

Promoting Oral Proficiency Gains in Education Abroad through a Programmatic Intervention

Francesca Di Silvio, Center for Applied Linguistics

Michael Vande Berg, Ph.D., MVB Associates

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- ▶ Background for the study
- ▶ Previous research on language learning during study abroad
- ▶ Current study
- ▶ Implications
- ▶ Small group discussion and reporting

Study abroad at the century mark: Three dominant narratives about learning cross culturally

1. Humans learn through **exposure** to cultural difference
2. Humans learn by being **immersed** in different types of cultural difference
3. Humans learn and **develop**:
 - a) by being **immersed** in cultural difference,
 - b) by **reflecting** on how they & others frame experience,
 - c) and by **re-framing** their experience

Vande Berg, M., Paige, R. M., & Lou, K. H. (Eds.) (2012). *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Georgetown Consortium study: core findings*

- ▶ **Studying abroad for longer periods: Yes—some impact**
- ▶ **Maximizing contact with host nationals: No impact**
- ▶ **Enrolling in host institution classes: No impact**
- ▶ **Doing internships, service learning: No impact**
- ▶ **Being housed in home stays: No impact**
- ▶ **Pre departure cultural orientation: Yes—some impact**
- ▶ **Home stays: Yes—when students engaged with host family**
- ▶ **Receiving cultural mentoring at sites abroad: Yes—the highest impact practice in the study**

*Vande Berg, M.; Connor-Linton, J.; & Paige, R. M. (2009). The Georgetown Consortium Study: Intervening in student learning abroad. *Frontiers: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. Vol. XVIII, pp. 1-75.

- ▶ **Research supports story 3: Georgetown study findings for second language learning***
- ▶ **“Left to their own devices, too many students [abroad] fail to learn effectively. Merely exposing them to the potentially rich linguistic environment they will encounter abroad is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for improving their language learning.”***
- ▶ **The sufficient condition is provided when educators intervene in student learning throughout the study abroad experience.**

***Vande Berg, M.; Connor-Linton, J.; & Paige, R. M. (2009). The Georgetown Consortium Study: Intervening in student learning abroad. *Frontiers: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. Vol. XVIII, p. 17.**

The CAL/CIEE partnership aimed to intervene in three stages through a pilot program:

- 1. Train a member of the host family to engage students in conversation in ways that are designed to improve student oral performance.**
- 2. Collect data through a mixed-method approach: pre/post SOPI testing, pre/post surveying of learners, and pre/post recording of learner conversations.**
- 3. Once the data have been analyzed and interpreted, use the findings to improve future language learning through homestays.**

Growing strands in study abroad research

- ▶ Investigation of factors that influence language learning based on program elements and learner characteristics
- ▶ Qualitative analyses of the student experience
- ▶ Studies using multiple and mixed research methods

(DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1998; Kinginger, 2011)

Previous findings: Oral proficiency gains

- ▶ Frequent use of measures rated according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines
- ▶ Documented gains by groups of learners include

Language	Duration	Study
French	Semester	Magnan & Back, 2007
German	Semester	Lindseth, 2010
Japanese	Summer	Hardison & Okuno, 2013
Portuguese	Summer	Milleret, 1991
Russian	Summer, semester, year	Davidson, 2010
Spanish	Summer, semester	Mendelson, 2004

- ▶ Documented gains in contrast to at-home groups
(Hernández, 2010; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009)

Previous findings: The homestay advantage

- ▶ Assumption: Students make great improvements in oral proficiency when living with a family due to increased target language input (Rivers, 1998)
- ▶ BUT student-host family interactions are not necessarily rich (Diao, Freed, & Smith, 2011; Iino, 2006; O'Donnell, 2004; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004; Wilkinson, 1998)
- ▶ Homestays may not result in expected gains in contrast with learners in other living arrangements (Magnan & Back, 2007; Rivers, 1998; Vande Berg et al., 2009).

