attitude towards the use of digital technologies is understandable, as not everyone embraces online digital tools, given the potential for technical difficulties. This evidently can be an obstacle in getting participants on board, as some individuals are more resilient to troubleshooting these sorts of issues than others. Also, considering these participants’ busy schedules as international students studying at the university level in a foreign language, as mentioned in an above comment regarding the mentoring sessions, it is entirely reasonable to expect them to experience frustration. One participant alluded to this and commented, “Me gusta usar el ordenador, porque no tengo que ir a la universidad cada vez. Es mucho mas facil como eso, es podemos guardar tiempo, porque tiempo es importante cuando un estudiante esta en intercambio³⁶”. As time is always an important consideration in recruiting participants for a study such as this, the initial training should be seen as a worthwhile investment to ensure the technology can be leveraged appropriately with minimal stress for the users.

4.2.3 Summary and Discussion of the RQ2 Results

From the participant responses analyzed to answer RQ2, it can be seen that the interventions in this study did in fact provide the opportunity to meaningfully reflect upon topics associated with metalinguistic awareness and sociopragmatic abilities with

³⁵ “Very good, although it can be frustrating to not see the person, but for me it was not a problem, I think it was easier that way in the end”.

³⁶ “I like to use the computer because I don’t have to go to the university each time. It’s much easier that way, we can save time because time is important for a student on an exchange”.

the use of digital communication tools. The participants within the experimental group routinely provided insights into their experiences engaging in the host community in the target language, presenting highly reflective commentary on what they were learning and how they were learning it. In particular they were able to comment on sociopragmatic practices they had detected and had participated in, including the use of certain vernacular words and phrases and the regionally nuanced usage of pronouns of address. They were also able to articulate ways in which they had chosen not to engage in certain sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms as they conflicted with their own intended identity performance for varying reasons.

In examining the self-reported post SA questionnaire questions, few notable differences were observed between the two groups. The control group perceived its advancement in sociopragmatic abilities to be greater on average. They also, on average, reported spending more time engaging in the target language while also spending more time communicating with individuals back home, compared to the experimental group. The participants' reported sense of welcomeness in Costa Rica and levels of confidence engaging with native speakers of Spanish were almost the same for the two groups. This suggests the interventions in this study did not necessarily directly affect these metrics. However, given the above testing results, these self-reported questions do suggest that in spite of the control group reporting greater strides in improvement and more time spent using the target language, their knowledge of tested Spanish did not improve in any greater measure compared to the experimental group. Interestingly, the control group also reported spending more time each day engaging in communication back home with friends and family, something that is now easily facilitated with the regular use of personal cellular devices. This stands in contrast to the experimental group, which reported much less time spent virtually "at home". In spite of these general differences, however, the statistical analyses did not show any statistically significant findings between the responses of the experimental group and those of the control group for these questions.

With regards to the digital tools selected for the purpose of carrying out this study, some participants expressed the need for further training, which could perhaps partially explain why they were not used to their full potential (Wang & Vasquez, 2012),

but that they also found them accessible and useful for task completion. In future iterations of this study, more attention could be paid to working more closely with participants on how the tools may be leveraged for specific purposes to encourage more advanced usage, for example in taking better advantage of some of the multi-media affordances they have to offer. This, however, would not necessarily enhance the central purpose of the interventions enacted here, as it was, evidently, fulfilled, as per the reflections produced by the participants; the participants were able to respond reflectively to the proposed tasks and engage meaningfully with the mentor. The multi-media and inherently shareable nature of these tools, however, are features that could make the e-portfolio in particular more interactive and present more possibilities for peer feedback (Cheng & Chau, 2009; Prichard, 2013) or showcasing, depending on the will of the users to make their experiences public.

4.3 Results from Research Question 2

Research Question #2:

What emerging trends are seen in the learning strategies and observations made by language study abroad students about their learning processes and surroundings, and what does this tell us about how to best prepare them for their sojourn?

4.3.1 E-Portfolio Contents and Mentoring Session Discussions

From the data collected via the two principal interventions in this study, several themes emerged, namely those that were targeted in the e-portfolio tasks and subsequent mentoring session discussions. These will be examined in detail below and include: 1) individual participant language learning strategies, 2) approaches to engaging with native speakers of Spanish, 3) observations about the host community and its surroundings, and 4) attitudes and challenges faced in navigating immersive language learning.

4.3.1.1 Language Learning Strategies

The e-portfolios revealed some consistent patterns in how the experimental participants went about learning Spanish. Some of the comments reflected what can be characterized as active or productive learning approaches, while others were more receptive or passive, and several touched on the role culture has to play in language acquisition. Throughout this range of learning strategies, both cognitive and affective approaches (Adams, 2006) can be seen, whereby participants report engaging with the language itself for the purpose of learning forms, and engaging with people who speak the language for the purpose of more communicative, functional learning.

In terms of active/productive approaches, some participants stated that they felt immersion was crucial to truly learning a language. Two participants emphasized the importance of speaking as much as possible. One wrote, “Desde que me subé en el avion intento hablar tanto español ya que es posible³⁷”. The other stated, “Trato de interactuar con nativos y hacerme amigos con ellos³⁸” but admitted that it took discipline not to revert to English or another language when engaging with fellow travellers. A simple concept, this notion of intentional, active language use did not appear frequently in the e-portfolio contents, especially given the context of these participants. Three participants wrote about the importance of immersion for acquiring a language, but did not refer to it in direct, active terms, but rather wrote about the notion in abstract terms as the best way to learn. For example, they expressed preference for learning through traveling without describing specific actions during travel that would lead to meaningful contact with the target language. This aligns to some degree with the myth surrounding language learning in study abroad through osmosis discussed in the first chapter. Another example of somewhat vague references to the importance of immersive contact in acquiring language can be seen in one person’s mention that she would like to keep practicing Spanish upon return home. Although she expressed a desire to continue her language use beyond her stay abroad, she did not commit to any specific efforts. Avoidance of the L2 in SA has been documented (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Rubrecht & Ishikawa, 2014), and certainly a lack of commentary on this particular active approach does not mean explicit avoidance

³⁷ “Since I boarded the airplane I try to speak so much Spanish now that it’s possible”.

³⁸ “I try to interact with natives and make friends with them”.

tactics, but it is interesting that this approach is not more apparent in the e-portfolio reflections. Not by coincidence, the participant who wrote of his intention to speak as much as possible also noted the fact that he felt living amongst native Spanish speakers was key to learning the language because it enhanced his possibility of speaking Spanish as much as possible. He also stated that another strategy for learning Spanish for him was actively maintaining a vocabulary travel journal to keep track of important new words. Clearly, this participant had very specific strategies in mind for gaining as a Spanish user while abroad.

Another participant emphasized the importance for her in taking a language course to develop an understanding of the fundamentals of a language. She wrote, “Para mi lo que me hace mejorar un idioma más rápidamente y con más eficacia son los cursos de un profesor con deberes a hacer a casa y exámenes³⁹”. This participant felt the formal instruction approach with formal assessment was key to her development. While taking a course may be described as active learning, it may or may not be a highly productive activity. Many participants underlined the importance of knowing the different verb tenses and other grammar rules, but the direct application of such knowledge as a strategy for language gain was less emphasized. However, one participant said she did make an effort to use “todos los tiempos⁴⁰” when at all possible, and she also noted that she was making an effort to become more accustomed to using the subjunctive.

In terms of passive/receptive approaches, some participants reported attending their university class lectures, as they felt this was time well spent, listening to their professors speak on topics relevant to them. One participant stated that the professor in one of her classes “habla mucho más lento; por eso le puedo entender más⁴¹”. The slow input was apparently optimal for this person to take in the language. The most frequently reported learning strategy mentioned in a few different ways was screen time in Spanish. Several participants reported that watching television series, movies, or videos online in Spanish was a strategy for acquiring Spanish skills, and something that they enjoyed doing. One person said that reading the subtitles was helpful in particular. Others also

³⁹ “For me what makes me learn a language more quickly and efficiently is taking courses with a teacher with homework to do at home and exams”.

⁴⁰ “All the tenses”

⁴¹ “speaks much more slowly, so for that reason I can’t understand him more”

noted that music, as well as reading Spanish texts, including the news, poetry, or books by Costa Rican authors were ways of getting more exposure to Spanish. One participant also specified that in reading “hay menos cosas que puedan influir en el proceso de comprensión⁴²”. This is an interesting insight because it suggests that things that influence, or as this comment reads, things that might limit comprehension can be more of a burden than as asset. Arguably, however, it is in these communicative interactions that a learner can grow (Shively, 2013), even strengthening their “tolerance for ambiguity”, as argued by Dewaele and Wei (2012). Also, Pellegrino Aveni (2005) notes that these experiences build the metalinguistic awareness and self-awareness necessary for developing language skills. She writes, “Once learners amass experience communicating in the L2, they begin to gain a better sense of exactly what they can and can’t perform with relative ease, and their attitudes and self-evaluation become more defined” (p.87). However, performance anxiety in language study abroad as well as in-class study (Allen & Herron, 2003; Hulstijn, 2015) has been shown to have a significant impact on language learners, and while the learners don’t refer specifically to anxiety in their comments reviewed here, it could be a factor that contributed to their perceptions of the challenges to their learning. The student suggests that interlocutory communication, as opposed to reading, involves a greater number of factors that could have an impact on the student’s ability to understand. This, in turn, could lead to a scenario in which a language learner might demonstrate a preference for engaging with the language through a cognitive approach, reading, as opposed to a more affective, in-person communication style of language contact.

Another passive/receptive approach noted by three participants in their e-portfolios was the idea of using online translators for learning new words or expressions. Also, following the online theme, one participant reported changing his computer settings and Facebook settings to Spanish, and two participants reported that they found programs like Babel or Duolingo were helpful tools for learning Spanish. Further, two participants reported using Twitter and/or Facebook to follow organizations posting in Spanish, one as a means of acquiring Spanish and the other as a means of learning more about the politics and culture in Spanish-speaking parts of the world.

⁴² “there are fewer things that could influence the process of comprehension”

This last point on politics and culture ties in with the third theme that emerged in language learning strategies in the e-portfolios, and that is the idea of gaining knowledge about culture to enhance language abilities. A total of four participants targeted this concept in their initial goals for their semester in Costa Rica. Three participants alluded to cultural knowledge for language learning (Bugnone & Capasso, 2016), stating that they wished to learn about the culture and better understand it as a means of taking advantage of their time abroad and as a means of learning the language. One participant stated, “En Facebook y en Twitter sigo también a organismos gubernamentales y empresas del país y me permite seguir la actualidad y cosas de la cultura⁴³”. Another participant expressed his enjoyment in learning about new ideas from the Spanish-speaking world to assist him in improving his Spanish language skills. Others mentioned culture when addressing questions regarding pragmatics, such as formal and informal language and slang, as well as other culturally specific forms and behaviours, which will be addressed in greater detail in the fourth category below.

It is worth noting that much of the content within the e-portfolios and mentoring sessions on language learning appeared in the earliest entries and/or conversations, closer to the beginning of the participants’ sojourns. Therefore, their insights are largely presented as learners new to their SA endeavours. It is entirely possible that their approaches to language learning could evolved as they gained more experience studying abroad. Although evidence of this is not apparent in all of the participants’ reflections, one participant shared initially that she felt fortunate to be the only foreigner in one of her classes, therefore afforded many opportunities to engage in Spanish with native speakers. By the end of the term, however, she noted that she felt she had to make more of an effort to memorize vocabulary and study the language itself. In this example it might be reasonable to infer a possible pendulum swing from an initial affective approach to language learning to a more cognitive approach. Perhaps this student was working to find a balance between actively engaging with native speakers and the value that that brings, and a foundation of independent language study. Another participant, while quite enthusiastic about engaging with native speakers of Spanish at the outset of the semester,

⁴³ “In Facebook and Twitter I follow government [organizations] and businesses from the country and this allows me to follow current events and things from the culture”.

did express some disillusionment in not being able to understand everyone and in progressing in his language abilities. This is not to say his entire approach to language learning changed over the course of his studies abroad, but that he was perhaps grappling with his approach and potentially looking for ways to better navigate the language input. These examples of evolution in language learning strategies are insightful in that they reveal these participants as complex individuals with ever-changing thoughts about and approaches to living in an immersive context. In fact, their ability to explore their learning environment and adapt to it, or at least express a desire to make modifications, is an important skill tied directly to the metalinguistic awareness this study has sought to explore.

4.3.1.2 Approaches to Engaging with Native Speakers

In the e-portfolio entries, there were participants who stated that studying abroad was the most effective way of gaining access to interlocutors for the purpose of practicing the target language. Such an observation, while true in theory, does not provide any insight into whether or not these individuals are actually able to gain access to native speakers with any regularity or with any meaningful benefit to language gain. How learners procured opportunities to engage with the target language and with whom is an important question in understanding how language learning opportunities are shaped. Regrettably, it is entirely possible to avoid the target language by retreating to L1 use, or use of another language in which a person might be more comfortable, such as English, among fellow international students (see above references on L2 avoidance in SA) or by remaining “virtually” at home through online contact with friends and family (Kinginger, 2008, p.97). As has been discussed, the mythology that surrounds SA suggests that greater contact with native speakers will be obtained automatically within a SA context. In terms of specific strategies for engaging with native Speakers of Spanish, some participants reported engaging in day-to-day activities while living in Costa Rica, such as going shopping, going to the park, going out to bars, or going traveling on the weekend. Others noted that going to class or participating in school-related activities provided opportunities to speak Spanish with locals. Two participants, for example, cited really interesting applied practicum hours they were accruing for their course work at the UCR

(see Mitchell, 2015 on SA students in varying placement types and social networking), which allowed them access to native Costa Ricans and provided opportunities to practice speaking Spanish. One explained, “El sábado por la mañana tengo prácticas con personas migrantes o en un centro de desintoxicación. Me gusta mucho compartir con ellos, es muy interesante ver las diferentes percepciones⁴⁴”. This would provide opportunities not only to speak Spanish but also to engage with people who live outside of the university bubble and who would represent a different sector of Costa Rican society. Another participant, when discussing a typical day in her life living in Costa Rica, shared, “A mediodía inicio mis prácticas en el IAFA, el Instituto sobre Alcoholismo y Farmacodependencia. Estoy allí como estudiante de psicología en el Centro de Menores y participo a las sesiones de conducta adictiva o otros tipos de terapia⁴⁵”. These two examples exemplify the opportunities that do exist for engaging with native speakers in local communities while abroad, but they are not necessarily the norm for all sojourners, and they are opportunities that must be facilitated with a larger organization or institution such as the UCR. A third participant mentioned meeting a poor Costa Rican family while traveling stating, “ya visité a una familia costarricense muy pobre, que me impresionó mucho⁴⁶!”, but this did not seem to be a regular occurrence or one that was planned for specific learning purposes. Nevertheless, it is evidence of engagement within the host community apart from university life or day-to-day activities and presents opportunities for further interactions that otherwise may not have been as accessible.

The most commonly reported form of engaging with native Spanish speakers was through cohabitation, living with native speakers of Spanish. Of the ten experimental participants, eight reported living with native speakers of Spanish, either Costa Ricans or individuals from other Spanish-speaking nations, one reported living with a Costa Rican homestay family, and one reported living with a Costa Rican for a few days but that they spent the majority of the semester abroad living with a Canadian (native language not specified). Therefore, the vast majority of participants had daily opportunities to engage

⁴⁴ “Saturday mornings I have a practicum with migrant people or at a detox centre. I like sharing with them a lot, it’s very interesting to see the different perceptions”

⁴⁵ At noon I begin my practicum at the [IADA], the Institute for Alcoholism and Drug Addiction. I’m there as a psychology student at the Youth Centre and I participate in sessions on addictive behaviour and other types of therapy”

⁴⁶ “I visited a very poor Costa Rican family that had a big impression on me!”

with native Spanish speakers, and many reported spending time together, travelling together, and, for those living with Costa Ricans, learning about Costa Rican culture, such as traditional Costa Rican dishes. Two participants reported actively seeking out such living circumstances for the specific purpose of engaging with native speakers of Spanish. For example, one participant wrote, “Me llegó acá sin tener un piso, porque quería elegir mis compañeros de piso. Para mi es muy importante vivir con hablantes nativos. Ya encontré un piso muy barato y ahora vivo con dos estudiantes de biología (un tico y una española)⁴⁷”. This participant had a strategy in mind before arriving to his SA destination, and he made a concerted effort to make the living arrangements he wanted, happen. The other participant described a similar approach saying,

Antes de llegar en Costa Rica, solamente queria descubrir el espiritu de America Latina. Por esta razon, elegi una grande casa compartida con doce personas. Gracias a eso, puedo interactuar con personas de todo en mundo, y aprender sobre nuevas culturas⁴⁸.

His interest in intercultural growth is expressed here most predominantly, but this also shows his interest in engaging with people outside of his circle, and therefore, outside of his linguistic orbit. The individual who spent the semester living with a homestay family did not explain how he came to these living circumstances, whether he had sought them out or if he had a specific reason for not living amongst other students in a house or apartment. However, he did explain that he spent time engaging with his host family on a daily basis at breakfast and also after school for dinner, stating:

Después de mis clase yo regreso a casa para cenar con mi familia y descansar un poco. Discutamos y podemos mirar al partido de Saprissa, el equipo favorito de mi padre. Es un tema sobre lo cual hablamos muchos porque nos gusta mucho el fútbol⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ “I arrived here without having an apartment because I wanted to choose my roommates. For me it is very important to live with native speakers. I already found a very cheap apartment and now I live with two biology students (a Costa Rican and a Spanish girl)”

⁴⁸ “Before arriving to Costa Rica, I just wanted to discover the spirit of Latin America. That’s why I chose a big house shared with twelve people. Thanks to that I can interact with people from all over the world and learn about new cultures”.

