

**American Association of University Supervisors,
Coordinators, and Directors of Foreign Language Programs
(AAUSC)**

**Issues in Language Program Direction
A Series of Annual Volumes**

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Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study

Claire Kramersch
Editor

Heinle & Heinle Publishers

An International Thomson Publishing Company

Boston, Massachusetts 02116, U.S.A.

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Heinle & Heinle Publishers is an International Thomson Publishing company.

ISBN 0-8384-6029-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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A Framework for Investigating the Effectiveness of Study Abroad Programs

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Introduction

As institutions of higher education become more aware of the need to develop higher levels of foreign language skill, the traditional model of university-level foreign language instruction, in which the study of language *per se* (as opposed to literature), is concentrated in the first two years, requires re-examination. This, together with the burgeoning research in second language acquisition (SLA) over the past two decades, has led to a renewed attention to alternative models of delivery, models that incorporate features believed to contribute to foreign language proficiency. These include the addition of task-based, communication-oriented interactional components to the curriculum, summer intensive courses and year-round learning, and academic discipline-based courses offered in the target language.

Study abroad (SA) programs are also receiving increased attention from administrators, teachers, and researchers for at least two reasons. First, they are a common component of many foreign language programs across the country. Lambert reports that “a substantial number of higher-education institutions maintain study abroad programs for their students, and one in three four-year institutions operate language programs either on their own or as part of a consortium” (1994, p. 135). Second, by their very nature SA programs subsume many features of these alternative delivery models. Students in a junior year abroad program, for example, are often expected to take courses in the major or minor in the target language. A program designed for a graduate level student pursuing an

advanced degree in a specialized area might include an intensive foreign language component. But the central trait of all SA programs aimed at increasing foreign language proficiency is the opportunity they provide for informal out-of-class exposure to the target language.

The benefit of informal out-of-class exposure to the target language for the development of second language proficiency is more than a common folk belief. It is also a question of central concern for SLA theory. It has been shown that in conversations with second language learners, native speakers adjust their speech in order for both parties to better understand what is meant (e.g., Ferguson 1971, 1975; Freed 1978; Long 1981). This "negotiation of meaning" not only facilitates understanding, it is now commonly believed among many researchers that "conversational interaction forms the basis for the development of syntax" (Gass and Selinker 1994, p. 216). While informal exposure without instruction may not be sufficient for successful second language learning, there is support for the position that in combination with formal instruction, it helps learners to develop greater second language proficiency (cf. Ellis 1994, p. 616).

Since Carroll's (1967) report that time spent abroad was one of the major predictors of foreign language proficiency among 2,782 college seniors, it has been assumed that the out-of-class contact afforded by the SA experience was to a large extent responsible for this finding. Yet despite the importance of data from SA programs for important issues in SLA and foreign language education, research into the linguistic effects of SA is only beginning to emerge (see, for example, Brecht and Walton 1994; Freed 1995a). It is precisely because they deal directly with these SLA issues, and because of the dearth of empirical data available, that SA program administrators, teachers, and researchers must look, not only at their own programs but also at the range of programs confronting these same issues. More broadly, this includes language learning situations that involve some form of informal learning within a target language context, such as immersion bilingual programs and the experiences of immigrants and foreign students in this country. Toward this end, this paper will outline a framework for assessing SA programs, review published research on the effectiveness of SA programs within this framework, and identify some possible directions for future research in this area.

The Architecture of Institutional Types

Of course, universities comprise only a part, albeit a major part of the "national architecture" (Lambert 1994) of overseas study in this country.

Within the formal K-16 system, foreign exchange programs, such as those sponsored by the American Field Service (AFS), provide SA experiences for secondary school students. The federal government is involved in SA with programs such as the Peace Corps (Gunterman 1995, 1992a, 1992b) and the Foreign Service Institute. A system of private language schools also offers SA experiences for American students of all ages. At the informal level, there are the experiences of individuals who go abroad for the purpose of increasing foreign language proficiency, but without enrolling in any form of formal language instruction.

Conversely, not all SA programs include a foreign language instructional component. Exchange programs to other English-speaking countries most immediately come to mind, but other programs, offered in non-English-speaking countries, may import *in toto* the curriculum from the home institution, including the native language as a medium of instruction. In programs with a foreign language instructional component, that component may be intensive or not. Among programs with non-intensive foreign language components, some offer companion courses in the major or minor field or area of concentration in English to the American students isolated from their counterparts in the host country institutions. Others expect students to fill out their schedule with courses from the regular offerings of the host country institution with the target language as the medium of instruction. Intensive overseas foreign language programs usually do not allow time for the study of other subject areas.