Purpose of the current study

- ▶ Investigate whether and how training families to increase meaningful conversational exchange with hosted students contributes to student oral proficiency gains
- ▶ Three-year study funded by the U.S. Department of Education International Research and Studies Program, #P017A100027
- ▶ Response to call for research on the benefits of interventions to increase the quality of student interactions with native speakers (see, e.g., Back, 2013; Goldoni, 2013; Kinginger, 2011; Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Martinsen, 2010; Vande Berg et al., 2009)

Research questions

- RQ1: What oral proficiency gains do study abroad participants in homestays attain after one semester, and is there a difference between gains made by participants whose families receive training on ways to extend conversation with students and those whose families do not?
- RQ2: Which student characteristics and target language activities affect language gains?
- RQ3: How do student and host family perceptions of the homestay relationship relate to language gains?
- RQ4: What do students and host families believe was effective about the homestay experience and the training intervention?

Participants

- ▶ College students in a semester language program living in homestays
 - 92 female, 60 male; majority juniors
- ▶ Host data collected from one adult informant per trained family
- ▶ Group assignment dependent on host family's willingness to participate in training and data collection

Language (Study Abroad Location)	Experimental Group	Control Group	<i>N</i>
Spanish (Lima, Peru & Valparaíso, Chile)	31	22	53
Mandarin Chinese (Beijing, Nanjing, & Shanghai, China)	26	23	49
Russian (Saint Petersburg, Russia)	30	20	50
Total	87	65	152

Data collection

- ▶ Data collected over multiple semesters

Materials	Date	
	Pre	Post
Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI)	Week 2	Week 15
Recorded student-host family conversations	Week 2-3	Week 14-15
Student and host family surveys	Week 3	Week 15

- ▶ Host family group training scheduled in Week 4
- ▶ Goal: Increase and improve communication between students and host families

Procedures: Host family training

- ▶ Group meeting
 - Conducted by study abroad program director
 - Attended by one representative from each host family

- ▶ Strategies for encouraging students to elaborate
 - Ask to talk about an event in the near past
 - Avoid yes/no questions
 - Ask follow-up substance questions

- ▶ Open discussion
 - Reflect on past experiences with students
 - Brainstorm possible questions and other strategies
 - Ask questions of trainer