⁴⁹ “After my class I go home to eat with my family and rest a little. We [chat] and we can watch the Saprissa game, my father’s favourite team. It’s a topic we talk about a lot because we like soccer a lot”.

Evidently, this participant had ready access to Spanish in a meaningful, consistent way in his place of living.

4.3.1.3 Observations about Host Community and Surroundings

Generally, the observations about the host community and surroundings were fairly superficial. When it came to this topic, the most commonly reported observation was time orientation. Several participants described a relaxed, stress-free sense of living in Costa Rica as a result of the lack of pressure to arrive on time. Others noted the fact that this attitude would be frowned upon in their home countries. Apart from this, the majority of the participants alluded to things such as food, traffic, and music. Certainly these topics are not insignificant to the students' experience, but they relate to rather commonplace aspects of daily life, rather than to matters that would reflect more in-depth observation of cultural differences. This suggests that perhaps further training regarding cultural awareness could enhance learners' ability to reflect critically upon and engage in a host community. As documented by both Martinsen and Alvord (2012), as well as Wang (2011), enhancing language gain may be accomplished through greater intercultural sensitivity. Further, Agar (1994), famous for his theory on learning language and culture through "rich points", or the meeting of two "languacultures" writes, "Culture erases the circle around language that people usually draw. You can master grammar and the dictionary, but without culture you won't communicate" (p.19). Interestingly, some participant comments suggested that there seemed to be little difference between Costa Rican culture and the culture of their home county, an observation that may be more insightful than it seems, as borders do not necessarily define cultural norms, and culture in and of itself is highly multidisciplinary and subject to many different meanings for different people (Piller, 2011, p.15). Supporting language learners in making more nuanced and insightful observations about the people they are living amongst and engaging with on a daily basis can have an impact of how they progress in acquiring language competencies. However, there were some observations made that proved quite introspective, demonstrating the ability of some of the participants to reflect on their own practices and how they interact with those of the host community and with the individuals with whom they were coming into contact. For example, two participants pointed out that

they had sensed there was a greater feeling of national pride evident among Costa Ricans than in their home countries. Another compelling observation came from one participant regarding race relations in Costa Rica. She wrote, “He notado también, que en la gran mayoría de las afiches publicitarias, los protagonistas tienen la piel clara y no representan la totalidad de la sociedad costarricense⁵⁰”. This comment shows an awareness about Costa Rica as a diverse nation and the lack of representation of this diversity in advertisements. Another comment also pertaining to diversity of Costa Rican society was a reference to attitudes towards immigrants from neighbouring nations in Central America. The comment read,

Creo también tienen una mala opinión de los inmigrantes que llegan de otros países de centroamérica los cuales son más pobres y por eso más involucrado en actividades ilegales y los crímenes. He escuchado a veces discursos racista de parte de Ticos con respecto a inmigrantes. Aunque eso, los Ticos son muy amables en general y predisponer a ayudar⁵¹.

The kind of critical eye demonstrated in these two observations is something that could be cultivated to acquire a deeper sense of social norms and systemic racism, all part of engaging in and gaining a deeper sense of a host community.

4.3.1.4 Attitudes and Challenges Faced

Finally, the experimental participants provided several comments about the way they approached learning Spanish, including inevitable miscommunications that had arisen. They also discussed challenges they faced as language study abroad students, which revealed a lot about them as individuals and as problem-solvers, including the resources they were able to access. Several participants told stories of situations they had found themselves in by misconstruing a word or phrase while engaging with an interlocutor in Spanish. For example, one participant shared that he had been confusing a vulgar slang

⁵⁰ “I’ve noticed too that the vast majority of the people featured in the advertisement signs have white skin and they don’t represent the entirety of the Costa Rican society”

⁵¹ “I think they also have a poor opinion of immigrants that arrived from other countries in Central America, who are poorer and for that reason more involved in illegal activity and crime. I have heard sometimes some racist discourse by Costa Ricans with respect to immigrants. However, Costa Ricans are very nice in general and willing to help”

term for a very commonly used expression, and that he had carried on doing this for two weeks before anyone had corrected him. He was embarrassed, but had learned the correct way of saying the expression. Another participant expressed his positive attitude in dealing with such miscommunications saying, “Para evitar todo estos momentos incómodos de miscomunicacion, uso el reír. Porque no hay que tener vergüenza cuando estamos aprendido una idioma. Hay que aceptar las errores y las dificultades con alegría⁵²!” Like these individuals, generally most participants demonstrated a sense of humour in navigating such errors, framing them as learning experiences. In most cases, to resolve the confusion the participants simply said they took the opportunity to ask for clarification or for the speaker to repeat him or herself. While many comments suggested there was frustration at times in not being able to communicate at a desired level, most often they were followed up with a spirit of positivity and opportunism. This was an encouraging finding in the data, as this type of resilience is not always identified in language learners. Pellegrino Aveni (2005) warns of the potential of feeling devalued when faced with challenges in communication. She writes, “When learners who doubt their own linguistic abilities experience negative consequences in interactions due to difficulties in communication, those bad experiences may further engender learners’ fear of potential consequences and their ability to communicate successfully” (p.126). Negative experiences can lead to learners being “acutely sensitive to the social environment” (p.126). In this study, however, most of the commentary on the issue of error-making was positive. For example one participant wrote, “Cuando no puedo comunicar en un idioma que conozco me siento un poco como frustrada pero cuando tengo que comunicar en un idioma que aprendí o aprendo es una oportunidad que aprovecho, aunque haga errores⁵³”. Another wrote, “No me siento mal porque estoy probando y muchas veces la gente estan ayudando y no tengo miedo de hablar incorrecto.

⁵² “To avoid all of these uncomfortable moments of miscommunication, I use laughter. Because there is no need to feel embarrassed when we are learning a language. One must accept the errors and difficulties with joy!”

⁵³ “When I can’t communicate in a language I don’t know I feel a bit frustrated but when I have to communicate in a language that I learned or I learn it’s an opportunity to take advantage, even though I make mistakes”.

Si la gente puede entender estoy feliz⁵⁴”. This type of attitude is an asset to troubleshooting miscommunications, and it shows the person is able to rely on people with whom they are engaging for assistance, rather than turning away from them for fear of making a mistake.

By extension, another commonly noted challenge that participants faced in navigating the use of Spanish was understanding and acquiring the informal language that was used around them outside of their university classes. One participant wrote,

Un reto importante que encontré aprendiendo idiomas son las expresiones propias a cada países. Es un vocabulario totalmente nuevo que no hemos visto en clase y que constituye un obstáculo cuando hablamos con gente nativa. La pronunciación también puede variar entre diferentes países y eso complica la comprensión a menudo⁵⁵.

This theme of variation, as discussed in more detail above in the section on the acquisition of sociopragmatics, was found throughout the data. The informal language, not taught in class prior to living abroad, was seen as an obstacle. In addition, other non-standard forms were mentioned as pain points, even highly formal language seen in textbooks. Some participants noted that the level of Spanish language skills required for their university coursework was quite high, so they felt they had to spend a lot of time on homework and on keeping up with the coursework in general. Another concern was the fact that it was difficult to understand local Spanish speakers when they were speaking amongst each other. One participant even went as far as to say, “Hay alguna gente que nunca voy a entender en mi vida (me falta el talento para idiomas y el dialecto es demasiado fuerte)⁵⁶”, but fortunately this does not reflect the feelings expressed by the majority of participants.

In terms of language forms that participants reported as being challenging, as mentioned in the above section on the results for research question 1, the subjunctive was

⁵⁴ “I don't feel bad because I am trying and many times people are helping and I'm not scared to speak incorrect[ly]. If people can understand I'm happy”.

⁵⁵ “An important challenge that I found learning languages are specific expressions in each country. It's a totally new vocabulary that we haven't seen in class and which constitutes an obstacle when we speak with native people. The pronunciation can also vary between countries and that complicates comprehension at times”.

⁵⁶ “There are people that I will never understand in my life (I'm lacking talent for languages and the dialect it too strong”.

the most common concern. Several students shared that they were unsure of its different forms and how/when to use it correctly. This concern is reflected particularly in the initial diagnostic test results for both participant groups, as the scores were significantly lower at the outset of the study. The post-sojourn test scores, however, show significant improvement for the experimental group in the section including the subjunctive, however. Implications of this, as well as the other results described here will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

4.3.2 Summary and Discussion of the RQ3 Results

The observations made using these “microethnographic” (Iino, 2006, p.152) sources of data to answer this third research question regarding trends in learning strategies and observations revealed a number of highly insightful reflections, full of current, reflective ideas from astute language learners who have a lot to offer in terms of contributing to language acquisition and SA programming. The above insights including language strategies, approaches to engaging with native speakers, observations about the host communities, attitudes and challenges faced paint a picture of the lives of these participants during their stays abroad. They suggest, firstly, that more emphasis should be placed on preparing students for SA by training them in active language learning strategies. While some participants expressed the ability to do this, others were much more abstract in their discussion of this topic, presenting a scenario whereby they were passively missing out on opportunities to engage with native speakers of Spanish within their immersive SA environment. Further, while their observations about Costa Rican culture, vernacular linguistic forms, and related thematic content demonstrate some awareness of intercultural communication and language variation, more in-depth, critical insight into this aspect of language acquisition through more rigorous study would contribute to more meaningful, nuanced understanding of engaging in language use on a social level. On the whole, however, the participants here demonstrated resilience and a level of optimism in navigating their processes in acquiring Spanish language skills that shows they are able and willing to make mistakes and learn from them. The findings here represent essential information that should be leveraged to guide language learners in making language study abroad more purposeful so that they can make informed choices

and take advantage of the affordances of living in an immersive, SA environment. Further, by offering language learners the opportunity to elevate their metalinguistic, and more generally, metacognitive abilities, they will be more prepared to advance in their universities studies post-sojourn. Language study abroad exists at the nexus of so many learning opportunities, and as these participants have made quite clear, they are willing and able to procure opportunities for themselves to acquire linguistic competencies and take advantage of living abroad, but they are limited to the metalinguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmalinguistic knowledge they have access to.

4.4 Experimental Participant Profiles

This study is theoretically framed, in part, by taking a holistic view of each language learner within their individual study abroad context, as opposed to supposing one collective experience. This section will examine the experimental participants in the present study from this lens, including a discussion of their individual profiles⁵⁷ from several different perspectives, drawing on all of the data sources. This will be done in order to carry out an analysis of them as real people instead of “theoretical abstractions” (recall Ushioda, 2009, p.220). While it is not possible to claim direct causality between the learning approaches, behaviours, or in situ experiences of these individuals and their testing performance, it is possible to detect trends that might reasonably be associated with their linguistic and sociocultural gains throughout the semester. Thus, this qualitative analysis focusing on individual learners will contribute to a sense of understanding who these learners are, as agents of their own learning, and how that may have impacted the outcomes of their study abroad sojourns and of the findings of this study. It will also contribute to an understanding of the value of this interventionist approach to language study abroad.

⁵⁷ All names used here have been replaced with pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity of the participants.

4.4.1 Eva

Eva tested in at the beginning of the study as an Intermediate level Spanish user scoring 23/30 on Part I and 13/20 in Part II for a total of 36/50 overall. By the end of her semester abroad, she had edged into the Advanced level, according to the test's categorical groupings, scoring 26/30 in Part I and 14/20 in for a total of 40/50 overall. Like all of the other experimental participants, Eva scored higher on the first part of the test than on the second part both in the pre-test and the post-test, and she showed improvement in Part I of the test from start to finish of her semester. Also, like most, but not all, of the other experimental participants, she improved in the more challenging Part II of the test in comparing the pre/post-sojourn scores. Therefore, Eva began her semester with fairly strong Spanish language skills and was able to improve upon them in terms of testing by the end of the term. Eva's as well as all of the experimental participants' pre/post-sojourn test scores can be seen in Table 4.7. In addition, Eva developed one of the most robust EPs of the whole experimental group. She completed the EP tasks with a significant amount of detail, demonstrating an interest in really exploring the questions posed to her. She also made the effort to include images in her EP, something that very few participants did. The fact that she took advantage of the opportunity to share different media within her EP on Google+ showed an interest in going beyond the expectations of participating in the study. Her initial goals suggested that she intended to explore not only the language of Costa Rica but also the country and its biodiversity, as, according to her, this tied to her professional goals. She also indicated that she was interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the culture. To that end, she took the initiative to engage in activities that would help her meet those goals. She noted that her roommates and most all of her friends were Costa Ricans, and that she had taken opportunities to travel with them and meet their families. This suggests that she had adopted a strategy for gaining exposure to Spanish and becoming acquainted with members of the community. Coinciding with this, she reported spending five hours a day engaging with native speakers of Spanish, the highest number reported for this question by the experimental group participants. Interestingly, Eva also reported the highest number of hours spent daily in communication with people back home, so perhaps she is just an active communicator in many capacities. She also shared that she had intentionally sought out

activities within the university to participate in as well as projects to join as a volunteer. The way her decisions aligned with her goals is something that may have impacted her success throughout her sojourn. In addition, Eva demonstrated an interest in participating in the mentoring sessions, providing thoughtful answers to questions and engaging in discussion about her experiences with a sense of curiosity. Overall, she seemed invested in and enthusiastic about exploring and reflecting upon her language learning experiences in a meaningful way. In her reflections, she noted an awareness of the world around her, noting the contrast she had observed between an appreciation for material things such as luxury cars on the streets, and Costa Rica's natural green beauty. She also commented on colloquialisms she had come into contact with and tried to assimilate, as well as formal and informal forms she recognized in engaging with native speakers. Further, she recognized forms she found difficult, such as irregular past participles, the subjunctive, and correctly using *ser* and *estar*⁵⁸. Eva is an example of a sojourner who seemed to take advantage of her time immersed in a new place, and she was able to articulate her interests and observations in a substantive way.

4.4.2 Cole

Cole, like Eva, tested in at the Intermediate level upon beginning the semester, and then moved up to the Advanced level, according to the proficiency test. In fact, he was able to increase his overall test score by 16% from the pre-sojourn test to the post-sojourn test. He scored 25/30 on Part I in the pre-test and then moved up to 27/30 on Part I in the post-test. Where Cole improved the most, however, was in Part II of the test, as he went from 9/20 in the pre-test to 15/20 in the post-test, which was the greatest increase in Part II of all of the experimental participants. In fact, only one other participant, a control participant, surpassed that Part II increase. Something else that set Cole apart from the other experimental participants is the fact that he was the only one to live with a Costa Rican homestay family throughout the semester. Due to his living circumstances, he shared about his experiences living and engaging with the family in his EP and during the mentoring sessions. He expressed enjoyment in being able to speak Spanish with them,

⁵⁸ Spanish copulative verbs "to be" that can be particularly difficult for learners to master.

learn new slang words and phrases, and connect about soccer. He also shared about his travels, as he spent a significant amount of time going away on the weekends, as permitted by his university course schedule, to places within Costa Rica and the surrounding Central American countries. Throughout his reflections, he demonstrated an awareness of his surroundings, describing social and cultural tendencies he had observed, such as attitudes towards immigrants, political leanings, and religious practices. He also made the effort to join in activities at the university and other social events, which is how he said he reported making most of his friends, both local and international. He attributed his progress in Spanish vocabulary and expressions in large part to the writing he had done for school, although he said if he could do it over again, he would choose more interesting courses to study. He also named the EP tasks as a factor in his Spanish language improvement, as they gave him the opportunity to write and reflect. This is an important point, as treatments in this study were designed primarily to promote reflection for the purpose of fostering metalinguistic awareness. However, the act of writing, not necessarily tied to any specific thematic leanings, could in and of itself hold value for sojourners to give them additional opportunities to engage with the target language. Generally, Cole was an active participant in the study, and he seemed to have a genuine interest in learning and integrating with his host community.