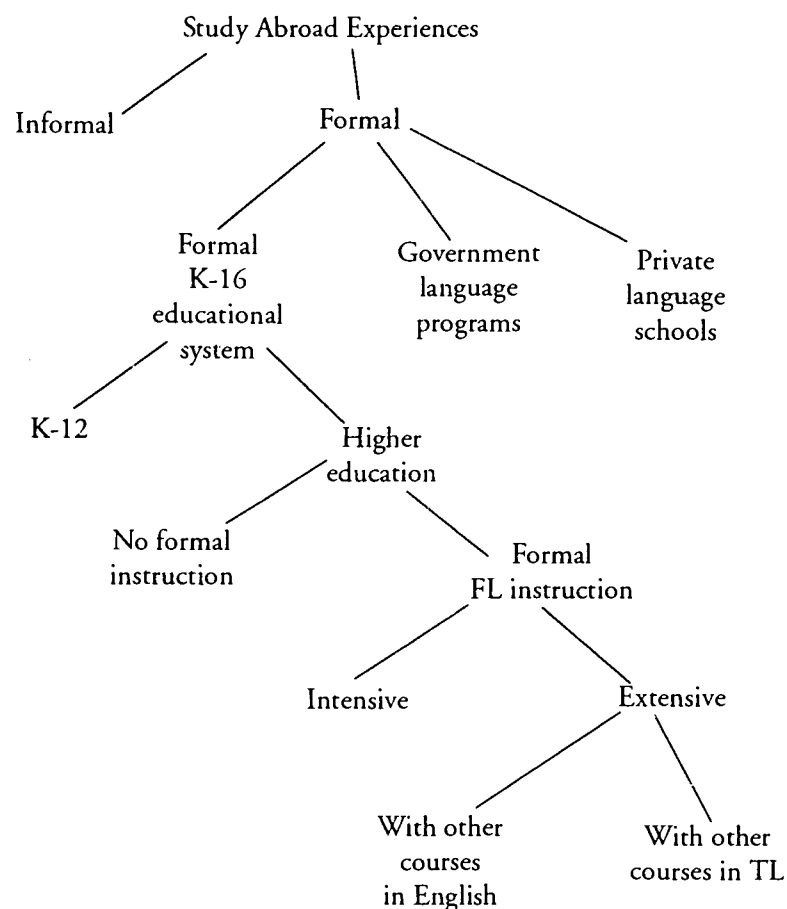
With the exception of the example of SA programs to English speaking countries, what all of these language learning situations have in common, with or without formal instruction, is the opportunity for informal language learning outside of the language classroom. With respect to the development of FL proficiency, this is the defining issue in SA programs. Thus, the first step in outlining a framework for SA experiences is to establish an architecture of institutional types (Figure 1).

Each of these systems has counterparts or near counterparts in other parts of the world (cf. Coleman et al. 1991, cited in Freed 1995a; Regan 1995). The foreign exchange experience, for example, is available to secondary students in many countries (cf. Lussier et al. 1993; Marriott 1995), and Canada's provincial exchange program offers a similar program within that bilingual country (cf. Lapkin et al. 1995).

In looking at the effectiveness of SA programs for the development of foreign language proficiency, it is necessary to consider the findings from all language learning situations that provide opportunities for informal

Figure 1

A Taxonomy of Institutional Types Providing Study Abroad Experiences



language learning. At the same time, one cannot lose sight of the variation among these program types with respect to philosophies, goals, student demographics, program design, and assessment, what will be referred to here as the language learning situation.

Program Goals

Implicit in the various program types are different goals for students enrolled in them. Brecht and Walton (1994) suggest that the goals of SA

programs, whether under the auspices of a university or university consortium, a private language school, or a government training program, fall into two broad categories: those goals that they call “broadly educational,” and those that are directed at foreign language proficiency. Broadly educational goals include the benefits derived from a general cultural experience in a foreign country, the promotion of international understanding and increased knowledge or expertise in a particular discipline or concentration. SA programs whose goals are exclusively broadly educational do not include a language study component.

For some of these programs, no foreign language proficiency is required. These include SA programs in other English-speaking countries, as well as overseas programs in other environments that require no foreign language proficiency. Examples include some AFS programs in Scandinavia or Asia or those SA programs in which “students are taught in English by faculty from the home institution” (Brecht and Walton 1994, pp. 217–18). Except for those rare cases in which students may “pick up” the host country language through informal out-of-class contact alone, without the benefit of formal instruction, these programs have little to contribute to the dialogue surrounding the integration of SA programs into the foreign language curriculum.

In other SA programs with exclusively broadly educational goals, a working knowledge of the foreign language may be a prerequisite, for example, those that sponsor advanced in-depth study of a disciplinary concentration, such as Italian Renaissance art, the structure of the Israeli Kibbutz, or the management style in a Japanese auto manufacturing firm. For these programs, it is necessary to identify the specific foreign language skills needed to function in the foreign language environment, and the best ways to develop and assess those skills prior to the student’s sojourn abroad.

Goals directed at increased foreign language proficiency as a product of the SA experience are inherent in all SA programs that include a foreign language component. But the notion of foreign language proficiency is itself an elusive one. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) point out that during the early years of SLA research, “the prevailing view held that language proficiency could be divided into unrelated skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and knowledge of language components (vocabulary, phonology, and grammar) (1991, p. 38). Within the past twenty years, however, alternative views of language proficiency have been proposed. Oller (1976), for example, proposed a “global proficiency” as a unitary

trait incapable of being divided into separate skills or components. Cummins (1980) has also proposed a kind of global language proficiency factor "which can be assessed by a variety of reading, writing, listening, and speaking tests and which is strongly related to general cognitive skills . . . and to academic achievement" (p. 176). He calls this Cognitive /Academic Language Proficiency or CALP. But he also proposes a second type of language proficiency, called Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which consists of the oral fluency and the sociolinguistically appropriate use of a language in everyday, interpersonal interactions. Sociolinguistic competence is a component of several other models as well. Rather than linguistic proficiency, Canale and Swain (1980) speak of communicative competence, later further specified as consisting of four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale 1983). Global measures of proficiency commonly used in SA programs include oral proficiency interviews, such as the ones developed by the Foreign Service Institute or by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), although the latter is not without controversy (see, for example, Kramsch 1986 and Savignon 1985, and the discussion below on gender).

The complexity of the notion of language proficiency suggests that SA program goals directed at increased foreign language proficiency need to be specific with respect to what aspects of foreign language proficiency the program hopes to develop and to what level. But it is the contextual variables within the language learning situation that will determine the success of those goals. These variables include the type of target language, target populations, and structure of the overseas experience.

Types of Languages Targeted

There are at least two dimensions to language type. The first is the relative difficulty of the oral language to be learned by English speaking students. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), for example, lists four groups of target languages taught in the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) according to expected levels of speaking proficiency after a specified length of training. For example, students learning a language like French or Spanish (Group I languages) can expect to attain between a 1+ and a 2+ on the ETS oral proficiency interview (OPI) test after 16 weeks or 480 hours of instruction (Liskin-Gasparro 1982). Students studying Group II languages (for example, Greek, German, or Farsi) can expect to achieve between a 1 and 2 on the OPI during the same period. In the same amount of time, students of

Group III languages (Bengali, Hebrew, Russian, and Vietnamese, for example) can expect to attain between 0+ and 1+, while those of Group IV languages (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean) can expect scores of only 0+ to 1.