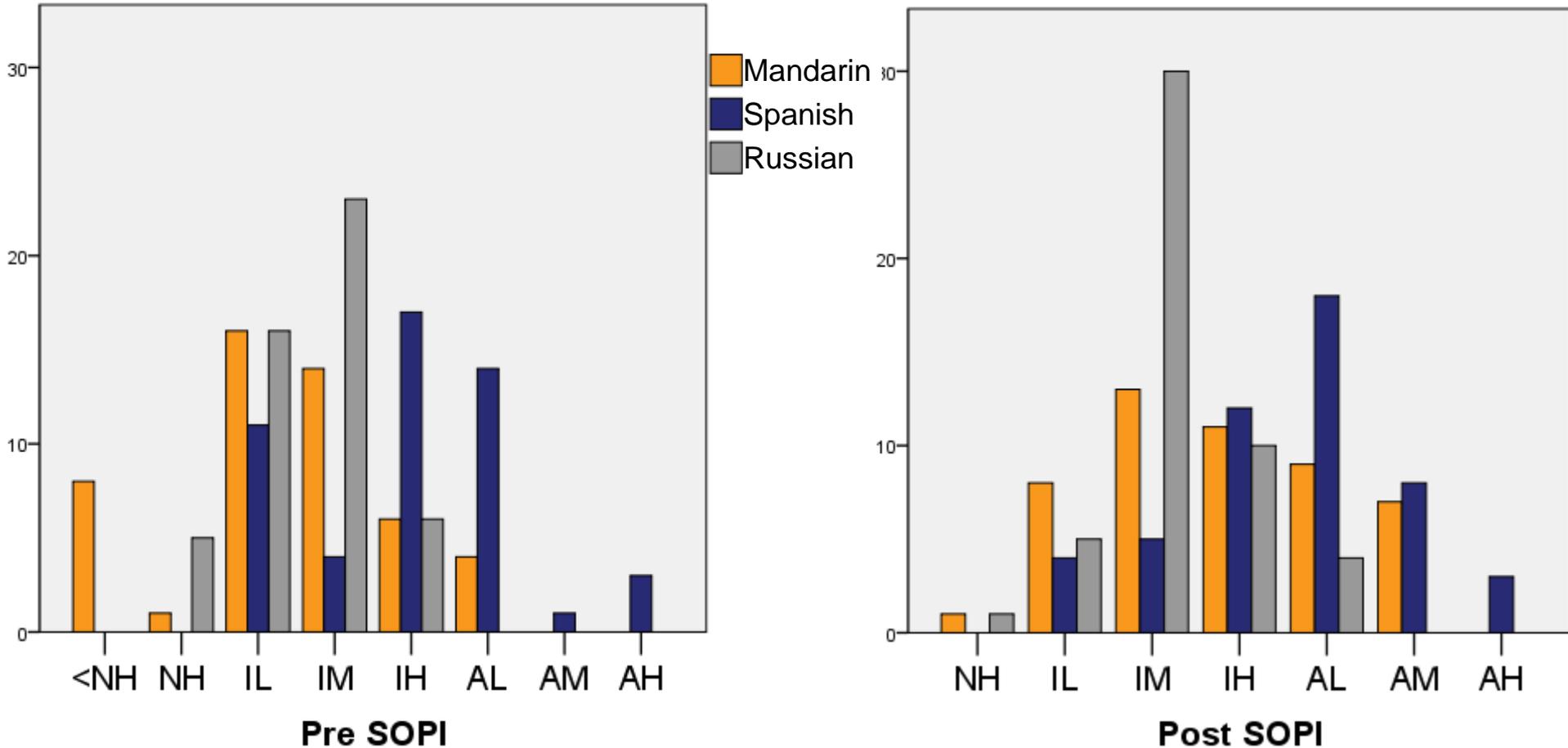
Data analysis

- ▶ SOPI ratings converted to values (Vande Berg et al., 2009) and a subset of performances transcribed

Rating	Conversion
Novice Mid	0.3
Novice High	0.8
Intermediate Low	1.1
Intermediate Mid	1.3
Intermediate High	1.8
Advanced Low	2.1
Advanced Mid	2.3
Advanced High	2.8

- ▶ Statistical analyses compared survey responses to student SOPI gain versus non-gain
- ▶ Open-ended survey responses coded thematically

Results: Pre and post SOPI by language



Results: SOPI gains

- ▶ No significant difference between groups at pretest
- ▶ Participants experienced significant gains in their SOPI ratings, $t(148)=-13.23$, $p<.001$, $r=.74$

Group	Change in ACTFL Level			
	=	+1	+2	+3
Experimental ($n = 87$)	23 (27%)	49 (57%)	13 (15%)	1 (1%)
Control ($n = 65$)	20 (32%)	35 (56%)	7 (11%)	1 (2%)
Total	43	84	20	2

Results: SOPI fluency

- ▶ 4 pre and post SOPI tasks of 25 learners transcribed in each language
- ▶ Preliminary findings for Spanish
 - Students who gained on the SOPI significantly increased their speech rate, mean length of run, and rate of repetitions and repairs, and decreased their rate of silent pauses
 - Students who did not gain on the SOPI significantly increased their speech rate and decreased their rate of filled pauses
- ▶ Preliminary findings for Mandarin
 - Students significantly increased their speech rate, rate of repetitions and repairs, and rate of filled pauses (there were only 2 non-gainers in this group)

Results: Group differences

- ▶ No significant difference found in SOPI gains between groups overall or within each language
- ▶ Control group reported significantly lower frequency of language learning activities with host family than experimental group
 - Correcting of mistakes
 - Discussion of grammar rules
 - Discussion of idioms
 - **Asking of questions**

Results: Predictors of SOPI gain

- ▶ Lower starting proficiency level
- ▶ Time engaged in language partner exchange
- ▶ Post-survey agreement that “I am glad that I lived with a host family.”
- ▶ Student satisfaction with homestay also predicted agreement that “I learned as much [language] as I thought I would.”
 - Strongest relationship with “My host family helped me improve my [language] skills.”