4.4.3 Jane

Jane, a person who demonstrated a very social, open-minded attitude towards studying and living abroad, tested in as a fairly low beginner, but moved up to a mid-Intermediate Spanish user level according to her test scores. In her pre-test she scored 15/30 on Part I and 7/20 on Part II. In the post-test she moved up substantially in Part I to a 28/30, almost doubling her initial score. In Part II of the post-test, however, her score remained the same at 7/20. On the whole, her test scores increased by 26% from start to finish, the second highest overall increase of all of the experimental participants. The arc of her testing makes sense, given that it is expected that a beginner would make greater strides, faster than an intermediate or advanced learner. The fact that she was not able to increase her Part II score, however, shows that she may have hit a wall in terms of her knowledge of some of the more challenging forms such as the subjunctive. Majoring in Psychology

at the university level, she, in fact, was one of the few experimental students who was not enrolled in a Spanish language course either at the beginning of her sojourn or throughout it. Crucially, Jane did recognize her limitations with the subjunctive in her reflections and asked for help from the mentor in understanding and practicing some of the grammar rules. This, as well as her overall attitude towards learning and engaging with people demonstrated a willingness to learn and an ability to access resources to help her as needed. Additionally, Jane carried out her EP tasks in Spanish, making a significant effort to practice and hone her language skills, although she noted she was not a great fan of technology due to technical difficulties. In her mentoring sessions, however, she chose to use English, as she said she felt more comfortable and confident communicating in this way in real time. Evidently, in looking at her test scores, it is unlikely that this decision impacted her ability to improve her Spanish competency. As far as the contents of her EP and mentoring sessions, Jane demonstrated an interest in learning new perspectives. This was evident in her goals, as she indicated a desire to learn more about the local culture through reading Costa Rican literature and studying her major in a new country with alternative viewpoints. As far as her learning strategies are concerned, she noted that she was able to speak French and that that had helped her in understanding some of her classes. When asked at the beginning of her semester how confident she felt communicating in Spanish on a scale of 1-10, her answer was 3, and even later in the semester she explained, “I get little list [lost] because I git [get] all the words in my head and I want to say so much thinks [things] at one time so at the end I guess I would switch to english to express myself more easily”, so she did rely on the languages with which she had more ease, but, again, her testing scores show a considerable increase in her Spanish skills. Nevertheless, Jane did position herself throughout her sojourn to immerse herself in the host community. She did this through relationships she had formed with local people and her school practicum working with aging populations and their families in Costa Rica. Through these experiences, she was able to articulate a deep understanding of family dynamics she had observed and how they compared to the social norms back in her home country of Germany. As a language learner, Jane seemed motivated to face new challenges, and she seemed willing to make mistakes for the purpose of learning.

4.4.4 Melanie

Melanie began her sojourn at the low end of the Advanced Spanish language proficiency test category. In her pre-test she scored 27/30 on Part I and 13/20 on Part II for a total score of 40/50, which was the second highest initial test score of the experimental group. Starting with a strong language base, she saw her scores only move up slightly over the course of the semester. She scored one more point in each part of the test for a post-test total of 42/50, or a 4% increase. As discussed earlier, just as beginners tend to make greater strides faster, advanced language users have less room to grow, and they tend to show progression over a similar time period. Therefore, Melanie's progress appears entirely expected given her proficiency level. Unlike most of the experimental participants, she was not enrolled in a Spanish language course during her semester abroad, perhaps due to her relatively high level of proficiency to begin with. In fact, in one of her initial mentoring conversations, when asked how comfortable she felt communicating in Spanish, she stated, "Me siento bien para comunicar, aunque no sé siempre como decir algunas cosas encuentro siempre otra forma decirlas⁵⁹". This assertion seems to align well with a person who possesses advanced language skills in a specific language, and it also suggests a certain amount of confidence and experience in navigating the challenges of communicating across languages. Perhaps this level of comfort coincided with somewhat of a plateau in her tested abilities as well. Where Melanie really stood out, however, was in her EP contributions. While her initial goals were concise and to the point, she seemed to make the greatest effort of the experimental group in preparing her posts in a very detailed and timely manner. She wrote at great length and included multiple parts for most of her posts. The content of her posts demonstrates that she paid attention to detail and reflected upon her learning strategies in an in-depth way, describing a variety of methods she typically uses for learning a new language. Those methods covered both active and passive approaches to learning, such as reading and watching television and videos in the target language, and writing emails, doing homework and attending formal classes in the target language. She was also aware of areas of weakness that she had detected in her language skills, such as breadth of

⁵⁹ "I feel good communicating, although I don't always know how to say things, I always find a way to say them".

vocabulary. She also mentioned trying to mimic the way Costa Ricans speak in terms of the words and phrases they typically use in the different tenses in an effort to improve her skills and also fit in and be understood. In terms of Melanie's detected awareness of her surroundings, she seemed to only touch on general, more superficial observations about signs and places she would see in the city. However, in terms of her effort in exploring her surroundings, she reported visiting local places and events such as the National Museum of Costa Rica, the Independence Day parade, university activities, and local parks in order to, in her words "experimentar con la cultural costarricense y compartir con hablantes nativos⁶⁰". She also indicated that she followed Costa Rican governmental organizations and businesses online via Twitter and Facebook to help her stay informed about current events and cultural references. Melanie also cited spending time with one of her roommates, a Costa Rican girl, who shared Costa Rican recipes and cooking methods with her. Melanie wrote, "También hablamos mucho sobre la cultura, la percepción de las cosas, las diferencias con otros países que conocemos⁶¹". Thus, as a language learner, Melanie seemed comfortable with her abilities in Spanish and also quite focused and sure of her approaches to accessing the language and immersing herself in her learning environment. She seemed motivated and interested in participating in the study, and she took steps to connect with local people around her and expose herself to practices that might give her greater insight into the host community.

4.4.5 Holt

Holt showed a great amount of enthusiasm in being a participant in this study. He expressed a keen interest in the study itself and in carrying out the tasks with the hopes of furthering his language skills. In terms of testing, he scored 14/30 on Part I of the pre-test and 8/12 on Part II of the pre-test for an overall initial total score of 22/50, so he started in the Low category, among the lowest scores of the experimental group. However, by the end of the semester, he had improved quite considerably, tied with one other experimental participant for the greatest overall test score increase of 28%. In the

⁶⁰ "To experience the Costa Rican culture and share with native speakers"

⁶¹ "We talk a lot about the culture, the perception of things, the differences with other countries that we have know of"

post-test Holt scored 24/30 in Part I, 12/20 in Part II, and 36/50 in total, so he moved from a true beginner to a strong Intermediate level Spanish user. His initial beginner status can likely account for the magnitude of his improvement, especially in Part I of the test. His improvement in Part II of the test, which included forms such as the present and past subjunctive, can possibly be explained by his concerted effort in seeking out opportunities to live and engage with native speakers of Spanish. From the beginning Holt articulated a clear plan to find housing in Costa Rica with Spanish-speaking roommates. In addition, something unique about Holt compared to other participants was his ability to reflect upon and organize his language learning strategies in terms of what he had previously done that he had found effective and what he had not yet done but planned to do in order to succeed in his own way throughout his sojourn. He expressed that he had travelled in the past and found that keeping a journal in the target language was helpful, as was using tools such as Duolingo to practice his language skills, and reading local newspapers. He also remarked that for him he had found it important to take an extroverted approach and be open to new people and learning about new cultural practices. This openness, as well as his enthusiasm mentioned earlier, was present throughout his reflections as well as his mentoring sessions. In addition, as some other participants had done, Holt planned to carry out a practicum of sorts on the coast, but through an outside organization. Although he felt it would present opportunities to speak Spanish, he said he anticipated some use of English with the organization. However, he also felt it would represent another experience for gaining a deeper sense of Costa Rican life and of the people of that area. Further to his strategies for language use, Holt demonstrated an interest in learning more about the Spanish language itself and the particular forms used in Costa Rica. In discussing pronouns of address and the preference for the formal *usted* in Costa Rica, he mentioned he had come across a news article on the topic and that he had found it interesting to try to understand the practice of using this pronoun, in spite of his reported discomfort with using it at times when it seemed overly formal to him. Therefore, Holt seemed to take a holistic approach to learning Spanish abroad in that he had made specific plans to suit his learning needs and set up an scenario in which he felt he would thrive through contact with native speakers. As a point of interest, he reported the lowest amount of time spent on a daily basis communicating with

friends and family back home, only about ten minutes a day, so he potentially spent more time than others focused on communicating in situ. He also focused on studying the language itself. Interestingly, near the end of his semester he noted a feeling of lacking in natural language learning ability. He expressed that he had found it difficult at times to understand certain people, so he had faced challenges as all people do, but given his awareness as a learner and his progress in his tested Spanish, he seemed to be following a positive trajectory.

4.4.6 Maria

Maria tested in at 18/30 in Part I of the pre-test and 13/20 on Part II of the pre-test for a total of 31/50 in all. Like many of the participants, this put her at an Intermediate level of Spanish proficiency. In the post-test, however, her overall score went down to 30/50, the lowest Intermediate score before dropping into the Low level category. Although in Part I of the post-test she scored one point higher for 19/30, in Part II of the post-test she scored 11/20, or two points less than in the pre-test. Overall she dropped 2% in terms of Spanish proficiency testing from start to finish of her semester abroad. This was something seen in a few of the control group participants, but not in any of the other experimental participants. In order to try to understand this small divergence from the overall pattern, we can look at her performance as an experimental participant to try to detect factors with any potential causal relationship to her testing abilities. On the whole, Maria put forth probably the least effort in carrying out her EP and engaging in the mentoring sessions. She carried out the tasks and mentoring sessions, but had to be asked a number of the times to ensure that she completed the work. Her reflections were generally insightful, not unlike the other experimental participants' posts in terms of richness in content. However, near the end she included fewer details. In the final questionnaire when asked about the value of the EP and mentoring sessions, while she felt the conversations were interesting, she did not feel the EP tasks were “adecuado para aprender realmente una idioma⁶²”. Thus, she may not have had the same buy-in as others in developing her EP. Within her EP posts, however, she did specify important learning strategies for her in

⁶² “adequate for really learning a language”

trying to learn a new language. She cited immersion and through multimodal means: visual, audio, tactile, and social as key to language learning. She was also able to articulate observations she had made about a sense of nationalistic pride within the Costa Rican culture as compared to her home culture, and an understanding of direct versus indirect discourse and the cultural norms embedded in that. During the mentoring conversations Maria commented that she spent time each day speaking Spanish with her roommate and that her practicum through school had provided her with opportunities to learn more about Costa Rican culture, but she did not provide any further detail about the nature of that practicum or any specific skills she had acquired or observations she had made. Interestingly, she described making friends in Costa Rica as a difficult task. She wrote, “Me parece difícil hacer amigos ticos, porque las personas tienen sus vidas, sus amigos⁶³”. However, happily, she reported making two acquaintances that she could meet up with regularly for a drink or to go for a walk, so she seemed to have found a social network. It is also worth mentioning that she reported spending time chatting on WhatsApp everyday and on Skype once or twice a week with her boyfriend back home. As a speculation only, it is possible that her relationship back home could have prevented her from integrating more within the host community. Notably, in the post-sojourn questionnaire, Maria stated that she had improved her Spanish somewhat, “pero no tanto⁶⁴”. Therefore, according to her own self-assessment, she did not progress all that much. However, in the Likert scale questions about her specific language skills, she cited 4/5 improvement in her reading, writing, listening, and pragmatic skills. For her speaking skills she gave herself a 2/5, which stood in contrast to one of her initial goals which was to improve upon her oral proficiency skills. When asked about her time spent communicating back home with family and friends, she said on average she only spent an hour a day doing this, compared to her reported 4 hours a day communicating with native speakers. She did make an interesting comment in the final questionnaire, however, when asked what she would change if she could do her study abroad over again. She said she would like to take Spanish language classes. Perhaps with the support of formal instruction throughout her stay, she would have improved her tested language skills, or

⁶³ It seems difficult to make Costa Rican friends, because people have their lives, their friends”.

⁶⁴ “not that much”

perhaps her scores would have turned out differently. Therefore, although she may have been less committed to completing the study compared to others, as a language learner and sojourner, there was nothing that made her stand out either positively or negatively from the rest of the experimental group that may have impacted her testing abilities.

4.4.7 Harris

Harris tested in at the Low category of the Spanish proficiency test, with a 14/30 in Part I and a 8/20 in Part II for a total of 22/50. However, he, tied with Holt for the greatest increase, was able to improve his pre-test score by 28% by the end of the semester with a total post-test score of 36/50. His Part I score moved up to 25/30, and his Part II score moved up to 11/20. This represents a fairly substantial change in his tested Spanish abilities, and this is without having been enrolled in a Spanish language course while studying abroad. As a participant committed to the EP tasks and mentoring sessions, Harris' effort was comparable to that of Maria. He was clearly able reflect critically on his experiences and make insightful observations about his surroundings, but he did not provide as much detail or effort as some of the others who seemed more engaged. In the final questionnaire he stated that the mentoring sessions were fine, but provided an answer regarding the value of the EP tasks that suggested he did not understand the question, so it is unclear whether or not he was invested in using the EP as a method of reflecting and deepening his awareness about his language learning experiences. Nevertheless, in terms of the contents of his work, one of his initial goals was to meet people of new and different cultural backgrounds, and his appreciation for friendships he had made with new people was clear throughout his reflections. For example, Harris noted that he had set a personal goal for himself to learn three new words per day at that his roommate was helping him with that. Further to that, he commented that he felt welcomed by his Costa Rican friends, but he did express a feeling of otherness at times. When asked if he felt welcomed within the country/community he said, "Mas o menos, de mis amigos ticos pienso que si. Pero cuando caminamos en la calle parecemos a

gringos y somos mal visto⁶⁵". Therefore, while he had clearly made successful attempts at getting to know local people and establishing friendships, he still felt he was somewhat of an outsider. Interestingly, in the final questionnaire, Harris reported a 3 out of 5 in terms of feeling welcomed in Costa Rica, which was the lowest ranking along with only two other experimental participants. Therefore, in taking a holistic view of Harris as an individual, it is difficult to say why he improved in his testing scores the way he did, as nothing stands out in terms of his level of motivation or engagement. His test scores showed a healthy amount of progress over the course of the term, and any number of factors could have contributed to that, including the treatment in this study and his own decisions as a sojourner/language learner. He certainly seemed interested in taking advantage of his experience abroad and in making friends, but his reflections provided only surface-level discussion about his intention and experiences so it is difficult to draw any concrete conclusions.

4.4.8 Claire

Claire tested in with the highest pre-test score, and she finished with the highest post-test score. She scored 29/30 in Part I of the pre-test, and 16/20 in Part II of the pre-test for a total of 45/50 overall. This put her at a very strong Advanced level. At the end of her sojourn, her scores had increased to 30/30, 18/20, and 48/50 in Part I, Part II, and overall, respectively. Clearly, her Spanish language abilities in terms of tested knowledge were impressive. Surprisingly, she was enrolled in a Spanish language course at the beginning of her sojourn, even though she explained early on in her reflections that she has previously spent time in Spain learning Spanish and that she hoped to retain her Spanish accent. She also mentioned having spent time studying in Argentina, so she came with a certain level of experience as a language study abroad student, though she explained that it had been six years since her previous study abroad experience, which is why she perhaps felt it beneficial to take a refresher course in Spanish. She did, however, note that she found it difficult to understand some of the more poetic texts she had previously read for university and the more informal language she had come into contact with in Costa

⁶⁵ "More or less by my Costa Rican friends I think so, but when we are walking on the street we appear to be [American] foreigners and we are seen in a negative light"

Rica among younger people. Even when she came across things she could not understand, however, she seemed confident in her language skills and seemed to have adopted a way of communicating that suited her and that she felt aligned with her pragmatic performance as a language user. For example, she explained that although she understood the norms surrounding the use of *usted* in Costa Rica, she often opted to use *tú* at times, going back to the pronoun of address she had learned to work more comfortably with in previous study abroad experiences. Therefore, she was quite aware of her abilities as a Spanish user and of the language variation that is often seen in different contexts. Further, within her reflections she demonstrated the ability to use a variety of Spanish language forms including idiomatic expressions, showcasing her experience as an advanced learner. As far as her involvement within the host community and her contact with native speakers is concerned, Claire shared about her experiences working with vulnerable populations of alcohol and drug addicts, including migrants to the area, as part of her university program at UCR, and the value that had for her in deepening her in situ cultural understanding. She observed some simple, more superficial tendencies, such as tardiness as a cultural norm, but she also noted examples of discrimination she had seen towards some but not all of the refugees she had worked with. In sum Claire's contributions as a participant were significant and interesting, as she represented a very advanced language learner. She seemed poised to take advantage of her time in Costa Rica not necessarily to advance her grammar skills, as she noted in the final questionnaire, but rather to take the opportunity to advance her university studies and gain valuable lexical resources associated with her Psychology major. Her language skills also allowed her to gain valuable cultural experience, and gain access to members of the host community in a meaningful way. In this way, she brought interesting insights to this study and the spectrum of Spanish users in the experimental group.