A separate but related dimension of language type concerns orthography. For example, Thai and Vietnamese are both Group III languages according to the ETS' expected levels of speaking proficiency, and typographically they share many features. However, Thai uses an Indic-based alphabet, and while Vietnamese uses three distinct writing systems: Chinese characters, a demotic script called "southern script," and the Roman "national" or "standard script," it is the last that "serves as the medium of instruction at all three levels of education and has been successfully groomed as the official orthography" (Nguyễn 1987, p. 780). Similarly, two other Group III languages, Russian and Polish, are both Slavic, but the former uses a Cyrillic alphabet while the latter uses a Latin one. Finally, all of the Group IV languages listed by the ETS use non-Roman systems, but they differ considerably one from the other. For example, one (Arabic) uses a right-to-left alphabet system. A second (Korean) uses a left-to-right alphabet in which letters forming a syllable are arranged as a rebus. Chinese uses a logographic or character system, and Japanese uses three systems simultaneously, a Chinese-based character system and two syllabary systems, katakana and hiragana. While speaking proficiency in these four Group IV languages may require comparable periods of training, it is not unreasonable that development of literacy skills among these languages may vary greatly.

This has at least two important implications for an evaluation of the impact of overseas study. First, research into the effects of the overseas experience on emerging foreign language literacy skills cannot ignore these orthographic differences. One can assume that development of literacy skills in an orthography different from that of the students' native language would take longer than in one similar to it. At the same time, the exposure to environmental print that the SA experience provides may facilitate the development of literacy in alternative orthographies. Huebner (1995), for example, found that beginning level students of Japanese in a SA program performed better on a test of reading comprehension than did their counterparts in a comparable introductory Japanese program in a stateside university. Equally important, however, is the effect of exposure to environmental print on oral proficiency. Students studying languages with familiar or easily accessible orthographies may be in a better position

to take advantage of environmental print for vocabulary development, for example, during their sojourns abroad than students of languages with less accessible orthographies. To date, there is little research on the effects of environmental print on either literacy development or other aspects of foreign language proficiency in the study abroad context.

Target Populations

Much of the emerging body of literature on the linguistic effects of SA programs has been directed toward the question of who benefits most from a sojourn abroad. Yet, because of the complexity of the question, no definitive answer is available. Among the constellation of learner variables that will likely prove relevant to the issue are age, gender, aptitude, motivation, previous language learning experiences, and learning strategies.

Age. Within the larger field of SLA, the relationship between age and second language development has been much researched, although because the focus of this research has been on whether or not there is a critical or sensitive period for second language learning, most of it has looked at pre-adolescent, adolescent versus postadolescent learners (see Long 1990). In a review of this literature, Krashen, Scarcella, and Long (1979) conclude that adults acquire a second language faster than children and older children faster than younger children, but that learners who begin study of a second language from childhood are more likely to achieve accent-free, native-like performance. Johnson and Newport (1989), however, report on data from 23 adults ranging in age from 17 to 39, that shows no relationship between the acquisition of morphosyntax and age of onset of study for this group of learners, suggesting that the age differences among learners may be the result of a sensitive period around puberty and not of a general age effect. Yet anecdotal evidence from government language programs, for example, suggests that there may be age-related differences among adult learners as well. No documented research is currently available that directly addresses the issue of a general age effect on the range of factors which constitute second language proficiency.

Foreign Language Aptitude. Aptitude has been defined as "some current state of capability of learning [a] task . . . presumed to depend on some combination of more or less enduring characteristics of the individual" (Carroll 1981, p. 84). Foreign language aptitude is taken to mean the capacity for learning a second language. Within the foreign language apti-

tude research, the instrument most commonly used to measure foreign language aptitude is the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll and Sapon 1959), although there are others (e.g., the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery [Pimsleur 1966]; the Defense Language Aptitude Battery [Petersen and Al-Haik 1976]; the York Language Aptitude Test [Green 1975]; for a discussion of foreign language aptitude and the use of the MLAT, see Goodman, Freed, and McManus 1990; Freed 1995b).

While there is much debate over what constitutes foreign language aptitude, "the early research provided convincing evidence that classroom learners' language aptitude has a major effect on their success in learning an L2" (Ellis 1994, p. 498). But subsequent research (e.g., Skehan 1989) has led others to suggest that language aptitude may be "more related to the academic/literacy skills than to oral/aural proficiency" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991, p. 172). This interpretation is consistent with at least one study of SA programs. Reporting on a multiyear study of 658 students of Russian in a SA context, Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1993, p. 22) report that language aptitude, as measured by two subparts of the MLAT, has a strong positive correlation with reading and listening gains, but not with gains in speaking skills. This would suggest that assessment of the effects of the SA experience would need to control for language aptitude with respect to the development of CALP, but not where speaking skills are the primary goal.

Gender. When SLA research has looked at gender differences in SLA, the general pattern seems to suggest that females are better second language learners than males. This difference has been attributed to differences in attitudes to learning a second language (Burstall 1975), motivation to learn the second language (Gardner and Lambert 1972), and different ways of approaching the language learning task (Gass and Varonis 1986; Bacon 1992; Bacon and Finnemann 1992). Whatever the specific reason, the differences that appear are attributed to social, rather than physiological, factors.