4.4.9 Jace

Jace presented with a very positive attitude towards his study abroad experience and towards participation in this study abroad intervention. He tested initially with a 23/30 on Part I of the pre-test and 10/20 on Part II for a total of 33/50, or Intermediate level ranking. In the post-test, Jace demonstrated a fairly large increase in his score. He moved

up to 29/30 in Part I, 14/20 in Part II, and 43/50 overall, which was the second highest overall score in the both the control group and the experimental group. This represented a 20% increase in his test score, moving him well into the Advanced level category of the test. In Jace's initial goals, it was evident that he was aiming to improve his language skills in order to communicate in Spanish in a functional way, and do so with relative ease without directly translating words and phrases from his native language of German. Associating language learning with travel and engaging with people and their cultures, Jace emphasized the importance to dedicating time to improving his Spanish language abilities. He also noted that he felt it important to focus on the new language, rather than resorting to English as a comfort zone when challenged. Although this can be a natural tendency, in his reflections he commented that he needed to be disciplined in this regard and use Spanish even if he felt unable to communicate adequately. By the end of the semester, looking back on his goals, Jace said that he felt he had improved his conversational abilities, and that he had gained an appreciation for some Spanish language music he had been exposed to. He lamented, however, still thinking primarily in German, instead of Spanish. In terms of his social interactions, Jace had chosen to live with several other students, some of them Costa Rican and some of them international like him. He expressed enjoyment in spending time with them, cooking together and going out together. Closer to the end of the semester he also reported having a Costa Rican girlfriend with whom he spent a considerable amount of time speaking Spanish, which he felt was a very effective way of improving his language skills. He also participated in weekly soccer matches with Costa Ricans. Through that, he explained that he had found it difficult at times to communicate, given the specialized vocabulary needed to talk about soccer. However, he reported acquiring new words and phrases that he had not known previously as a result of this activity. Generally, Jace said that he found it difficult to understand native speakers when telling jokes or talking about specific topics in biology in his classes. He seemed to possess an awareness of the variable nature of language and the way this can sometimes present challenges, but he also looked at situations of miscommunication with a sense of humour, and he provided examples of that in his EP posts. In addition to his regular university classes focusing on his major, Jace was also enrolled in a Spanish Speaking class, as well as a Spanish Grammar class,

so this further exposure to formal instruction may well have contributed to his improved test scores. In terms of the mentoring sessions and that aspect of the treatment of this study, Jace often asked questions about things he did not understand in terms of language but also cultural norms. He also reflected on observations he had made about the family and religious norms within the country. Therefore, participating in this study gave him the opportunity to examine his language learning experiences and the social and cultural context in which he had been living. He even noted in the final questionnaire that he found the EP tasks to be useful, although not a learning tool per se for him, observing that they were “...una buena cosa para reflexar un poco del tiempo que pasas acá⁶⁶”. He also reported having really enjoyed the mentoring conversation saying “me encantaban los chats⁶⁷”. Thus, as a participant, Jace seemed to demonstrate a positive attitude towards the interventions, appreciating the engagement with a mentor during his stay abroad, and this, along with his social approach to finding ways of gaining contact with Spanish may have played a role in his progress.

4.4.10 Aidan

Aidan’s testing presented an interesting contrast from start to finish of the semester. In the pre-test he scored 14/30 in Part I and 11/20 in Part II for a total of 26/50 overall. This placed him within the Low category of the test. By the end of the semester, he had increased his score in Part I considerably to 24/30, but his score in Part II went down by one point to 10/20. This jagged increase in Part I and decrease in Part II while still progressing 16% in the test overall to move up to the next, Intermediate level was something not seen in any of the other participants in either groups. Why his Part I scores improved greatly while his Part II score went down slightly is not clear. As mentioned, Part II tests fairly advanced grammar forms, so it is not an easy assessment. Aidan was enrolled in a Spanish course during his semester, so he presumably had access to formal instruction that might have assisted him in progressing, but details about this course and his performance in it are not known. Like two of the other experimental participants, Aidan, a French national, chose to live with several other students, including both Costa

⁶⁶ “A good thing for reflecting a little on the time you spend here”

⁶⁷ “I loved the chats”

Ricans and international students. For this reason he noted in his EP posts that he spent the majority of his time speaking Spanish at home but that he also used English at times, as a universal language among his German and American roommates. In the final questionnaire he reported using Spanish only two hours per day with native speakers, which was on the lower end of the responses for that question, but he also reported spending only about 20 minutes per day communicating with people back home, so he did not report spending a significant amount of time communicating in Spanish or in French. Outside of his home life, Aidan expressed great interest in involving himself in a group of international students through the university for travel and social activities. As far as his language learning approaches are concerned, he noted that he preferred speaking with people or watching movies and/or television shows as opposed to reading long texts. In fact, when asked initially how he felt in communicating in Spanish on a scale of 1-10, he responded with a 7. Given his pre-test score as a beginner, this answer demonstrates a considerable level of confidence, and perhaps this contributed to his ability and interest in using Spanish, which may have impacted his tested abilities by the end of the term. As regards his interest in carrying out the EP tasks, he provided a moderate level of detail in his reflections. In the final questionnaire he responded neutrally about the EP tasks saying that they were fine and easy to understand. For the mentoring sessions, however, he seemed quite interested in engaging with the mentor and sharing his experiences. This was also reflected in his response in the final questionnaire about how he had perceived the mentoring sessions. He stated that they had been interesting for him and that the questions during the sessions had permitted him to interact and learn more about Costa Rica. Therefore, Aidan, as his test scores show, gained in his Spanish language skills while studying abroad. He completed the study, demonstrating most interest in the more social, mentor-based portion of the treatment. Like many others, he cultivated a social network for himself and seemed to be interested in actively participating in his language learning.

4.4.11 Summary of Experimental Participant Profiles

As can be seen, there are a multitude of approaches to language learning and, more specifically, in situ language study abroad learning. There is no one way to successfully

acquire language competencies or experience a successful stay abroad, and these individuals are evidence of that. By examining each individual as a whole, complex person, we can see that there were some common tendencies across the experimental group participants in terms of their social interactions and approaches to gaining exposure to Spanish. However, they lived very different experiences in spite of being in the same general location, studying at the same university. Some of them were even quite close friends, living together in some cases and spending time studying, socializing, and traveling together throughout the term. They also contributed uniquely to the study in carrying out their tasks and engaging with the mentor, and held very different beliefs about the value of the treatments. As a self-selecting group they willingly volunteered to participate in the study, but their motivations and levels of investment were somewhat diverse. It can be said, however, that they all shared a common desire to improve their language skills and learn more about their cultural surroundings through travel and interaction with the host community.

Table 4.7

Experimental Group Pre/Post Sojourns Proficiency Test Scores

Participant Pseudonym	<u>Part I</u> /30		<u>Part II</u> /20		<u>Total</u> /50	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Eva	23	26	13	14	36	40
Cole	25	27	9	15	34	42
Jane	15	28	7	7	22	35
Melanie	27	28	13	14	40	42
Holt	14	24	8	12	22	36
Maria	18	19	13	11	31	30
Harris	14	25	8	11	22	36
Claire	29	30	16	18	45	48
Jace	23	29	10	14	33	43
Aidan	15	24	11	10	26	34

Chapter 5

5 Conclusion

This project was designed to build upon the empirical body of knowledge available on intervention in language study abroad while also deploying digital technologies for the purpose of facilitating the main treatments of the study. As demonstrated by the studies reviewed in Chapter 2 (Doctor & Montgomery, 2010; Engle & Engle, 2004; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009), intervention, in the form of expert mentorship in particular, has been shown to have a significant positive effect on language acquisition in study abroad, as well as gains in intercultural communication. The objective here was to test the intervention hypothesis and sociocultural theory alongside these digital tools to find out whether the development of a personalized e-portfolio combined with expert mediation at distance could also render a positive impact on the acquisition of Spanish language proficiency during a semester abroad at the University of Costa Rica. At the same time, the purpose of this study was to provide ongoing opportunities for exploration and self-reflection in order to further investigate individual identity and metalinguistic awareness of sociopragmatics while studying abroad. The research questions utilized to frame this project were as follows: 1) Does intervention to promote metalinguistic awareness during language study abroad have a significant effect on students' ability to acquire language competencies in study abroad? If so, do any particular tendencies emerge?; 2) Can a participant-managed digital portfolio paired with expert mentorship via online communicative tools be used meaningfully to cultivate self-awareness and/or metalinguistic awareness in the development (and negotiation) of sociopragmatic capabilities, while studying abroad?;—and 3) What emerging trends are seen in the learning strategies used by and observations made by language study abroad students about their learning processes and surroundings, and what does this tell us about how to best prepare them for their sojourn?

Given the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collected and analyzed in this study, it was possible not only to examine patterns in tested language proficiency from start to finish of the participants' stay abroad, but also gather rich

insight into the “actual linguistic experiences” (Freed, 2009, p.6) of individuals as agents of their own learning while living and studying abroad.

5.1 Quantitative Data

Conclusions drawn from the quantitative data will be discussed first. On the whole the participants of both the experimental group and control group tested very comparably at the onset of the study as they arrived in Costa Rica to prepare to initiate their studies. The groups demonstrated similar proficiency levels in Spanish, scoring within similar margins in Parts I and II on the proficiency test, as well as for the total test scores, although it is worth noting that the experimental group did obtain slightly higher average scores than the control group across the board. Interesting differences between the groups emerged, however, from the analysis of changes between scores from this initial proficiency test and those of the proficiency test administered at the end of the semester. Both groups progressed significantly in Part I of the proficiency test, the most elementary portion, and in terms of total scores, but the experimental group showed significantly greater mean gains in both cases as compared to the control group. However, the most interesting results were found in the analysis of the Part II post-sojourn scores. While the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant increase compared to its own initial test results, the control group actually regressed. This Part II portion of the test, presented in the form of a Cloze test passage, represented the most challenging portion of the test. It included the subjunctive, prepositional phrases, as well as other more advanced forms, and participants were asked to fill in the blanks. This task apparently proved more difficult for the control group participants after they had spent a semester abroad studying and learning Spanish, a result that is counterintuitive to what logic would predict. This does, however, present compelling data for how these two groups performed and whether or not the treatment in this study had anything to do with the differences that emerged. To answer the first research question, yes there is possible evidence to suggest that frontloading the experience of studying language abroad through intervention can have an effect on and even accelerate the acquisition of language in study abroad. Alternatively, to be sure, the inverse could be stated: without intervention, perhaps the control participants were more vulnerable to regression in certain aspects of grammar. At

least in as far as this project was able to assess, it seems that more advanced faculties of Spanish embedded in a larger, relatively complex passage can prove problematic in proficiency testing for language study abroad sojourners. Whether or not there is a propensity for this type of outcome for other, unknown reasons or not cannot be determined, but there is a case for the intervention designed for this study playing a role in these results.

5.2 Qualitative Data

Analysis of the qualitative data gathered in this study revealed interesting patterns as well as a number of highly insightful observations on the part of participants. To address the second research question, it may be concluded that the experimental participants were able to utilize their e-portfolios and mentoring discussions in a way that meaningfully cultivated self-awareness and metalinguistic awareness, as evidenced by their commentary on their gains in Spanish language proficiency and on aspects of the language they still felt they needed to improve upon. Further to that, the participants provided in-depth reflections on individual linguistic features including vernacular forms, linguistic variability, and, most important to this study, sociopragmatic practices, providing insight into their encounters as international students living and studying abroad. Moreover, and perhaps one of the most salient findings in this study, the experimental participants repeatedly demonstrated knowledge of specific pragmatic practices, but this did not necessarily impact their decision-making as to whether or not they would adopt such practices. What proved most important was the identity performance they wished to deliver, and how they felt they wanted to be perceived in spite of often very clear, articulated awareness of different social and cultural expectations.

The information drawn from the qualitative data also contributed to answering the third research question in this study, asking about what can be learned from these participants' experiences. Participants provided rich insight into language study abroad including information about learning strategies and observations related to their learning processes and surroundings that can be utilized to better prepare future language study abroad participants. Some of the themes that emerged that should be passed on are related

to linguistic preparedness and awareness about regional varieties of Spanish, including vernacular forms, as well as the form and function of higher order language skills such as the subjunctive. Also worth noting is the value the participants generally placed on their e-portfolio and mentor sessions to assist them in reflecting on the evolution of their learning throughout the semester. While some reported less interest in the process overall, there were a number of expressions of satisfaction in having been a part of the study. They also suggested that the use of the digital technologies to carry out the study components provided flexibility and ease of use; however, several reported that the use of these tools involved a learning curve in acquiring understanding about their different functions, an issue that will be addressed below in the limitations section.

5.3 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study, probably the most obvious one being the fact that it features only a small group of participants. As an extension of that, this study examines the experiences of these individuals in one place, studying one language, during one semester abroad. The scenario is admittedly narrow and it does not offer the advantage of more voices over a longer duration of time. Further to that, given the ethical requirement of voluntary participation, it is entirely possible that the self-selecting group of experimental participants was more amenable to the somewhat more onerous task of documenting and discussing their observations and learning experiences, therefore, positioning themselves as inherently more willing, active agents. Because of this, it is possible that they were able to more significantly gain as Spanish language users, as evidenced in their higher proficiency testing scores and individual reflections. However, the control group also participated voluntarily, so in that sense both groups may have been more keen than those who were offered the opportunity to participate in the study but declined. Without a randomized sample, whether or not one group proved significantly different than the other based on the experimental treatment alone cannot be known.

Another limitation to this study as it pertains to the sample groups has to do with the inherent position of privilege these participants enjoy. As university students, these individuals possess a level of education that most people in the world do not have access

to. Additionally, given their status as international students and world travellers hailing from Western nations, they represent a cohort of people who carry highly desirable passports and who are able to cross borders with relative ease. Thirdly, as far as the researcher has been made aware, none of these individuals was studying in Costa Rica on scholarship funds, so given the fact that they had the means to travel and spend time abroad, they can be said to be situated in the upper echelons of society. For these reasons, and other factors associated with privilege and power, this study does not, unfortunately, deviate from the vast majority of study abroad research that has come before it in that the participants do not represent diverse populations of individuals of varying backgrounds. Study abroad in and of itself has historically been and continues to be an elitist endeavour, and this is reflected in the research to date. How individuals coming from differing social classes interpret study abroad experiences (Kinging, 2008), for example, is one avenue that has not been explored in any great measure. In addition to that, Kinginger (2013) also notes that both race and sexuality are missing from the literature to date on SLA in study abroad (p.354). This is echoed by earlier work by Talburt & Stewart (1999), who emphasize the need for more research into race relations and gender in study abroad participants, so there are many interesting and important areas to which researchers have not devoted significant effort or attention. Granted, more opportunities for individuals who represent minority groups and varied racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to participate in study abroad sojourns is needed so that empirical research may be conducted. Fortunately, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2017) has reported an increased percentage of study abroad participation among African Americans in the 2015-2016 academic year compared to previous years. However, more emphasis should be placed on researching these variables and how they affect SLA as a strategy for promoting and enhancing study abroad programming for broader populations of people. Then, research on their lived experiences as language study abroad sojourners may be carried out to fill in this gaping hole in the literature. Until this takes place, the information on SLA in study abroad available now and for the foreseeable future will represent only a slice of what could potentially be drawn from working with broader cohorts of students.

As for the proficiency test itself, there are additional limitations to address. As a tool for assessing Spanish language proficiency it served its purpose well in that it could evaluate the participants' knowledge of a variety of lexical items and grammatical forms from start to finish of their sojourn. Much like Kinginger's (2008) work on Americans studying French in France design did, this proficiency test was meant to fulfil a supporting role, not a primary one. A snapshot of their pre/post abilities was essential for providing a baseline in this study, and the test was able to do that. However, the test itself assessed relatively passive skills. Made up of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank style questions, it did not require any productive task completion. Had the diagnostic been more robust, including an initial oral proficiency test and/or prompt for the creation of a written sample, the participants may have tested differently. For any number of reasons, not all individuals are able to exhibit peak performance during proficiency testing. Select individuals may have excelled more in the way of conversational skills including the acquisition of colloquial words and phrases (Masuda, 2011; Shenk, 2014; Shively, 2013) and/or improved control over phonetic structures (George, 2014; Martinsen & Alvord, 2012; Valls-Ferrer & Mora, 2014). Moreover, others may have been better able to showcase their Spanish language skills in prose. Although not essential to the focus of this project, more tested output could have painted a more complete picture of the participants' communicative abilities and overall linguistic competencies in Spanish. These are all ways in which the proficiency testing implemented in this study may have been modified, but with a central qualitative design, the quantitative data was not meant to be the main basis for observations for this study. Future iterations of this study or one related to it could consider a different approach to testing participants' language abilities and then compare their progress following an interventionist treatment to see how that could impact productive, communicative competencies.

Turning to the chosen e-portfolio platform and communicative tools, rather than discussing limitations, it would be more appropriate to discuss challenges. The accessibility and use of these tools was of course indispensable to this study as they remain at its center. From the perspective of the investigator, these immediate and ubiquitous forms of digital communication allowed for unprecedented and meaningful interaction with study abroad language learners, something which was not possible for

individuals studying abroad in years past. With more students studying language abroad than ever before, these tools afford the opportunity to make study abroad experiences more intentional, guided by mentors or other experts who reside elsewhere, for example at home universities. In this way the inherent value of studying abroad, whether it is for the purpose of studying and learning a language or for other educational endeavours, can be enhanced. Knowing that individuals can do more to reflect and develop their critical metacognitive skills through these forms of digital technologies presents really interesting possibilities for how study abroad experience can be constructed. The learning experiences at home in traditional classroom settings and the ones that take place in situ do not necessarily have to be segregated. They can be merged together through the kinds of interventions seen here, and they can occur with limited time and resources.