Social factors also seem to play a role in gender differences which have been reported in the literature on SA programs. In these cases, however, those factors work against females. For example, Carlson et al. (1990), in a study of 171 students from four American universities participating in SA programs in Germany and France, used pre- and post-self-assessment questionnaires to assess language development during study abroad. They found that "the single most powerful predictor of language change was gender. . . . Examination of [mean scores on self-assessment scales] of the

males and females both before and after study abroad showed that the greatest gain in language proficiency was made by the males" (Carlson et al. 1990, p. 78). Similarly, the large-scale Russian study mentioned above found that on average men outgain women in listening comprehension and oral proficiency (Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg 1993, p. 16).

Several qualitative studies of the SA experience suggest why this might be so. In a case study of four women learning Japanese as a foreign language in Japan, Siegal (1994, 1995) reports that for these women appropriate language use involves a knowledge of how Japanese women speak, as well as their view of Japanese women and themselves while they are in Japan. Their failure to use appropriate language may be the result of lack of proficiency in Japanese in socioculturally appropriate ways or of their refusal to accept "certain societal rules concerning the conduct of everyday [women's] behavior" (1995, p. 228).

A preliminary analysis of the daily language learning journals of a sample of the 658 participants in the larger Brecht et al. Russian study found that men and women spent their free time outside of class in similar activities, but that "American women may have fewer—and qualitatively different—opportunities to speak in a mixed gender setting than American males" (Brecht and Robinson 1993, p. 19). In a more extensive analysis of diaries from this same study, Polyani (1995) attributes the women's lower scores on both tests of listening and oral proficiency to gender-related problems:

In Russia, in the field, [the women in SA programs] are learning not to be "Russian language speakers" but to be "women Russian language speakers." Rather than discussing music, politics and debating the relative merits of a totally free market based economy, they are learning how to get out of humiliating social encounters, how to interpret the intentions of even polite seeming educated young men, how to get themselves home in one piece after an evening spent in fending off unwanted advances. They are learning to be more subtle about handling encounters in Russian than they would hope to ever need to be in English. They become skilled at saying "*No. Get your hands off me.*" to young men whose friendship and help they need to get to know the country well and to do the job they came over to do. . . . [T]he women do succeed in learning precious linguistic and cultural survival skills, yet these hard won skills are not those defined as skills which need to be learned. (p. 290)

These studies suggest that women are not only faced with out-of-class

encounters that are both quantitatively and qualitatively different from those of their male colleagues, but they have also not been prepared in their pre-SA language programs to deal with these differences. Furthermore, assessment instruments such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), commonly used to measure proficiency gains, fail to measure what they have learned of the language during their sojourn in the host country.

Motivation. As Ellis (1994, p. 517) points out, "motivation in L2 learning constitutes one of the most fully researched areas of individual differences" (p. 517), and numerous studies have provided evidence that indicates that motivation is an important indicator of foreign language learning success. Yet, despite the abundance of research in the area, it is not without controversy. The bulk of the motivation research in SLA has focused on the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation (cf. Gardner 1985), the former arising from a desire to integrate with the TL community and the latter from material rewards associated with FL learning success. It can be assumed that each of these motivates participants in SA programs. While Gardner maintains the superiority of integrative motivation for FL learning, instrumental motivation has shown to be an effective predictor in environments where learners have little interest in the target culture (Gardner and Lambert 1972; Lukmani 1972). Other researchers find the distinction difficult to maintain (e.g., Ely 1986; Crookes and Schmidt 1989). Others still provide evidence that motivation may be a result of FL success as much as it is a predictor of it (Savignon 1972; Hermann 1980; Strong 1984; Freed 1990, 1995b).

This last point suggests that motivation can change over time, with as yet unexplored implications for SA programs. Several studies that compare the effects of a sojourn abroad with similar language courses at home have controlled for motivation (e.g., DeKeyser 1986, 1991; Huebner 1995), but few (exceptions include Gardner, Smythe, and Brunet 1977, cited in Larsen-Freeman and Long 1988, p. 20; Coleman et al. 1994, cited in Freed 1995a) have looked at changes in motivation as a result of the immersion experience.

Previous Non-Target-Language Language Learning Background. Another difference among individual learners likely to influence the effects of a sojourn abroad on language proficiency is the learner's proficiency in his or her first language and in foreign languages other than the target. While most students who participate in SA programs are assumed to have

relatively well-developed first language skills, it would be remiss to ignore this variable when measuring the benefits of the SA experience, especially with respect to the development of CALP. Cummins' (1980) interdependence hypothesis proposes a common underlying proficiency for CALP that is transferable across a student's two languages. Highly developed CALP in a student's first language is likely to aid in the development of second language literacy skills.

At the same time, knowledge of languages other than the target language or the native language of the students may also have a positive effect on the development of the target language. For example, Rivers (1979) reports that her knowledge of French (her second language) facilitated her subsequent learning of Spanish. Certainly cognates played a role in this case, but it may also be that knowledge of a second language constrains the hypotheses that learners formulate regarding the target language. It may be, too, that having successfully learned a second language already, the learner has "learned how to learn." Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg suggest as much when they write that "students gain more in-country if they have had another foreign language in addition to Russian in high school or college" (1993, p. 20). In any case, this is an area that has received little attention in research on language learning in SA contexts.

Learning Strategies. Learning strategies are those unconscious or conscious activities undertaken by learners to promote learning (cf. Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991, p. 212). It has been proposed that the teaching of learning strategies as a part of the second or foreign language curriculum can be of benefit to learners (O'Malley et al. 1985). At the same time, research on SA programs suggests that learners do not take full advantage of the opportunities for out-of-class contacts to enhance their learning of the target language while studying overseas. Huebner (1995) administered the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford 1990) to students in intensive Japanese programs both at home and in Japan at the beginning and again at the end of the course. Not only did he find little difference between the two groups, there was also little change within the Japan-based group in the strategies they employed at the beginning of their overseas sojourn and at the end.

As a part of the larger Russian study, Miller and Ginsberg (1995) analyzed the journals of a sample of students for their beliefs about language and methods of language learning. They found that while students are critical of what takes place in their formal language learning classrooms, they approach the out-of-class experiences with the target language in

much the same way that they approach the tasks involved in formal classroom learning. Miller and Ginsberg maintain that as a result, students do not take full advantage of the language learning opportunities that a sojourn abroad affords them. It seems that Wenden's suggestion that language teachers should no longer consider their domain to be simply the teaching of language is especially apropos to SA programs:

Learners must learn how to do for themselves what teachers typically do for them in the classroom. Our endeavors to help them improve their language skills must be complemented by an equally systematic approach to helping them develop and refine their learning skills. Learner training should be integrated with language training. (1985, p. 7)

Background in the Target Language. Much of the research on the linguistic effectiveness of SA programs has focused on the question of when in the learners' FL learning careers they might optimally benefit from a sojourn abroad. The results have not always been consistent. Research on the linguistic effects of three-month interprovincial exchanges among junior and senior high school students in Canada finds that students with initially lower French language proficiency made greater gains as result of submersion in a French environment, especially for listening and oral skills (Lapkin et al. 1995). Furthermore, analysis of diaries and questionnaires suggest that most of the significant learning experiences of the interprovincial exchange students occur outside the classroom. The researchers conclude that "[t]he importance of frequent and sustained interactions with native speakers, it seems, cannot be overstated in achieving impressive linguistic gains in a three-month exchange" (1995, p. 91). Freed 1995b also finds more growth for those with lower levels of proficiency.

By way of contrast, Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1993) report that in the Russian study, those students with higher pre-sojourn FL reading and grammar test scores were more likely than students with lower scores to gain in all other skills, including gains on the OPI and listening comprehension measures. This is particularly true for groups of learners who have reached a threshold level of 1+2 on the OPI. They conclude that investment in grammar instruction in the early years of instruction may result in advances in speaking and listening skills at the upper-intermediate and advanced levels" (1993, p. 21). Since this study was based on undergraduate and graduate students, while the Canadian study was of adolescents, other factors (e.g., age, motivation) may account for these apparently conflicting results.

That SA participants at various levels of FL proficiency benefit differently from the overseas experience is apparent in the work of Freed (1990). In a study of university-level SA students in France, she found that those at advanced levels of FL study benefit more from "non-interactive contact" (i.e., reading books, watching television, etc.) with the TL. Intermediate-level students, on the other hand, benefit most from "interactive" (speaking with family and friends) out-of-class contact. Other studies offer data to suggest that even students at beginning levels of FL study may gain added benefits from the SA experience (i.e., Huebner 1995).

Given these findings, there may not be one best time for all students to study abroad. A definitive answer may ultimately rest on other variables discussed above as well as individual differences, such as personality type or cognitive style. It may also rest on variables inherent in program design.

Program and Course Design

SA programs vary with respect to design features perhaps as much as foreign language programs do in general. These variables can be seen in terms of the amount and quality of out-of-class target language contact that SA programs foster, and the extent to which these programs prepare students for this contact, both before and during the sojourn abroad. Because SA programs are often a part of a larger foreign language program, post-SA follow-up to sustain and build upon gains attributed to the overseas experience becomes an important component as well.

Out-of-class Contact and Language Acquisition. As has been pointed out above, the quantity and quality of out-of-class contact is related to such learner variables as gender, learning strategies, and background in the target language, as well as to *type* of out-of-class contact. But programs vary with respect to the extent to which opportunities for out-of-class contact are built into them. Programs that house American students together in American enclaves (Brecht and Walton 1994) provide for fewer such opportunities than those that house students with host-country students in dormitories. Host family living arrangements may provide even more such opportunities. In situations where students are left to themselves to find living arrangements, individual learner differences may take on more importance with respect to the opportunities students seek out for informal out-of-class target language contact.

The Formal Instructional Context and Language Acquisition. One over-

riding issue in SLA research concerns the ultimate value of language instruction in target language contexts: Does language instruction help at all in these contexts? In a review of studies comparing naturalistic versus formal instruction, Chaudron (1988), following Long (1983), argues that "the outcomes favor instruction, *all other factors being equal*" (emphasis in original, p. 4). Within the SA context, the corresponding question would be whether formal instruction along side of informal contact facilitates learning. Studies of SA programs, drawing on student journals and interviews, provide some insight into students' impressions of the value of classroom instruction vis-à-vis their out-of-class experiences (cf. Carlson et al. 1990; Brecht and Robinson 1993). But lacking among the SA research is any close look at what actually happens in the classroom and the relationship between that and FL attainment during the sojourn abroad.

Among the areas yet to be explored in in-country classrooms are the design features of the course itself, the nature of classroom language, and methods of student assessment. Course design features encompass such variables as the intensity and duration of the course, the specification and organization of the course syllabus, and the role of classroom resources. SA courses, as noted earlier, can be either intensive or extensive, and they can range in length from several weeks to a full year. The syllabus may be organized around structural features of the language, notions and functions that language performs, situations students are likely to find themselves in, tasks students are expected to perform in the target language, or some combination of these. Among the classroom resources SA programs may draw upon are textbooks, authentic oral and written materials in the target language, computers, and language laboratories. Spada (1985, 1986) suggests that the learners' informal contact with the target language may interact with instructional differences to produce variation in improvement in proficiency. The extent to which design features have been modified from regular home-based courses to meet the immediate communicative needs of SA students will surely affect the degree to which those students are able to take advantage of their out-of-class contacts in the target language.

Classroom language subsumes not only teacher talk and student behaviors, but also teacher/student interactions. Among the variables involved in teacher talk are the amount (the percentage of classroom talk produced by the teacher) and the specific language used (the students' native language or the target language). The functional distribution of teacher talk is also a relevant dimension here: What percentage of teacher

talk is devoted to soliciting, structuring, reacting, and responding to student talk, as opposed to explaining, questioning, and commanding? Finally, teacher talk issues include the kinds of modifications in speech rate, phonology, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse intended to accommodate the learner.