As described in the methodology chapter, the Google+ platform was chosen deliberately for its expansive brand recognizability, as part of the widely used Google Suite, its user-friendliness and intuitive design, and open-source accessibility via either personal computer or handheld device application. Unlike some of the other e-portfolio software available that require specialized membership access and yearly subscriptions, Google+ presented a cost-effective option with the capacity for innovative portfolio-like presentation. It was also thought that it would be familiar enough for the participants to feel comfortable accessing it, but peripheral enough to the online tools they currently use that it would not impinge on their already well-established social circles on Facebook, for example. The intention was to avoid a platform they would associate with personal relationships to ensure they would feel comfortable sharing their reflections without compromising their right to privacy. Overall, it was perceived to be an optimal choice, as it seemed to present the most barrier-free scenario for participants to be able to carry out the study tasks. However, in spite of its list of merits, the study design was dependant upon two highly salient variables, which were digital literacy and participant motivation. These, coincidentally, also proved to be the two main concerns that emerged in Williams, Chan & Cheung's work on English language learning and e-portfolios (2009). Digital literacy in particular is mentioned by several researchers investigating e-portfolios (Brandes & Boskic, 2008; Cummins & Davesne, 2009; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007; Gerrity, Hopper, & Sanford, 2014, among others), so to detect it in this study is not

all that surprising. Although there is a supposed ease of access in utilizing easily accessible digital tools mainstay in today's modern world, in reality this can be a much more complex process for many individuals depending on how well they are able to navigate online tools, their threshold for troubleshooting, and, individual interests, among other potential obstacles. In the case of this study, there was a significant amount of untapped potential in the use of Google+ to develop much more sophisticated, multimedia content within the e-portfolios. The participants were invited to be creative in their reflections, as can be seen in the task descriptions, to share different media of expression in their reflections such as videos or audio recordings, and although many did share digital photographs to go along with their posts, no one went beyond that. Whether or not this is evidence of a need for more intensive training on the chosen online platform is not clear. Nevertheless, this study could have been improved by better guiding and modeling the experimental participants towards a better understanding of the more interactive features of the e-portfolio platform so that the question of whether or not technical competency stood in the way of making greater progress could be ruled out.

It is important to note that the present study did not explicitly seek to measure motivation in language learning (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Rubrecht & Ishikawa, 2014; Dörnyei, 2005; Ushioda, 2009; 2016), but this is certainly an area of research that could be explored in the future to look more specifically at the effect of e-portfolio use on learner motivation. In a general sense, however, this study was, unfortunately, heavily reliant on the internal motivation of the participants to carry out the tasks. On the whole, given their voluntary participation and the fact that they saw the study through to its completion with very little external incentive is evidence that these participants represent a fundamentally engaged, and by extension, motivated cohort of individuals. Their dedication to the project, especially amidst other competing academic priorities as full-time university students, is to be admired to be sure. Given the fact that this study was designed to be carried out at distance, however, with no in-person interaction between the researcher and the participants, it is plausible that the online communication may have fallen short in motivating the participants. Perhaps more direct contact would have made a difference in how they perceived the tasks and in their desire to complete them. Ideally, an interventionist study such as this one, with the expectation

of producing an end product illustrative of their study abroad experiences and learning processes, would be tied to more concrete curricular requirements at the institutional level to add a level of incentive towards task completion. Under such circumstances, there may have been more drive from the participants to engage with the Google+ platform tools to develop richer, digitally mediated artifacts to post to their portfolios. Further, had there been the possibility of an added component to take place post-sojourns, whereby participants' would have the opportunity to gather and share their e-portfolios, or even selected elements of it, in a "debriefing" of sorts (Jackson, 2008, p.239), the participants' e-portfolios may have turned out differently. Alternative outcomes can only be speculated upon, but by anticipating perhaps slightly less eagerness on the part of the participants to want to go above and beyond the minimum expectations of the project solely for their own personal gain, this study could have been improved, or at least modified in its delivery.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the conclusions drawn from this project, a holistic, pre, during, and post model of intervention for language study is suggested. Administrators and practitioners who implement language study abroad policy and programming should consider this approach, including, firstly, formal sociolinguistic instruction prior to leaving. This would provide sojourners with a stronger foundation of awareness about how language can be applied in real-world contexts, and how it can vary considerably across regions and among different groups of people in different pragmatic scenarios. Secondly, threaded throughout this holistic model should be a significant emphasis on metalinguistic reflection. Sojourners should be encouraged to and supported in thinking about what they wish to gain from their language study abroad experience, what they are observing, strategies they are using in engaging in the speech community, what they know and how they know it, and what they are learning and how they are learning it. This can be done using using a formalized e-portfolio with multimedia features, as has been seen here, or through other means that suit the needs of the individual learner with the resources available. In order to support this on-going meta-reflective piece, sojourners should also be given access to a mentor to whom they may reach out for guidance. As has

been made clear in this project, mentorship represents a salient interventionist strategy that can allow learners to bridge the gap between their own individual ability to problem-solve and make sense of the input they are receiving, and the ability they can accrue with the support of an expert other. This mentorship should be made available from beginning to end, and even beyond the sojourn if possible in order to offer continued, formative support. Furthermore, there is also potential for experienced sojourners be provided with opportunities to mentor other language learners and/or prospective sojourners. This can make sense from a programming perspective, and also from a pedagogical standpoint in that it can allow for more in-depth, meaningful learning to take place. Finally, this model should be implemented with the backing of formal program requirements to ensure a level of accountability from not only the learner but also all parties and stakeholders involved. Such structured course of action can truly elevate language study abroad, affording sojourners with opportunities to cultivate linguistically transformative experiences.

5.5 Closing

To conclude, there is utility to be derived from investing in sojourners during language study abroad. The results in this study demonstrating significant gains in the experimental group as compared to their control group counterparts support a reasonably strong argument for a language study abroad model that is more holistic in its delivery. Although, according to Lou, Vande Berg, and Paige (2012, p.415), “[t]here is no best or single way to intervene,” it seems reasonable to suggest that intervention of any kind is worth considering not only for the benefit of the individual language learner but also for the integrity of study abroad programming as a whole. In the case of this project, complementing the rich learning potential of living in an immersive environment with active participation in a reflective process with the support of an expert mentor, all of which can be done accessibly and cost-effectively without hampering the overall objective of language gain, seems to offer the possibility of a linguistically formative experience. Reforming and enhancing study abroad programming in this way can set the table for more engaged, metalinguistically aware participants who may be able to achieve more as language learners during their study abroad sojourn and beyond. Given the multitude of meaningful yet invisible ways one may be affected by a study abroad

experience, “more” achievement is not necessarily the main objective of all sojourners or their home-based institutions; however, acquired knowledge about language and language proficiency are certainly among the expectations of spending time abroad, and because there exists a certain mythology surrounding perceived versus actual acquired linguistic competencies, an effort to implement intervention to support metalinguistic awareness is recommended.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Language Profile

Language Profile

(All information will remain confidential. Please do not add your name.)

A. Personal Information

Sex: • Male • Female

Year of Birth: _____ Place of Birth: _____

B. First Language(s)

What is (are) your first language(s)?

What is the first language of your mother? _____

What is the first language of your father? _____

Which language(s) did you speak at home as a child?

In which language/s do you feel most

comfortable? _____

C. Education and Language Use

Which language(s) were you formally educated in and where (i.e. country)?

Primary/Elementary school: _____

High School: _____

Post-Secondary: _____

Which language(s) do you use:

At home: _____

In social situations: _____

D. Second Languages

Other than your first language(s), what languages do you know and what is your proficiency in them?

Language	Reading Skills	Writing Skills	Listening Skills	Speaking Skills

Spanish	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Beginner
	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate
	<input type="radio"/> Advanced	<input type="radio"/> Advanced	<input type="radio"/> Advanced	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
	<input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Near-native
	At what age did you begin to learn this language?			
Before now, have you ever spent time in a place where this is the native language? Yes / No If so, for how long?				
Are you currently, or have you ever, taken a course in this language? Yes / No If so, please indicate the highest course level you have completed.				
Approximately how many hours a week do you spending speaking/using this language?				
	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Beginner	<input type="radio"/> Beginner
	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate	<input type="radio"/> Intermediate
	<input type="radio"/> Advanced	<input type="radio"/> Advanced	<input type="radio"/> Advanced	<input type="radio"/> Advanced
	<input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Near-native
	At what age did you begin to learn this language?			
Before now, have you ever spent time in a place where this is the native language? Yes / No If so, for how long?				
Are you currently, or have you ever, taken a course in this language? Yes / No If so, please indicate the highest course level you have completed.				
Approximately how many hours a week do you spending speaking/using				

	this language?			
	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native
	At what age did you begin to learn this language?			
	<p>Before now, have you ever spent time in a place where this is the native language? Yes / No</p> <p>If so, for how long?</p>			
	<p>Are you currently, or have you ever, taken a course in this language?</p> <p>Yes / No</p> <p>If so, please indicate the highest course level you have completed.</p>			
	Approximately how many hours a week do you spending speaking/using this language?			
	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native	<input type="radio"/> Beginner <input type="radio"/> Intermediate <input type="radio"/> Advanced <input type="radio"/> Near-native
	At what age did you begin to learn this language?			
	<p>Before now, have you ever spent time in a place where this is the native language? Yes / No</p> <p>If so, for how long?</p>			
	<p>Are you currently, or have you ever, taken a course in this language?</p> <p>Yes / No</p> <p>If so, please indicate the highest course level you have completed.</p>			

	Approximately how many hours a week do you spending speaking/using this language?
--	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Appendix B: Proficiency Test

Spanish Language Proficiency Test

Multiple Choice Test: Each of the following sentences contains a blank indicating that a word or phrase has been omitted. Select the choice that best completes the sentence.

1. Al oír del accidente de su buen amigo, Paco se puso _____.
 a. alegre b. fatigado c. hambriento d. desconsolado
2. No puedo comprarlo porque me _____.
 a. falta b. dan c. presta d. regalan
3. Tuvo que guardar cama por estar _____.
 a. enfermo b. vestido c. ocupado d. parado
4. Aquí está tu café, Juanito. No te quemes, que está muy _____.
 a. dulce b. amargo c. agrio d. caliente
5. Al romper los anteojos, Juan se asustó porque no podía _____ sin ellos.
 a. discurrir b. oír c. ver d. entender
6. ¡Pobrecita! Está resfriada y no puede _____.
 a. salir de casa b. recibir cartas c. respirar con pena d. leer las noticias
7. Era una noche oscura sin _____.
 a. estrellas b. camas c. lágrimas d. nubes
8. Cuando don Carlos salió de su casa, saludó a un amigo suyo: -Buenos días, _____.
 a. ¿Qué va? b. ¿Cómo es? c. ¿Quién es? d. ¿Qué tal?
9. ¡Qué ruido había con los gritos de los niños y el _____ de los perros!
 a. olor b. sueño c. hambre d. ladrar
10. Para saber la hora, don Juan miró el _____.
 a. calendario b. bolsillo c. estante d. Despertador
11. Yo, que comprendo poco de mecánica, sé que el auto no puede funcionar sin _____.
 a. permiso b. comer c. aceite d. bocina
12. Nos dijo mamá que era hora de comer y por eso _____.
 a. fuimos a nadar b. tomamos asiento c. comenzamos a fumar
 d. nos acostamos pronto
13. ¡Cuidado con ese cuchillo o vas a _____ el dedo!
 a. cortarte b. torcerte c. comerte d. quemarte

14. Tuvo tanto miedo de caerse que se negó a _____ con nosotros.
a. almorzar b. charlar c. cantar d. patinar
15. Abrió la ventana y miró: en efecto, grandes lenguas de _____ salían llameando de las casas.
a. zorros b. serpientes c. cuero d. fuego
16. Compró ejemplares de todos los diarios pero en vano. No halló _____.
a. los diez centavos b. el periódico perdido c. la noticia que deseaba
d. los ejemplos
17. Por varias semanas acudieron colegas del difunto profesor a _____ el dolor de la viuda.
a. aliviar b. dulcificar c. embromar d. estorbar
18. Sus amigos pudieron haberlo salvado pero lo dejaron _____.
a. ganar b. parecer c. perecer d. acabar
19. Al salir de la misa me sentía tan caritativo que no pude menos que _____ a un pobre mendigo que había allí sentado.
a. pegarle b. darle una limosna c. echar una mirada d. maldecir
20. Al lado de la Plaza de Armas había dos limosneros pidiendo _____.
a. pedazos b. paz c. monedas d. escopetas
21. Siempre maltratado por los niños, el perro no podía acostumbrarse a _____ de sus nuevos amos.
a. las caricias b. los engaños c. las locuras d. los golpes
22. ¿Dónde estará mi cartera? La dejé aquí mismo hace poco y parece que el necio de mi hermano ha vuelto a _____.
a. dejármela b. deshacérmela c. escondérmela d. acabármela
23. Permaneció un gran rato abstraído, los ojos clavados en el fogón y el pensamiento _____.
a. en el bolsillo b. en el fuego c. lleno de alboroto d. Dios sabe dónde
24. En vez de dirigir el tráfico estabas charlando, así que tú mismo _____ del choque.
a. sabes la gravedad b. eres testigo c. tuviste la culpa
d. conociste a las víctimas
25. Posee esta tierra un clima tan propio para la agricultura como para _____.

- a. la construcción de trampas b. el fomento de motines c. el costo de vida
d. la cría de reses
26. Aficionado leal de obras teatrales, Juan se entristeció al saber _____ del gran actor.
a. del fallecimiento b. del éxito c. de la buena suerte d. de la alabanza
27. Se reunieron a menudo para efectuar un tratado pero no pudieron _____.
a. desavenirse b. echarlo a un lado c. rechazarlo d. llevarlo a cabo
28. Se negaron a embarcarse porque tenían miedo de _____.
a. los peces b. los naufragios c. los faros d. las playas
29. La mujer no aprobó el cambio de domicilio pues no le gustaba _____.
a. el callejeo b. el puente c. esa estación d. aquel barrio
30. Era el único que tenía algo que comer pero se negó a _____.
a. hojearlo b. ponérselo c. conservarlo d. repartirlo

Cloze Test: In the following text, some of the words have been replaced by blanks numbered 1 through 20. First, read the complete text in order to understand it. Then reread it and choose the correct word to fill each blank from the answer sheet. Mark your answers by circling your choice on the answer sheet, not by filling in the blanks in the text.

El sueño de Joan Miró

Hoy se inaugura en Palma de Mallorca la Fundación y Joan Miró, en el mismo lugar en donde el artista vivió sus últimos treinta y cinco años. El sueño de Joan Miró se ha _____(31). Los fondos donados a la ciudad por el pintor y su esposa en 1981 permitieron que el sueño se (32); más tarde, en 1986, el Ayuntamiento de Palma de Mallorca decidió _____(33) al arquitecto Rafael Moneo un edificio que (34) a la vez como sede de la entidad y como museo moderno. El proyecto ha tenido que (35) múltiples obstáculos de carácter administrativo. Miró, coincidiendo (36) los deseos de toda su familia, quiso que su obra no quedara expuesta en ampulosos panteones de arte o en_(37) de coleccionistas acaudalados; por ello, en 1981, creó la fundación mallorquina. Y cuando estaba (38) punto de morir, donó terrenos y edificios, así como las obras de arte que en ellos (39).

El edificio que ha construido Rafael Moneo se enmarca en (40) se denomina “Territorio Miró”, espacio en el que se han (41) de situar los distintos edificios que constituyen la herencia del pintor.

El acceso a los mismos quedará (42) para evitar el deterioro de las obras. Por otra parte, se (43), en los talleres de grabado y litografía, cursos (44) las distintas técnicas de estampación. Estos talleres también se cederán periódicamente a distintos artistas contemporáneos, (45) se busca que el “Territorio Miró” (46) un centro vivo de creación y difusión del arte a todos los (47).

La entrada costará 500 pesetas y las previsiones dadas a conocer ayer aspiran (48) que el centro acoja a unos 150.000 visitantes al año. Los responsables esperan que la institución funcione a (49) rendimiento a principios de la (50) semana, si bien el catálogo completo de las obras de la Fundación Pilar y Joan Miró no estará listo hasta dentro de dos años.

Cloze Test Answer Sheet/Hoja de respuestas de la prueba Cloze

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 31. a. cumplido | b. completado | c. terminado |
| 32. a. inició | b. iniciara | c. iniciaba |
| 33. a. encargar | b. pedir | c. mandar |
| 34. a. hubiera servido | b. haya servido | c. sirviera |
| 35. a. superar | b. enfrentarse | c. acabar |
| 36. a. por | b. en | c. con |
| 37. a. voluntad | b. poder | c. favor |
| 38. a. al | b. en | c. a |
| 39. a. habría | b. había | c. hubo |
| 40. a. que | b. el que | c. lo que |
| 41. a. pretendido | b. tratado | c. intentado |
| 42. a. disminuido | b. escaso | c. restringido |
| 43. a. darán | b. enseñarán | c. dirán |
| 44. a. sobre | b. en | c. para |
| 45. a. ya | b. así | c. para |
| 46. a. será | b. sea | c. es |
| 47. a. casos | b. aspectos | c. niveles |

- | | | |
|------------------|------------|-----------|
| 48. a. a | b. de | c. para |
| 49. a. total | b. pleno | c. entero |
| 50. a. siguiente | b. próxima | c. pasada |

Appendix C: Post Sojourns Questionnaire

1. Describe your living circumstances this past semester. For example, did you live with a homestay family or on your own? With other international students or with native Spanish speakers? Indicate how many months in each situation if it changed part way through.

2. In what ways would you say your Spanish language skills have improved?

Reading:

Rate your improvement:

1	2	3	4	5
(none)				(beyond expectations)

Writing:

Rate your improvement:

1	2	3	4	5
(none)				(beyond expectations)

Listening:

Rate your improvement:

1	2	3	4	5
(none)				(beyond expectations)

Speaking:

For those who participated in the e-portfolio (Google+) only:

10. How did you view the e-portfolio as a tool for learning throughout your semester? Explain and provide any feedback on how it could be improved for future students.