Such modifications have been found to increase comprehensible input needed for SLA to occur. But when there is a discrepancy between the talk of the teacher and that of the community in which the students must function outside of the classroom, such modifications may work against the students' most immediate needs. For example, a teacher of Japanese may insist on the use of only formal forms in the classroom, but outside of class in their everyday interactions, students consistently encounter informal forms.

Learner behaviors of possible relevance include the amount and kinds of student in-class language productions, the opportunities they have for interaction and negotiation of meaning, and opportunities for controlling their own learning. What percentage of the class time do students speak and is it in the target language? Does student speech consist primarily of mechanical responses in drills or do they include opportunities for social interaction of the kind they are likely to encounter outside? Finally, to what extent does the course allow for students' self-identified immediate linguistic needs to be incorporated into the content of the course? Swain (1985) suggests that conversational exchanges that provide for negotiation of meaning are important not only as sources of comprehensible input; they are necessary to provide opportunities for "contextualized, meaningful use, to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to a syntactic analysis of it" (p. 252).

A crucial issue in SLA classroom-oriented research is which cultural norms, those of the target language or those of the students, should dictate teacher/student interactions. A mismatch between teachers and students' cultural norms may result in a differential in teacher interactions with students in classrooms. While conversational participants normally "exchange and negotiate information on the reception and comprehension of their message" (Chaudron 1988, p. 132), in the language classroom, the status and knowledge differential between teacher and students results in an imbalance in that exchange process. Conflicting cultural expectations about the role of teachers and the role of students in a SA context may add to that imbalance. Are students in SA classrooms being taught the target

culture norms of students in that culture or of active participants in the wider sociocultural setting? To date, this issue has received little attention in the research on the effectiveness of SA programs.

Because students' perceptions of what is most relevant in the content of a course are shaped by "what will be on the test," another important factor in the SA course design is the degree to which it is test oriented, and the nature of those exams. Do the tests measure the kinds of skills that students are expected to develop from their sojourn abroad? This is an issue not only of course design but also of any evaluation of the linguistic effectiveness of the of SA programs in general.

Post-instruction Follow-up. Post-instruction follow-up to formal SA language instruction may take the form of re-entry courses for students returning to their home institutions, or, in the case of students who continue their sojourn abroad after the completion of formal language instruction (e.g., the Peace Corps example), support structures in the host country. Pilot studies from the massive European Language Proficiency Survey (35,000 students in approximately 100 institutions [Coleman et al. 1994, cited in Freed 1995a]) suggest that student growth in the target language slows down radically upon their return from a year abroad. These results point to the importance of follow-up to sustain and build upon gains attributed to the overseas experience.

Assessing the Linguistic Effectiveness of SA Programs

Having outlined some of the variables which must be taken into consideration in assessing the linguistic effectiveness of SA programs, the discussion now turns to assessment methodologies and instruments. Evaluations of the effectiveness of SA programs have involved both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative research methods are those concerned with understanding the processes involved in human behavior from the dual perspective of both the insider and the outsider. They involve increasingly focused observation of naturalistic behavior and result in rich descriptions of a particular learning situation. Quantitative research methods are concerned with finding causes of social phenomena from the perspective of the objective observer. They involve the controlled measurement of quantifiable outcomes, resulting in hard, replicable data. True experimental research also involves the use of experimental and control groups with subjects assigned randomly to each group.

Because true experiments are difficult to design for such complex

human endeavors as language learning situations, many studies employ methodologies that omit control groups. These are sometimes called "pre-experimental" studies (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991). Because human behavior with respect to whether or not someone will study abroad is difficult to dictate for experimental purposes, very few involve random assignment of subjects ("quasi-experimental," *ibid.*). As a way of compensating for these problems, many SA studies have employed multiple research methodologies. Those that do often provide the richest pictures of the linguistic effects of SA. But ultimately the research methodologies employed are dictated by the type of research questions asked.

Instruments. Related to research methodology are the instruments used to measure the linguistic effects of SA. Early studies relied on discrete item test scores to measure linguistic growth (Carroll 1967; Willis et al. 1977). Subsequent researchers (e.g., Veguez 1984; Kaplan 1989; Freed 1990; Milleret 1990; Hart et al. 1994) have pointed out the potentially confounding ceiling effects of discrete point tests, such as the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) or the MLA Cooperative Tests.

Questionnaires and surveys have been used to gather information on student language use (Kaplan 1989; Freed 1990), learning strategies (Huebner 1995) and affective variables, such as attitude and motivation (DeKeyser 1986, 1991; Freed 1990, 1995b; Huebner 1995). They have also been used as indicators of students' self-assessment of proficiency gained (e.g., Carlson et al. 1990; Meara 1994; Lapkin et al. 1995). Meara's (1994, cited in Freed 1995a) analysis of a self-assessment questionnaire administered to 586 SA students from the more general Nuffield Modern Language Inquiry found that the majority of students reported improved oral-aural skills as a result of the year abroad experience; fewer than half felt that they had made progress in reading and writing. But the value of self-assessment questionnaires as a surrogate for other measures of proficiency gain is questionable. Lapkin et al. (1995), using both self-assessment questionnaires and tests of listening and reading comprehension, speaking, and writing, conclude: "Overall, the results were disappointing in that the correlational data would not encourage us to dispense with language testing in favour of self-assessment scales" (p. 91).

Perhaps the most commonly used measure of oral proficiency in SA programs is the TL interview (especially the ACTFL OPI). Taped interview data have also been used to look at the acquisition of specific grammatical features of the TL (e.g., Ryan and Lafford 1992; Gunterman 1992a, 1992b), fluency (Freed 1995b), and sociolinguistic competence

(e.g., Marriott 1995; Regan 1995). Freed (1995b), however, points to at least one limitation to the OPI as a global measure of language use. Because of its non-linear construction, the OPI is often unable to discriminate progress made by students at the upper levels of the proficiency scale.

Learners' diaries and journals provide insights into affective variables as well as communication and learning strategies (DeKeyser 1986, 1991; Brecht and Robinson 1993; Miller and Ginsberg 1995; Polyani 1995). The discussion of gender differences above points to the value of diary studies and native language interviews to enrich our understanding of the results of quantitative studies.

Communication games, picture descriptions, and role play situations have been used to look at communication strategies (DeKeyser 1986, 1991; Lafford 1995) and the development of sociolinguistic competence (Marriott 1995). Studies of sociolinguistic (Siegal 1994, 1995) and strategic competence (Hashimoto, *in press*, cited in Marriott 1995) have also relied on data from tape recordings of natural conversations.

Some Findings from Pre-Experimental Studies

Several studies involving pre- and post-application of some of these measures indicate improvement in speaking and listening skills and in certain aspects of sociolinguistic competence.

Spoken Proficiency. Freed 1995a cites a number of pre-experimental studies (those without control groups) to provide evidence that students in SA programs show gains on post-SA measures, particularly in speaking skills. For example, she cites Willis, Doble, Sankarayya and Smithers (1977, cited in Freed 1995a) who used pre- and posttest scores of 88 British students who spent a year or more either working or studying in France or Germany, to find linguistic growth in speaking, listening, and reading skills.

Dyson (1988, cited in Freed 1995a), assessing the linguistic competence in listening and speaking skills of 229 British students who had spent a year studying in France, Germany, or Spain, reports that pre- to posttests indicated considerable growth in both these skills, particularly among the weaker students in the study. O'Connor (1988, cited in Freed 1995a), in a study of approximately 30 intermediate-level students who spent a year in France, found that, at the end of the year, they had moved an average of one step on the OPI rating scale. Veguez' study (1984, cited in Freed 1995a) of 17 Spanish students who studied abroad yielded com-

parable results. Milleret (1990, cited in Freed 1995a) conducted a study of 11 intermediate-level students of Portuguese using the Portuguese Speaking Test and found that students who participated in a six-week summer abroad program in Brazil, increased their ratings, on average, one step on the ACTFL OPI scale.

Sociolinguistic Knowledge. Marriott (1995) uses role plays to analyze the acquisition of politeness in Japanese by eight secondary-level Australian exchange students who spent a year in Japan. Among her conclusions are: First, the students in the study displayed a great variation in the acquisition of politeness norms; second, students' use of politeness phenomena changed considerably after their sojourn in Japan; and finally, even after their sojourn abroad, their performance deviated considerably from the expected norm.

Regan (1995) looked at how the deletion of the negative particle *ne* in French was affected after a year of study in France. The procedures included Varbrul (cf. Young 1989, for a description) multivariate analyses of the linguistic contexts of *ne*-deletion in the pre- and postinterviews of seven advanced learners from Ireland. Previous to their sojourn abroad, students were found to make little use of *ne*-deletion, a sociolinguistic rule conditioned by grammatical, stylistic, and social factors among native French speakers. While the students in the study used this rule much more after the SA, they also were found to overgeneralize the rule, deleting the *ne* particle more frequently than native speakers in formal or monitored speech.

Of course, as we have seen, while pre-experimental studies can measure linguistic growth over the period of the overseas experience, they cannot tell us that the growth is a direct result of that overseas experience. Without control groups we cannot tell if students would have made similar growth studying the foreign language at their home institutions.

Some Findings from Quasi-Experimental Studies

The results of quasi-experimental studies are mixed. It seems that whether or not experimental groups (i.e., those who go abroad) outperform control groups (those who stay at home) depends on what skills are measured and how.

Oral Proficiency. On the basis of OPI scores, several quasi-experimental studies provide support for the benefit of the overseas experience on

oral proficiency. In a study of 40 students of French at the University of Wisconsin, Magnan (1986) found that those who had spent anywhere from one to 18 months in a francophone country tended to score higher on the OPI than those who had not, although the implications for SA are confounded by the facts that she did not conduct pretests and that students' time abroad varied greatly. Liskin-Gasparro (1984, cited in Freed 1995a), comparing the Spanish proficiency of students who had been abroad with those who had not, found that the former group outperformed the latter on the OPI. A study by Foltz (1991, cited in Freed 1995a), also used the OPI to assess oral development in Spanish of two groups of students, one who studied in Spain and a comparable group who remained on campus. His results found greater growth in oral proficiency by those who participated in the study abroad program than those who had not. Huebner (1995) found that beginning level students of Japanese who had studied abroad tended to score higher on the OPI than a comparable group of students studying at an American university. Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1993), comparing pre- and post-scores on the OPI among 646 students who studied Russian abroad with the general population of students who have completed four years of college Russian study, conclude that "at least one semester of study in-country is required if any sizable percentage of students studying Russian are to reach at least a functional level of competence in speaking" in a language of the degree of difficulty of Russian (p. 17).

Aspects of Grammatical Competence. For intermediate and advanced students, the sojourn abroad may not greatly affect certain structural elements. DeKeyser (1986), for example, reported no difference between those intermediate students who had spent a semester in Spain and those who studied at their stateside university in their command over the subjunctive as measured by a paper and pencil test. Similarly, Regan (1985), using interview transcripts from six advanced learners of French in French-speaking SA contexts, found that "in relation to negation, the stay in the native speech community makes virtually no difference to certain structural features in the learner language" (p. 259).

On the other hand, a pilot study by Cox and Freed (1988) of 12 students of French as a foreign language who had spent a semester abroad and 12 who had not, reported that the SA group demonstrated greater grammatical control of the past tense, of relative clauses, and of the subjunctive as well as "more native-like" use of negation and interrogation strategies. However, as one of the authors recognizes, "this study . . . was not carefully

controlled and presented no analyses of statistical significance" (Freed 1995, p. 8).