11. What role did the one-on-one mentoring sessions have you're your study aboard experience? Explain and provide any feedback you have on how this could be improved for future students.

Appendix D: E-portfolio Tasks

Please complete each of the following tasks throughout your semester abroad via your profile on Google+. You may post in any language you feel most comfortable, but aim to incorporate your target language as often as possible. You may and are encouraged to make additional posts to your Google+ profile as often as you wish, sharing any study abroad experiences, thoughts, reflections, etc. that you wish in addition to these tasks.

Please remember that your Google+ account is your own space, and you have complete control over what you contribute and who can access it. You can refuse to complete any of these tasks or answer any of these questions at any time. At any time, you can make any content you want private so that no one but you can view it.

Task #1: Goals

Post the three SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant, time-based) goals for your future language learning and study abroad experience.

Ex. By the end of my semester abroad, I will be able to have a 10-minute conversation with a local on a familiar topic, in my target language with confidence and fewer grammar errors than when I arrived.

Task #2: Linguistic Autobiography

Share a little bit about your journey in acquiring and using languages. You can discuss your native language(s), or other language(s) you have learned throughout your life. Here are some questions to consider:

- What is/are your native language(s)?
- What other language(s) do you know?
- What is your preferred way to learn languages?
- How do you learn best? (Ex. visually, by touch, by hearing, social interaction, etc.)
- What do you do to gain access to using different languages with native speakers?
- What is the best part about knowing a more than one language?
- What are some challenges to learning a new language?
- What role do the languages you use play in your life?

- How do you feel when you are in a situation where you can't communicate in your preferred/strongest language?
- How have the languages you know affected the experiences you have had in your life?
- Do you have any future plans for expanding your linguistic abilities? For example, are there other languages you would like to learn? Explain.
- Other...

Feel free to be creative and share your linguistic autobiography in any format (written, audio, video, creative writing, drawing...) with the support of images, outside links, audio, video, etc.

Task #3: A Typical Day in Your Study Abroad Life

Track a typical day in your life as a study abroad student in Costa Rica. Here are some things to consider documenting:

- Languages you see/hear/use (Spanish or other) at home or at school
- Language forms you see/hear on the street or at the university (slang, political, social, religious, economic messages, etc.)
- Language forms that you use (formal, informal, verb tenses, adjectives, nouns, slang, etc.)
- Opportunities you have to experience "local" culture and share with native speakers/ticos
- Social practices or activities you participate in
- People you engage with, for how long and where
- Challenges you face using Spanish or engaging within the community
- Places you see, routines you follow
- Changes you have noticed in your daily activities
- Things you say to different people and the ways you say them
- Questions you ask or don't ask, ways you solve problems
- Other...

Feel free to be creative and share your typical day by using images, audio, video, etc. to document your day-to-day life.

Task #4: Communication in Spanish

Think about how you communicate in Spanish in Costa Rica at this point and the challenges you have faced along the way. Here are some questions to consider asking yourself:

- What aspects of Spanish do you find most natural to use?
- What aspects of Spanish do you find most challenging to use?
- Can you think of something you have heard/observed (either language or culturally related) that you simply cannot understand?
- What is an example of a situation involving miscommunication that you have experienced?
- What strategies have you learned to try to navigate miscommunication?
- What have you learned about yourself through facing challenges of miscommunication?
- Can you think of a funny situation when something was lost in translation?
- Are there things you have noticed in the Spanish language that you understand but do not wish to incorporate into your own language use? Explain.
- Are there practices you have noticed in the culture around you that you do not wish to participate in? Explain.
- What are some similarities/differences between your home culture and the culture you have experienced in Costa Rica?

Write down your thoughts and reflect on what you have learned, how you have learned it, and what choices you have made as a language learner along the way.

Appendix E: Sample Prepared Mentoring Questions

Sample Questions from Mentoring Session #1:

Ice-Breaker Questions

- How are you?
- How is your week going?
- How was class today?
- What classes are you taking this semester?
- How does UCR compare to your university back home so far?

Language Observation Questions

- Can you describe 2-3 things about the Spanish language in Costa Rica that you have noticed? Ex. special words or expressions?
- Tell me about something that has surprised you about the language.
- Tell me about something that has surprised you about the culture.

Reflective Questions

- On a scale from 1-10, how well would you say you communicate in Spanish?
- How have you found your classes in terms of difficulty of understanding?
- Have you faced any challenges thus far? If so, what?
- How often are you in communication in Spanish each day? With who and how?
- How often are you in communication in your native language each day? With you and how?

Support Questions

- Do you have any questions for me?
- How are you finding using Google+? Do you have any questions regarding posting to your e-portfolio?
- Do you have any questions/concerns about any specific Spanish language questions, for example about grammar or vocabulary?

Sample Questions from Mentoring Session #2:

Ice-Breaker Questions

- How are you?
- How is everything going?
- Do you have a lot of tests assignments coming up before the end of the semester?
- Do you have any travel plans coming up?

Language Observation Questions

- Tell me something new you have learned in Spanish recently.
- What is one thing that has helped you improve your Spanish language skills the most? Ex. friends, travel, etc?
- How do you decide when to use which pronouns of address? Ex. tú, usted o vos. How do you know when a situation is formal or informal or somewhere in between?
- What are some examples of specific language you would use during different activities?
- If you had to make a complaint in Spanish, what would you say?
- If you had to make a request in Spanish, how would you say it?

Reflective Questions

- Do you remember the goals you set for yourself at the beginning of the semester?
- Do you feel you have reached your goals at this point?
- If you could modify your goals in any way, what would you change and why?
- How do you go about making friends in Costa Rica? What approaches have you used?
- Have you noticed anything about Costa Rican language/culture that you understand but which you prefer not to adopt?

E-Portfolio Follow-Up Questions

- You mentioned in your e-portfolio that you like to utilize programs such as Duolingo to improve upon your language skills. Is that something you still do very often and in what ways do you find it helpful?
- You mentioned in your e-portfolio that you play soccer in your free time and that there you have learned new slang words and expressions. Could you give me a few examples of these?
- You mentioned in your e-portfolio that you have observed Ticos to be non-confrontational. Could you explain that a little further?
- You mentioned in your e-portfolio that you have felt like an outsider having been referred to as a “gringo”. What is your response when you hear this sort of thing?

Support Questions

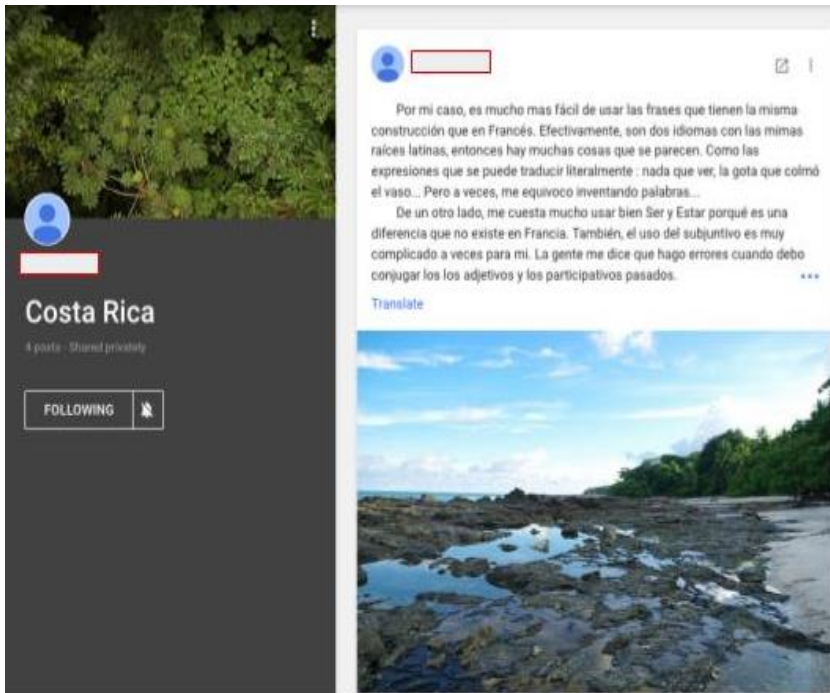
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Do you have any questions/concerns about any specific Spanish language questions, for example about grammar or vocabulary?
- I have posted the next e-portfolio task. When do you think you could have that completed?

Appendix F: Sample E-Portfolios

Example #1:

The screenshot shows a social media profile for 'Costa Rica' with a dark grey header. The profile name is 'Costa Rica' and it has '4 posts · Shared privacy'. Below the name is a 'FOLLOWING' button and a lock icon. The main content is a post from a user with a blue profile picture and a red name box. The post text reads: 'Costa Rica. 9000km de mi casa. Una aventura esperándome. Estoy en San José para estudiar las ciencias políticas, durante un año. He elegido este país para tres razones. La primera tiene un vínculo con mis proyectos profesionales : estoy aquí para enriquecerme de la naturaleza, darme gana de defender este planeta. Entonces, mi meta principal acá es viajar y descubrir lo máximo que puede ofrecer este país. Además, quiero sumergirme en un otro ambiente, una otra cultura para abrir mi mente. Así, debo encontrar a la gente, siempre quedar curiosa para empaparme de todo lo mas posible que sea, disfrutar cada instante. Y por supuesto, estoy impaciente poder hablar perfectamente español, poder jugar con las palabras, estar sarcástica, decir bromas sutil... Vamos a ver si podré lograr las metas! Pero estoy mas lista que nunca!'. Below the text is a photo of a suspension bridge over a lush green forest, with the caption 'Foto : Monteverde.' and a 'Translate' link.

The screenshot shows the same social media profile for 'Costa Rica'. The post text reads: 'Bueno, mi lengua materna es el francés. Siempre, he amado los cursos de idioma a la escuela. Aprendí al Colegio, el inglés pero nunca he evaluado mi nivel viviendo en un país anglosajón. Tengo también algunas bases de italiano pero deje de tomar estos cursos porque yo mezclaba demasiados con el español. Mi manera favorita para aprender un idioma es irse al país porque no se aprende las expresiones informales a la escuela. Pero yo debo aprender visivamente : en efecto, me recordara mas de un palabra si lo he leído. Me encanta demasiado aprender nuevas palabras, aunque a veces es difícil. Pero creo que lo mas importante cuando estamos aprendiendo una nueva idioma...'. Below the text is a photo of a beach with waves crashing on the shore under a cloudy sky, with a 'Translate' link.




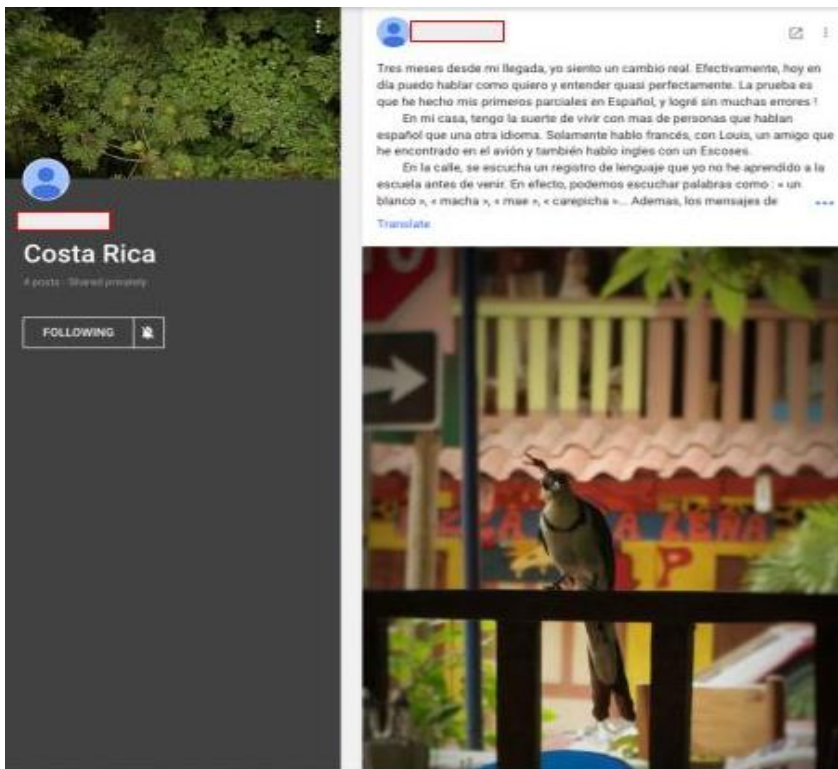
Costa Rica
4 posts · Shared privately

FOLLOWING

Por mi caso, es mucho mas fácil de usar las frases que tienen la misma construcción que en Francés. Efectivamente, son dos idiomas con las mismas raíces latinas, entonces hay muchas cosas que se parecen. Como las expresiones que se puede traducir literalmente : nada que ver, la gota que colmó el vaso... Pero a veces, me equivoco inventando palabras...

De un otro lado, me cuesta mucho usar bien Ser y Estar porque es una diferencia que no existe en Francia. También, el uso del subjuntivo es muy complicado a veces para mí. La gente me dice que hago errores cuando debo conjugar los los adjetivos y los participativos pasados. ...

[Translate](#)

Costa Rica
4 posts · Shared privately


FOLLOWING

Tres meses desde mi llegada, yo siento un cambio real. Efectivamente, hoy en día puedo hablar como quiero y entender quasi perfectamente. La prueba es que he hecho mis primeros parciales en Español, y logré sin muchas emociones!

En mi casa, tengo la suerte de vivir con mas de personas que hablan español que una otra idioma. Solamente hablo francés, con Louis, un amigo que he encontrado en el avión y también hablo inglés con un Escocés.

En la cafetería, se escucha un registro de lenguaje que yo no he aprendido a la escuela antes de venir. En efecto, podemos escuchar palabras como : « un blanco », « macha », « mae », « caregicha »... Además, los mensajes de ...

[Translate](#)



Example #2:



Portafolio electrónico

1 follower · 4 posts · Shared privately

FOLLOWING

gente nativa. La pronunciación también puede variar entre diferentes países y eso complica la comprensión a menudo. Por supuesto, me prefiera comunicar en mi lengua materna. Es más fácil decir algo y intercambiar rápidamente sobre sujetos o tema complicados, a veces no me gusta faltar la misma fluidez que tengo con mi lengua materna hablando en otra idioma. Tengo el sentimiento que estoy limitado para expresar lo que quiero decir, pero en general todo está bien. No tengo plan específico para el futuro, solo quiero fortalecer mis capacidades lingüísticas en los idiomas que ya conozco, el inglés y el español. Sin embargo, si tendría la oportunidad me gustaría aprender el árabe, porque es una cultura que me interesa mucho y porque me gustaría visitar el Oriente Medio.

Translate



Shared privately · View activity



Meredith McGregor
¡Muy interesante :)

47w



Add a comment...



21 Aug
2016

Al fin del semestre, querría hacer una comunicación oral de aproximadamente 15 minutos en clase sobre un tema de mi área de estudios en español con menos errores que cuando llegue.

Translate




Portafolio electrónico

1 follower · 4 posts · Shared privately

FOLLOWING

Tarea #2

Mi lengua materna es el francés pero crecí en Montreal entonces aprendí inglés desde pequeño y empecé hablar inglés con soltura desde hace 3 años por practicar más en la universidad y por algunos viajes. Me gusta mucho el inmersión para practicar un idioma después de seguir algunos cursos de lengua, porque creo que es más fácil aprender por interacción social y visualmente. En general, la única oportunidad que puedo tener para usar un idioma con hablante nativo es durante mis viajes o a veces en la universidad con estudiantes extranjeros. Para mí, saber idiomas es una necesidad para viajar, encontrar personas y crear vínculos con la gente. Hablar varios idiomas me permite tener la oportunidad conocer muchas culturas y países. Es también una ventaja para un trabajo, sobretodo un trabajo relacionado a unas áreas internacionales. Un reto importante que encontré aprendiendo idiomas son las expresiones propias a cada países. Es un vocabulario totalmente nuevo que no hemos visto en clase y que constituye un obstáculo cuando hablamos con gente nativa. La pronunciación también puede variar entre diferentes países y eso complica la comprensión a menudo. Por supuesto, me prefiera comunicar en mi lengua materna. Es más fácil decir algo y intercambiar rápidamente sobre sujetos o tema complicados, a veces no me gusta faltar la misma fluidez que tengo con mi lengua materna hablando en otra idioma. Tengo el sentimiento que estoy limitado para expresar lo que quiero decir, pero en general todo está bien. No tengo plan específico para el futuro, solo quiero fortalecer mis capacidades lingüísticas en los idiomas que ya conozco, el inglés y el español. Sin embargo, si tendría la oportunidad me gustaría aprender el árabe, porque es una cultura que me interesa mucho y porque me gustaría visitar el Oriente Medio.

Translate



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Meredith McGregor
Gracias ¡y interesante :)

47w



Add a comment...