Ultimately, the effects that opportunities for out-of-class contact and informal learning will be determined to have on grammatical competence may rest on what aspects of grammatical competence are examined, their relationship to both the immediate communicative needs of the learners as well as to the curriculum, and the level of student command of the TL.

Acquisition Orders. Research in SLA provides evidence that learners must pass through developmental sequences on their way to the acquisition of the structure of the target language. Much of this research has focused on the order in which TL morphemes are acquired (cf. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). The proposal of a fixed order of the acquisition of certain morphemes has provided the basis for models of both SLA and of teaching methodologies (cf. Ellis 1994, pp. 73–177). The extent to which these sequences or orders are found to exist in situations where learners have opportunity for both classroom and out-of-class learning, as opposed to either one or the other, will have implications for both SLA and foreign language teaching.

Several studies have examined whether there is a difference in the order of acquisition of specific morphemes between students who have had opportunity for informal contact as provided by a SA experience and those who have not. Ryan and Lafford's (1992) longitudinal analysis of the acquisition order of the Spanish copulas (*ser* and *estar*) in a study abroad context report an acquisition order similar to that established for U.S.-based students as reported by VanPatten (1987). Similarly, in a set of studies examining the acquisition order of *ser* vs. *estar*, and *por* vs. *para* among Peace Corps volunteers, Gunterman (1992a, 1992b) provides support for developmental stages suggested by prior research limited to learners in formal classroom contexts.

Communication Strategies. One might expect that one area in which students would surely benefit from a sojourn in a TL environment would be with respect to communication strategies, those strategies speakers use when faced with meeting communicative needs with their communication means. Although this question requires much further research, the research that exists in this area suggests that the effect of SA on communication strategies employed may be one area in which individual differences will be most pronounced.

Looking at the effect of an overseas experience on how learners supplement their insufficient knowledge of the target language during

communication, DeKeyser (1986, 1991) compared the communication strategies of seven American students spending a semester in Spain with five comparable students studying at Stanford University. Basing his conclusions on data from both interviews and a picture description task, DeKeyser maintains that the students "did not drastically change their monitoring behavior or their use of communication strategies" as a result of studying abroad (1991, p. 115). Nevertheless, the experimental group did demonstrate gains in fluency and vocabulary, and there was much more variability in their performance than among the stateside group. This last generalization is one reported in many SA studies.

In a somewhat larger study of 13 students in Mexico, 16 in Spain, and a control group of 13 students at Arizona State University, Lafford (1995) also compared the communicative strategies used by Spanish FL students, with somewhat different results. On the basis of her analysis of the pre- and postrole-play situations found in the OPI, she concludes that "the study abroad experience broadens the repertoire of communicative strategies of L2 learners and makes them better conversationalists" (p. 118). She goes on to say, "As compared to classroom students, those that have been abroad have shown themselves to be adept at using a wider variety of appropriate structures within a conversational context. . . . Those in the study abroad groups produce more words than the students in the classroom group and have more repairs than repeats in their speech" (p. 120). This last finding is consistent with other quasi-experimental SA studies (e.g., Huebner 1995; Freed 1995b).

Fluency. In SLA research, fluency has traditionally been measured in terms of temporal variables, such as the number of syllables per second, the average length of pauses between syllables, and the number of pauses between syllables. Other measures of fluency include such hesitation phenomena as pause fillers, repetitions, and self-corrections (cf. Ellis 1994, p. 394). In several pre-experimental design studies of SA programs, fluency has also been identified as an aspect of FL proficiency that is enhanced by sojourns in a target language context. Raupach (1983) describes how undergraduate German-speaking learners of French use formulas both as fillers and as organizers. Lennon (1989) followed four advanced-level German university students during a six-month period at the University of Reading. On the basis of both recordings of subjects' oral productions and of students' introspections recorded both in writing and in oral interviews in German, Lennon reports on the advances made in fluency by these students by the end of their stay.

In a comparative study of the effects of SA on the fluency of eight American university students, four studying abroad and four studying at home, Freed (1995b) used subjective evaluations by native French speakers of speech samples from interviews. She followed this with a detailed analysis of those samples in terms of those factors mentioned above frequently associated with fluency. With respect to the subjective evaluations by native speakers, she found that "among the students who were perceived as having lower fluency at the beginning of the semester, there was a greater tendency to improve and to be perceived as being 'somewhat more fluent' for those who had gone abroad than for a comparable group of students at home" (1995b, p. 136). When analyzing the excerpts for the existence of factors of fluency, however, she reports that "rate of speech is the only fluency feature that yields a significant difference between the At Home and Abroad groups. . . . [S]tudents who had spent a semester abroad spoke both more and at a significantly faster rate than did those whose learning had been restricted to the language learning classroom at home" (p. 137). At the same time, in a finding consistent with other comparative studies (e.g., DeKeyser 1986; Huebner 1995; Lafford 1995), she reports that students exhibited more individual variation than did the stateside students.

Conclusion

Although the research in SA is still in its infancy, as educators begin to explore avenues for reform and improvement of foreign language education, attention to SA programs will increase. This paper has attempted to provide a framework for the evaluation of these programs by identifying some of the variables that must be taken into consideration in evaluating the range of programs that all fall under the rubric of "Study Abroad." In the process, it has also reviewed some of the literature on that topic, and discussed some of the issues, for SLA and for foreign language pedagogy. The picture that emerges is both complex and incomplete. SA programs vary with respect to their placement in educational institutions, their goals, their target languages and populations, and their program and course designs, and these variables must be taken into consideration when assessing their effectiveness. In the final analysis, there may not be one most appropriate time for or approach to the SA experience. Rather, it may be that researchers will turn to how to best realize the goals of the SA program within the larger context in which it is embedded.

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