Portafolio electrónico
1 follower · 4 posts · Shared privately

Tarea #4

Un día típico aquí para mí se pasa así: me levanto por la mañana y yo desayuno con mi familia (mis padres de hospedaje y la nieta la cual cuidan durante el día). Hablamos en español y miramos la televisión y después me voy por la U caminando para mi clase. Si no tengo clase en la mañana yo hago mis tareas y al almuerzo solo tomamos un café con pan porque el desayuno está bastante pesado entonces no tenemos mucho hambre en mediodía. Si estoy en la universidad me quedo allá para estudiar o almorzar con mis amigos. En general, en casa y en la universidad, siempre hablamos español pero a veces cuando hay estudiantes extranjeros en mis clases hablamos un poco francés o español. También para las investigaciones, yo busco normalmente fuentes en francés en primero, sobretodo cuando yo estoy en equipo con franceses. Es más fácil para mí obtener muchas informaciones en poco tiempo en francés. Creo que to uso un lenguaje formal en general porque es lo que he aprendido en mis cursos de español, pero yo uso también un lenguaje informal, sobretodo con mis amigos. Se usa mucho el vos también aunque no conozco muy la conjugación. Después de mi clase yo regreso a casa para cenar con mi familia y descansar un poco. Discutamos y podemos mirar al partido de Saprissa, el equipo favorito de mi padre. Es un tema sobre lo cual hablamos muchos porque nos gusta mucho el fútbol. Por la noche, yo salgo con mis amigos en los bares o vamos a "mejengiar" en una cancha cerca de la U. Hay muchas expresiones típicas de Costa Rica que yo uso tal como: "mae", "cole", "tuanis", "ocupar", muchas malas palabras, muchos nombres de comida que no encontramos en otro país. Estas noche saliendo o jugando fútbol son buenas ocasiones para hablar con nativos y practicar la lengua. Por supuesto todavía está difícil entender a veces los nativos hablar entre ellos porque lo hacen muy rápido pero yo vi un progreso. Finalmente, tengo que decir que tengo solamente 3 días de clase entonces en general yo viajo mucho los fines de semana, pero en estos caso yo uso más el francés y el inglés porque los nativos no viajan mucho. Son los extranjeros con los cuales yo viajo normalmente y son de Francia o Alemania.

[Translate](#)



Portafolio electrónico
1 follower · 4 posts · Shared privately


Tarea #6

Yo creo que tengo mucha facilidad con los tiempos de verbos y yo sé bastante usarlos, pero pienso que lo que falta con respecto a mi español es una buena réplica, porque todavía a veces no tengo un vocabulario bastante amplio y me cuesta mucho usar las expresiones locales. Por ejemplo, aquí se usa muchas expresiones con la palabra "picha" que significa "pene". Por ejemplo, carrepicha, qué picha, pichaso, picharse, vale picha, etc. Cuando pregunte a mi familia que quería decir "picha", fue un momento cómico! Aquí se usa el "vos" pero lo uso poco porque nunca aprendí la conjugación lamentablemente. El "vos" es muy común en latino américa pero no lo estudiamos cuando nos enseñan el español internacional en la universidad. La palabra "mae" que es muy popular aquí, la cual significa "bro" en un sentido, convierte las discusiones más complicadas, porque las frases son cortadas por esa palabra varias veces. Así es más difícil seguir lo que se dice. Cuando no entiendo una frase o una palabra en general yo pregunto lo que significa o pido que la persona repite. En cualquier idiomas a veces usamos insultos para hablar a nuestros amigos. Es algo que no me parece cómodo en español porque es algo delicado que necesita un buen conocimiento de los sentidos de los insultos y cuando se puede decirlos. Por ejemplo, los ticos se dicen a menudo carrepicha, pero no me gusta decirlo porque no sé siempre cuando es adecuado. No hay muchas diferencias entre la cultura costarricense y la cultura canadiense en mi opinión. De hecho, la gente es más religiosa que en Canadá y también creo que hay un sentimiento patriótico más fuerte, por las varias banderas y el orgullo de los Ticos. El Iglesia católica es bastante fuerte y presente en el país por eso el aborto está prohibido. El único caso donde está permitido es cuando la vida de la madre está en peligro. Creo también tienen una mala opinión de los inmigrantes que llegan de otros países de centroamérica los cuales son más pobres y por eso más involucrado en actividades ilegales y los crimen. He escuchado a veces discursos racista de parte de Ticos con respecto a inmigrantes. Aunque eso, los Ticos son muy amables en general y predisponer a ayudar.

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Example #3:



[Redacted]

Estudio Linguístico

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FOLLOWING [Redacted]

[Redacted]

2 Aug 2016

TAREA #2: AUTOBIOGRAFÍA LINGÜÍSTICA (1)

Mi lengua materna es el francés.

Sé también el español (nivel avanzado), el inglés (nivel intermedio) y el alemán (nivel principiante).

Empecé a aprender español a la escuela primaria y hasta el final del instituto. Empecé a aprender inglés en el colegio y hasta ahora. Aprendí alemán dur...

Translate

+1 1

[Redacted]

30 Jul 2016


Las tres metas principales que tengo para mi tiempo en Costa Rica (un año) son:

- estar bilingüe al fin de mi estancia
- aprobar todos mis exámenes, y con buenos resultados
- descubrir la naturaleza del país.

Translate

+1 1

Meredith McGregor: Gracias [Redacted] ¡genial! Que bueno que vas a pasar el año completo en CR. Y sí, muchas cosas hermosas que ver de la



[Redacted]

Estudio Linguístico

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[Redacted]

47w

TAREA #4: UN DÍA TÍPICO EN MI VIDA VIVIENDO EN COSTA RICA (1)

En casa uso el español con mis dos compañeras de piso y para mis tareas de la universidad, escribir mensajes a amigos de Costa Rica y leer algunas noticias. También uso el francés para leer mis correos electrónicos, contestar a amigos de Francia, hablar con mi familia. Uso inglés para leer artículos de mis clases de la universidad y a veces para mirar a videos o leer artículos que me interesan.

En la calle y la universidad oigo y veo palabras en español de Costa Rica (1) ...

Translate

+1 1

[Redacted]

3 Aug 2016

TAREA #2: AUTOBIOGRAFÍA LINGÜÍSTICA (2)


Saber el español permitió a mi familia ir de vacaciones a España la conciencia tranquila.

Para ampliar mis capacidades lingüísticas en el futuro espero poder aprender más y mejorar mi inglés y alemán con cursos con nativos y/o ir a vivir en una familia nativa del idioma en un país hablante (Gran Bretaña, Alemania, etc). Quisiera aprender el alemán por lo menos hasta un nivel intermedio, mejor...

Translate

+1 1

Meredith McGregor: Gracias por compartir esto (las dos partes) [Redacted] Me alegro tanto saber de tus experiencias aprendiendo el español y



[Redacted]

Estudio Linguistico

4 posts · Shared privately

FOLLOWING [Redacted]

[Redacted] 47w

TAREA #4: UN DIA TÍPICO EN MI VIDA VIVIENDO EN COSTA RICA (3)

- Retos que enfrento al usar el español o ligar con la comunidad.
Al usar el español varias veces me faltan palabras, vocabulario que no he memorizado.
La comunidad me ve muy a menudo como "la extranjera", la gringa como ellos dicen, por el color de mi piel y de mi pelo y a menudo piensan que soy de EE-UU o de America del Norte y empiezan a hablarme en inglés. Así es difícil para mí fundirme en la masa. Por ejemplo, en una feria, cuando pregunto el precio : ...

Translate

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[Redacted] 47w

TAREA #4: UN DIA TÍPICO EN MI VIDA VIVIENDO EN COSTA RICA (2)

- Oportunidades que tengo para experimentar con la cultural costarricense y compartir con hablantes nativos:
Fui a visitar el Museo Nacional de Costa Rica y a ver el desfile de la Independencia de Costa Rica por ejemplo. Así, cuando hay un evento en la ciudad intento ir a verlo. O si hay lugares interesantes (parques, museos, etc) trato de ir también cuando mi presupuesto lo permite.
La chica costarricense con la quien vivo comparte conmigo las recetas o ...

Translate

+1 1



[Redacted]

Estudio Linguistico

4 posts · Shared privately

FOLLOWING [Redacted]

[Redacted] 45w

TAREA #6: COMUNICACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL (2)

- Hay costumbres, cosas que usted ha observado/aprendido de la cultura de Costa Rica en que usted no desea participar? Explique en detalle.
Para el momento no conozco costumbres o cosas de la cultura de Costa Rica para las cuales no me gustaría participar.

- Cual es un ejemplo de una miscomunicacion que usted ha tenido en español?
A veces, con personas que hablan rápido y/o bajo, estoy obligada hacerle ...

Translate

+1


[Redacted] 45w

TAREA #6: COMUNICACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL (1)

- Cuáles son los aspectos del español que usted encuentra más fáciles/difíciles para usar?
Es fácil usar palabras comunes ya que algunas se parecen mucho a las del francés o del inglés. Es difícil usar las pequeñas palabras de conexión entre frases, las que se dicen solo al oral.

Translate

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Estudio Linguístico

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✎



46w

TAREA #6: COMUNICACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL (3)

- Que ha aprendido usted sobre si mismo como resultado de enfrentarse a estos retos?
Aprendí que a veces mi nivel de español no es tan bueno que podía pensarlo y que no hago esfuerzos para memorizar los nuevos términos. Vi que de manera general logro a explicar la idea principal que quiero dar a otra persona.


- Puede pensar usted en una situación cómica en que la comunicación se : ...

Translate

+1

✉

←



46w

TAREA #6: COMUNICACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL (2)

- Hay costumbres, cosas que usted ha observado/aprendido de la cultura de Costa Rica en que usted no desea participar? Explique en detalle.
Para el momento no conozco costumbres o cosas de la cultura de Costa Rica para las cuales no me gustaría participar.

- Cual es un ejemplo de una miscomunicacion que usted ha tenido en español?
A veces, con personas que hablan rápido y/o bajo, estoy obligada hacerle : ...

Translate

+1

✉

←

Appendix G: Sample Transcribed Mentoring Sessions

Sample #1, Mentoring Session #1:

Mentor: Hola X!

Participant: hola meredith

Mentor: Como estas? Todo bien?

Participant: si estoy super bien y usted?

Mentor: Bien bien gracias. Estabas en la uni hoy?

Participant: ayer tuve mi primera presentacion

Mentor: Ah si? Y como te fue?

Participant: hoy tengo clases a 16:00 hasta 22:00

Participant: bien pero era en ingles. me han dicho un dia antes por la noche que tengo que presentar el día siguiente. Entonces espanol no era posible y el texto era en ingles de todos modos

Participant: pero fue muy bien y la tema tambien mu interesante

Mentor: Ah claro. Al ultimo momento seria dificil preparar todo en espanol.

Mentor: Cual es tu area de estudio?

Participant: edeficio de ciencias sociales

Participant: y tambien edeficio de economia

Mentor: Ah interesante. Y la presentacion? De que se trataba?

Participant: trató de codigo de estados unidos

Participant: y el codigo que tienen otras paises de america

Participant: y el codigo de su propia cultura

Mentor: Codigo?

Mentor: Que tipo de codigo?

Participant: en la manera que "imprints" los habitantes tienen sobre estados unidos

Mentor: Ah ya entiendo. Interesante!

Mentor: Y como te sientes ahora en tus clases? De 1-10, como te sientes entendiendo las clases?

Participant: si muy con los elecciones en este momento en estado unidos...

Participant: creo es un 5

Participant: depende del ruido de clase o de la velocidad en que se hablan

- Mentor: Claro. Y que has viste del idioma? Digo, el espanol de CR - como lo vez? Algo que te ha sorprendido?
- Participant: es distinto...
- Participant: ah en este momento estoy aprendiendo hablar con usted 😊
- Mentor: Si? Hablo distinto?
- Participant: y claro hay un monton de phrases ticos que tengo que aprenderlos
- Mentor: Me puedes dar un ejemplo?
- Participant: ah por ejemplo en la clase de gestion de mercadeo los otros estudiantes me han dicho wue la professora de todos modos habla distinto ;-). claro cada persona habla diferente...
- Mentor: Claro...y en CR, en cuanto a la cultura? Algo que te ha sorprendido? Con su forma de comunicarse por ejemplo? Cosas que has observado de la cultura? Costumbres?
- Participant: claro hay muchas cosas diferentes. alemania por ejemplo a mi parece mas "libre". aquí es parecido al colegio en alemania
- Mentor: En que sentido?
- Participant: ah muy dificil. por ejemplo la relacion con el profe aquí es mas cerca y me gusta eso.
- Mentor: Ah okay. Que bueno.
- Participant: en alemania estudiar es mucho diferente. mas libre. no tienes que hacer tantos cosas durante el semestre en todos los cursos. ahora no esoty seguro que estilo de universidad es mejor 😊
- Mentor: Que interesante eso...todo diferente. Y por fin estás viviendo en un piso con amigos?
- Participant: en alemania a mayoira de cursos son lecturas con ejercicios, pero el estudiante no tiene wue hacer anda durante el semestre. solo al final el gran examen.
- Participant: si vivio con un tico y una espanola
- Mentor: Ah perfecto! Ya tienes con quien hablar en espanol.
- Participant: es perfecto. hablo casi solo espanol
- Mentor: Genial! Te felicito porque eso te va a servir mucho.

Mentor: Entonces al día, cuantas horas dirias que estas comunicandote en espanol?

Participant: depende mucho, pero normalmente siempre. quizas 5 - 6

Mentor: Muy bien.

Participant: ayer por la noche or ejemplo solo ingles porque los otros no sabian espanol.

Mentor: Y hasta ahora, te has enfrentado con algunos retos en cuanto a la comunicación?

Participant: y escribo mucho en whatsApp con tico.

Mentor: Por ejemplo, algo que quieres decir puedes no puedes? O algun otro ejemplo?

Participant: si claro. si se hablan demasiado rapido or no directamente a mi es dificil entenderlos. y tambien los phrases ticos. como por dicha etc. espero que mejorará con el tiempo

Mentor: Claro.

Mentor: Me gusto mucho lo que me enviaste sobre tu forma de aprender y tus metas. Me parece que ya tienes muy buena idea de lo que quieres hacer en CR.

Participant: en la comunicacion normal no es una problema. mas en los cursos con las palabras especiales

Participant: si pero de verdad tengo muchos problemas con el "workload". pero los profes lo entienden.

Mentor: Claro. Me parece que los profes son muy amables. No te preocupes.

Participant: espero que en 4-6 semanas puedo hacer todo.

Mentor: Ellos entienden que estas en el proceso de aprender el espanol, asi que no pienso que sean muy exigentes.

Mentor: Ah si, estoy segura que tu vas a mejorar tu espanol mucho.

Participant: si lo creo tambien 😊

Mentor: Que bueno.

Mentor: Oye okay entonces, no te quiero demorar mucho.

Mentor: Gracias por haber hecho las tareas. La que escribiste incluye la informacion de las primeras dos tareas.

Participant: con gusto

Mentor: Cuando tengas tiempo, puedes hacer la siguiente tarea "Panorama Linguistico" que es la #3. Te parece bien?

Participant: si pero donde puedo encontrarlo?

Mentor: Esta en el circulo de "Estudio Linguistico" en Google+ pero yo te lo voy a enviar por email tambien. Okay?

Mentor: Ya te la envie.

Participant: si claro. espero que el fin de semana tengo tiempo.

Mentor: Claro. Cuando puedas. No hay apuro. Se que tienes mucho que hacer en la uni y planes de viajar etc...

Participant: vale entonces hasta pronto. me voy a la U

Mentor: Okay cuidate. Cuando tengas la otra tarea subida, me dices y hablamos en septiembre 😊

Sample #2, Mentoring Session #1:

Participant: Hola ahora estoy aqui

Participant: Tenía que bajar Hangouts primero

Mentor: Ah okay. No hay problema. Como estas?

Participant: Estoy bien, gracias :)

Mentor: Estabas en la uni hoy?

Participant: Sí, pero solo para comer algo

Participant: Los viernes tengo libre siempre

Mentor: Oh, perfecto. Para poder viajar los fines de semana.

Participant: Sí, esto es que voy a hacer este fin de semana

Mentor: Que bueno! Para donde vas? La costa?

Participant: Sí, para Ballena-Uvita. Con unos internacionales y un tico

Mentor: Que bonito!

Mentor: La van a pasar de maravilla 😊

Mentor: Bueno y que estudias en la UCR? Cual es tu area?

Participant: Es que tengo 2 areas. La una es espanol (no puedo hacer el nje en mi laptop) y la otra es Biología

Mentor: Ah que bueno. Pero ya tienes un nivel muy avanzado del español.

Mentor: Te felicito por eso.

Gracias :) Sí, es porque ya tenía español como asignatura en la escuela

Mentor: Ah okay. Con razón. Y estas tomando clases del español en la UCR ahora? O son clases de otras cosas, por ejemplo la cultura de CR o algo así?

Así, aprendo el español desde hace 6-7 años con un año de pausa

Mentor: Ah okay. Ya entiendo.

Participant: Tengo una clase de "Expresión Oral" y una de "Gramática española para lenguas modernas"

Mentor: Y en tus clases de la biología, como te sientes? A 1-10, como te sientes comunicándote?

Mentor: Mira que bien. Clases de español más la práctica de vivir allí. Eso te va a servir mucho.

Participant: Depende un poco de las clases. En las clases de "Español" como 6-7, pero en la clase de Biología como 4, porque la materia es muy difícil en español

Mentor: Claro.

Mentor: Y comparado con el español que estudiaste antes, me puedes dar unos ejemplos del español de CR? Expresiones o palabras nuevas que has aprendido hasta ahora?

Participant: Sí unos ya conozco. Vale hay: Mae (que se usa para todo), Tuanis, A cachete, anteojos, coger (que está un poco diferente del castellano), que picha, que chiva, que mae, huila (no sé si se escribe así). Rhasta (es como mae, no?)

Mentor: Muy buenos ejemplos 😊

Mentor: Sí. El lenguaje típico de CR. Y de la cultura costarricense? Algo que has observado - interesante o sorprendente?

Participant: Gallo pinto/ Casado (aunque no conozco la diferencia), "Pura Vida" por supuesto

Participant: Ehmm.. tengo que pensar un poco..

Mentor: Sí, mucha gente en el club bailan bailes latinos (que no conozco)

Mentor: Ah okay. Buen ejemplo.

Mentor: Y tu ahora estas viviendo en un pico o con una familia afitrona?

- Participant: Frutas y bebidas frescas son super buenos y muy popular aqui
- Participant: Vivo en una casa de estudiantes con muchos internacionales y un tico
- Participant: Gallo pinto = arroz con frijoles (mezclado) y casado es un plato de comida que tiene arroz y frijoles, pero tambien carne y ensalada.
- Mentor: Ah perfecto, gracias!
- Mentor: Ah si las bebidas con frutas frescas. Que ricas!
- Participant: De nada.
- Mentor: Okay unas pregunticas mas: Y los otros estudiantes con quien vives, son alemanes? O hablan espanol todo el tiempo?
- Participant: Unos son alemanes, con ellos hablo en aleman cuando estamos solo, pero en el momento de que otra gente está, cambiamos al espanol
- Participant: Y con los otros solo en espanol, ingles muy rara vez
- Mentor: Que bien. Y al dia, cuanto tiempo pasas hablando espanol? Mas o menos? Y en aleman?
- Participant: como 3-4 horas en espanol y 2 horas en aleman durante la semana y en los fines de semana más espanol
- Participant: Como 6-8 horas en espanol al dia y 2 horas de aleman
- Mentor: Y hasta ahora, te has enfrentado con algo reto en comunicarte en el espanol? Algo que todavia te cuesta entender o decir?
- Participant: Reto por ejemplo :) Sii hay mucho que no entiendo, especialmente cuando ticos hablan entre su mismo
- Participant: Todavia me cuesta mucho hablar en espanol
- Mentor: Claro. Ah okay. Y al dia, te comunicas mas hablando o por text tambien?
- Participant: Más hablando
- Mentor: Okay.
- Participant: Pero también me comunico por texto que me parece mucho más facil
- Mentor: Ah si? Mas facil por que?
- Participant: Porque uno tiene más tiempo para pensar en lo que escribe y también no hay problemas acusticas de que el otro dice
- Mentor: Claro.

Mentor: Okay. Bueno, no quiero tomar mucho mas de tu tiempo. Muchisimas gracias por hablar conmigo. Cuando tengas tiempo, puedes hacer la tarea #3 y despues hablamos en setiembre. Te parece bien?

Participant: Si está bien :)

Mentor: Perfecto. Okay buen viaje a Uvita!

Participant: Gracias, que tengas un buen fin de semana

Participant: ☺Chau!

Sample #1, Mentoring Session #2:

Mentor: Hola X! Estoy aqui cuando estes lista. Un poco temprano asi que no hay apuro si no estas listas todavia.

Participant: Hola Meredith! Está bien, me hace una pausa en mis cálculos de estadística jaja

Mentor: Jaja okay! Como te va con las matematicas? Pesado?

Participant: Me gustan las estadísticas, es solo como reglas para aplicar con un método que

una vez que se sabe funciona casi siempre. Y además ya hice un poco de esto en mi universidad en Francia

Mentor: Ah que bueno. Asi que no es algo totalmente nuevo para ti. Y como te va en CR? Como te sientes ahora despues de casi 3 meses alli?

Participant: Me siento bien aquí

Participant: el tiempo está cambiando en estos días

Mentor: Mas lluvia o mas calor?

Participant: Más calor por la mañana pero justo despuès más gris y más lluvia

Mentor: Ah okay. Y aqui entrando al friooo. Jaja. Quisiera estar en CR :)

Participant: Jaja, frío como cuantos grados?

Mentor: Bueno no taaan frio todavia. Baja hasta 10, pero por la tarde se calienta. El frio de verdad viene mas en diciembre, enero...Hoy hay sol por dicha.

Mentor: Una pregunta: Te acuerdas de tus metas del principio de agosto?

Mentor: Si no, no importa. Las tengo aqui: Ser bilingue al final; Sacar buenas notas en tus clases; Conocer la naturaleza del pais

- Mentor: Quería preguntarte cómo te va con las metas?
- Participant: Disculpe, alguien estaba esperando a la puerta
- Mentor: No te preocupes. No hay problema. Toma tu tiempo :)
- Participant: Con la primera meta, ser bilingüe, es más difícil que lo que me habría pensado, ya que no se hace "así", sin esfuerzo. Se tiene que hacer un esfuerzo para memorizar vocabulario y a menudo no hago esfuerzos suficientes.
- Mentor: Como es tu nivel ahora? Sientes que has progresado en tu español?
- Participant: Sí, progresé un poco me parece, digamos que conozco más vocabulario y la manera de hablar aquí.
- Mentor: Ah okay. Que bueno. Y que quisieras hacer para seguir mejorando? Que crees que te va a ayudar más en mejorar tu español?
- Participant: Para las notas, para el momento tengo buenas notas.
- Mentor: Felicidades!
- Participant: Para seguir mejorando hago esfuerzo para memorizar palabras, miro en el Dicionario
- Participant: Y hablar con personas que tienen paciencia jaja
- Mentor: Ah sí claro. A veces es difícil encontrar a gente para poder practicar. Piensas que tienes muchas oportunidades para hablar con los ticos? Buscas oportunidades todos los días? Que tal eso?
- Participant: sí, todos los días con mi dueña-compañera de piso, con la mujer que hace la limpieza una vez por semana, con los estudiantes, los profesores ticos que encontré en Facebook
- Mentor: Oh wow. Estas en comunicación bastante entonces! Que bueno eso. Y una vez dijiste que te gusta usar Duolingo o mirar tele para aprender/practicar el español? Sigues con eso? Te ayuda eso?
- Participant: Uso Duolingo pero ahora para aprender alemán jaja. Miro sobre todo videos en español relacionados con mis materias, por ejemplo para la preparación de una presentación, sino no miro muchos videos. Sí, también cuando un amigo me manda una. Me ayuda a escuchar muchas informaciones en un tiempo corto
- Mentor: Ah okay. La tecnología eso buenisima para aprender verdad? Que bueno que estes utilizando eso.

Mentor: Y otra pregunta: dijiste una vez que a veces te ven y te dicen "gringa" o piensan que eres americana. Que dices cuando te dicen eso?

Participant: No me dices directamente esto, lo entiendo porque empiezan a hablarme inglés o me dicen "hello" o a veces me preguntan si soy de Estados Unidos

Mentor: Ah ya entiendo.

Mentor: Y de la cultura en general? Has aprendido algo nuevo recientemente?

Participant: Mmm, recientemente aprendí que muchas personas tienen una persona nicaragüense que vive en su casa para hacer la limpieza o cuidar los niños. Que hay muchas escuelas, kinder school como dicen, bilingüeses. Que tener y moverse en carro es una manera de decir "soy rico y no tomo el bus"

Mentor: Wow, muy buenos ejemplos. Gracias!

Mentor: Y por ultima: como decides si tienes que usar usted o vos o tu en espanol? Como vez eso en CR? Lo de usted, vos, tu...

Participant: Nunca uso "tu" ya que me parece que no se usa aquí. Uso "vos" para las personas que conozco, que quiero tutear y usted para las personas que no conozco o con los profes. Pero tengo un amigo que de vez en cuando me dice "usted"

Participant: me hace un poco raro jaja pero entiendo que aquí muy a menudo mezclan todo

Mentor: si me imagino. yo uso mucho tu, que hablo el espanol un poco mas caribeno, asi que el usted me parece muy formal ya!

Mentor: Y el "vos" lo sabias antes de vivir en CR?

Participant: Si, me parece bastante formal también jaja Lo sabía un poco por haber leído articulos sobre la vida en CR

Mentor: Ohh que buena preparacion. Okay, bueno creo que ya. No tengo mas preguntas por ahora.

Participant: Era algo cuando tenía que elegir entre ir a Québec o ir a CR

Participant: De acuerdo

Mentor: Pero estamos en contacto, cualquier cosa.

Participant: Ok :)

Mentor: Te parece bien?

Mentor: Okay muchisimas gracias! Espero que todo te siga yendo muy bien!

Participant: Con gusto, gracias! Muy buen fin de semana!

Mentor: Igualmente. Chauuu!

Sample #2, Mentoring Session #2

Participant: hey:)

Mentor: Hi! How's it going? Thanks for finding the time today.

Participant: all good

Mentor: You said you're taking hip hop dance lessons? That's fun!

Participant: dont worry i am happy to help

Participant: yeah its really cool

Participant: i júse to dance my whole life 😊

Mentor: Nice!

Participant: i just stopped a year ago and its so much fun dancing again

Mentor: I used to love the aerobics classes in CR. They were like dance aerobics.

Participant: i can imagin !!!

Mentor: Yeah super fun.

Participant: with a little reagatonsito 😊

Mentor: Nice! That's the best. Okay so I just have a few questions.

Participant: First about your goals from the start of your semester. Do you remember them?

Mentor: How are they going?

Participant: yes sure 😊

Mentor: Do you feel like you have reached those goals?

Participant: hahah wait i think it was learning spanish no ?

Mentor: I'll show you:

Participant: hahah thx

Mentor: Primero quiero aprender espanol en costa rica para conocer mejor del ambiente tropical. Segunda meta: comprender mejor la cultura de costa rica y la oportunidad de leer textos de autores costariciences. Tercera: conocer mi carrera en un diferente pais con diferentes paragigmas.

Participant: ahhh si

Participant: so my spanish got better but i am still not happy

Mentor: No? What would you like to improve?

Participant: i am dating a guy and he loves to speak in english with me which is not the best for my goal

Participant: so i am still not happy with my spanish

Mentor: Ahh yeah he probably wants to practice English.

Participant: hahaha bit it gót heaps better at least everyone is telling me that

Participant: hahah yeah i think so

Mentor: Nice. Having a bf will probably help you improve a lot though, even if you don't notice it.

Participant: i am reading a book right now la sombra del viento

Mentor: Oh cool. Who is the author?

Participant: hahah yeah like about culture and life of course

Participant: ahhh let me think

Mentor: For sure.

Participant: ruiz zafón

Mentor: Okay cool. Good to know.

Mentor: So with your Spanish, what would you like to improve? Anything specific you can think of?

Participant: its really good even i am still at the beginning

Mentor: I'll have to look into that one.

Participant: i think the author is from spain though

Mentor: Yeah I just looked it up. Spain.

Mentor: Famous book I guess.

Mentor: but doesnt matter its spanish 😊

Mentor: Yeah exactly. Good practice. For vocabulary, grammar etc.

Participant: yeah and the first goal : i achieved

Participant: because i was actually thinking to stay one semester more because i like my career so much at the UCR

Participant: its so much more interesting and interactive than in germany

Mentor: Oh yeah? That's great! Will you be able to?

Participant: i dont think so because of the money

Mentor: Ohh too bad.

Participant: and my parents really want me to come home to finish my studies because they are payung the whole time 😊

Mentor: Right... that makes sense. But one semester is great too. And you have learned a lot it sounds like.

Mentor: How is the subjunctive coming?

Participant: very bad

Mentor: Yeah?

Participant: as i am traveling a lot and just talking to people with the grammar i know i didnt find a lot time to study which is enoying me but always when i got to decide like going to the beach or studying.....

Participant: its like ok lets go to the beach

Mentor: Ah okay. Do you remember some of the times when subjunctive is used?

Mentor: Haha for sure. You want to have fun too.

Participant: yeah i remeber tener miedo que .. i think but thats it hahaha

Mentor: Yeah that's one!

Participant: whoop whoop

Mentor: Lol

Mentor: Okay and what about when you're talking to different people and choosing between usted, Participant: vos, tu...how do you decide in CR?

Participant: usted

Participant: because vos is super confusing

Mentor: Yeah?

Mentor: Did you ever learn vos in Spanish class?

Participant: no never

Participant: i thought its just slang

Mentor: And what about tu? Would you use tu with your boyfriend, for example?

Participant: sometimes because i learned it first

Mentor: Oh okay.

Participant: but as i never hear it it kind of floated away and my roommates are from grecia

Mentor: Sorry what floated away?

Participant: and they never use vos so i am always udsing usted

Participant: hahah the ti

Participant: the tu

Mentor: Ohh okay I understand.

Mentor: Vos isn't really slang...but I guess it's not traditional. Vos is used now in many countries in Latin America actually. But I never use it either bc my Spanish is more Cuban Spanish.

Participant: ahhh oki

Mentor: But if you go to El Salvador, Argentina, Colombia...

Participant: but its not like a proper form?

Participant: like u wont find it in a dictionary

Participant: or ?

Participant: would u ?

Mentor: Umm It's a form. I'm not sure if we could call it not proper bc so many people use it now. It's kind of an accepted form.

Mentor: Umm

Participant: ahh ok

Mentor: If you even just google "El voseo" you'll see it's spoken in so many places.

Participant: ahh okk

Mentor: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voseo>

Participant: haha nice thx

Mentor: Yeah if you go to that page, look at the map at the bottom.

Mentor: Also, it has the conjugations if you want to see them.

Participant: ok wow almost everywhere

Participant: maybe i should take the chance to practice it a little more ,

Participant: i just know vos tenes i think hahaha

Mentor: You said you learn best by listening though I think?

Participant: haha yeah i'm like "y vos?"

Participant: that's all i use hhahahaha

Participant: yeah by listening and speaking

Participant: like definitely auditive

Mentor: How do you think usted sounds?

Participant: i think it sounds super formal but i am ignoring my feelings jaja

Mentor: Jaja. Yeah I guess it's easier to try to fit in.

Participant: yeah !

Mentor: Okay and another question: regarding conflict. You mentioned ticos aren't interested in confrontation? So how do you feel making a complaint or something like that in Spanish in CR?

Participant: i am just not complaining haha

Mentor: Haha that works.

Participant: because i feel like if i do they will just say its ok haha

Participant: i dont have much to complain anyway

Mentor: Ohh okay. Interesting how cultures are different.

Mentor: That's goo then.

Mentor: good*

Participant: but i have one friend and i am always fighting with him

Mentor: And how does your language change when you argue?

Participant: because he cant communicate properly so we are having a lot of misunderstandings and he is always like its ur fault even he would be 2 hours late

Mentor: Oh wow.

Participant: i get little list because i git all the words in my head and i want to say so much thinks at one time so at the end i guess i would switch to english to express myself more easily

Mentor: Right...that makes sense.

Participant: *little stressed

Mentor: Yeah I guess that would happen.

Mentor: And have you learned anything new recently in Spanish? A new word/expression or form maybe?

Participant: hmm #

Participant: apoyo

Participant: cuidadores de las personas adulto mayores because i am in a taller de cuidadores and i am learning a lot of expressions around old people and taking care of them

Mentor: Ahh okay.

Participant: ahh yeah i think it was el red de apoyo

Participant: cuidadores like caretakers

Mentor: This is in a practical taller that you do for your school?

Participant: of older people

Mentor: Ohhh okay now I get it.

Mentor: Yes.

Participant: yeah we are teaching the caretakers how to take better care of their family or parents

Mentor: Oh that's amazing! Great experience!

Participant: and themselves like when they have to take care of a sick family member

Mentor: What have you learned about families in CR?

Participant: yeah its nice its part of neuropsychology

Participant: hhahah in this taller i just learned taht they fight as much about money and time as german families and when it comes to giving away ur free time to take care of someone else

Mentor: Haha wow I guess some things are universal jaja

Participant: they are just a view family mambers lasting

Participant: members

Participant: but compared to germany they are less old people living in a retirement home

Mentor: Oh right. I bet it's like Canada. We have a lot of people living in nursing homes here, but that's really not a big part of the culture in CR or Latin America bc family member do more caretaking.

Participant: yeah i like that

Participant: i think its a better way to die

Participant: but yeah i think family life is super diferent

Mentor: For sure.

Participant: do u got some more questions ?

Mentor: Umm no. Actually That's it. Thank you!

Participant: ahhh oki:D

Participant: i hope i could help u a bit

Mentor: Oh you have helped a lot!

Participant: cool i am glad i could

Appendix H: Ethics Approval



Western
Research

Research Ethics

Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board NMREB Amendment Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jeff Tennant

Department & Institution: Arts and Humanities\French, Western University

NMREB File Number: 107897

Study Title: An Interventionist Approach to Language Study Abroad: Exploring Identity, Reasoning, and Intentions behind the Acquisition of Pragmatics through Mentorship, Reflection, and Digital Portfolio Documentation

NMREB Revision Approval Date: July 20, 2016

NMREB Expiry Date: June 01, 2017

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Recruitment Items	In-Class Verbal Script	2016/07/08
Recruitment Items	In-Class Verbal Script - Spanish	2016/07/08
Revised Western University Protocol		2016/07/08

The Western University Non-Medical Science Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the amendment to the above named study, as of the NMREB Amendment Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

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