Results: Student open-ended feedback

“What could your host family have done to help you learn more [language]?” (N=109)

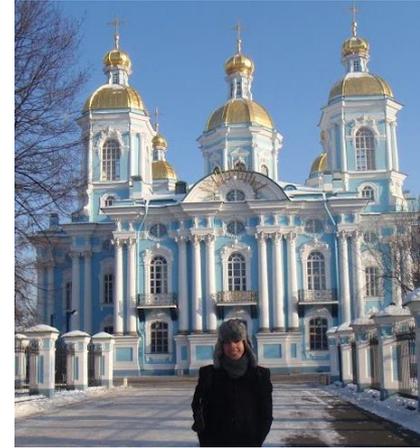
- ▶ They were great and couldn't have done more (27)
- ▶ Correct me more (17)
- ▶ Interact with me more (14)
- ▶ **Ask me more questions** (5% EG, 9% CG), **initiate more conversations** (5% EG, 9% CG), spend more time with me, be more patient with my speech, don't speak English/speak TL (7 each)
- ▶ 5 students admitted they should have done more

Select student survey quotes

“Ask me more about myself, tell me more about themselves: in some ways I don't think basic conversations happened as much as they maybe should have. Seek to talk with me about current events and politics.” (CG)

“Engage me a little more. I just lived with one older woman and I have no idea how to start a conversation about something with a stranger from a different culture. I didn't know what questions about her life would be fine to ask and which would be too familiar to ask.” (CG)

“My host family couldn't have done more. I feel that any remaining improvement could be made on my part by speaking more Spanish with my friends and classmates.” (EG)



Results: Family open-ended feedback

“How could the training be more effective and useful to you as a host?” ($N = 53$)

- ▶ Training was beneficial (30)
- ▶ It was good to exchange ideas in a group (6)
- ▶ Have more sessions (5) and longer training (2)
- ▶ Success of strategies depends on student characteristics (5)

Select family quotes (translated)

“It is easy to talk about training, but it is hard to put it into practice. It’s very hard to communicate with the students because of their Chinese levels. It’s hard to do some deep conversation.”

“Such trainings should be conducted regularly.”

“I think it was good, clear, and entertaining. In addition it allowed us to share experiences with other host mothers.”

“That there could be another meeting with the trainer and the other hosts to see how the students have improved.”

Challenges and lessons learned

- ▶ Recruiting: Start early and communicate often
- ▶ Retention: Explain purpose of study and offer compensation to participants
- ▶ Data collection: Conduct site visits to meet and train staff; use digital formats; make backups!
- ▶ NOT a challenge: Host family interest and participation

Implications for programs (1/2)

- ▶ Students want more interaction and time with hosts
 - Suggest patience with speech, more correction, less English, reviewing assignments, watching TV, taking students on outings
- ▶ Families desire more training with concrete examples
 - Suggest discussion of topics of interest to students, interactive activities, written materials, organized excursion with students
- ▶ Training should consider variability of students
 - Shyness
 - Motivation
 - Starting proficiency level

Implications for programs (2/2)

- ▶ Encourage students to be proactive in pursuing interactions and activities with host families
 - Use explicit instruction or required assignments
 - Glad to have lived with a host family → SOPI gain
 - Thought host family helped with language → Satisfaction with language learning

- ▶ Give host families ownership in student learning
 - Elicit family feedback on homestay practices and interactions
 - Discuss role in student progress
 - Provide training in strategies to draw out students!

- ▶ Encourage students to participate in language partner exchanges

Implications for research

- ▶ Further research on training intervention
 - Expand training based on student and host suggestions
 - Incorporate findings from language socialization research
 - Develop training protocols for students
 - Consider a joint session with students and families
- ▶ Additional means of assessing oral gains
- ▶ Additional research questions
 - What are students' expectations for language learning during study abroad?
 - What types of interventions support different languages and settings, and learners whose focus is not strictly language gain?
- ▶ More diverse populations of study
 - Age, sending institution, country of origin, program model

Next steps

1. Continue to analyze SOPI transcriptions
 - Measures of fluency across languages and relation to survey responses
 - Specific linguistic features
2. Analyze conversation transcriptions
 - Conversation topics
 - Turn-taking and other discourse patterns
 - Questions and strategies used by hosts
3. Pursue further research to maximize language learning benefits of study abroad
 - Collaboration
 - Dissemination to stakeholders

Small group discussion

Please discuss the following questions in small groups:

- 1. In what specific ways do you believe students abroad should improve their second language proficiency?**
- 2. What interventions do you believe educators should make to help students abroad improve their second language proficiency?**
- 3. What would the characteristics of an assessment program be that would provide evidence that students abroad are improving their second language proficiency?**

Thank you!

- ▶ To learn more about this study, see article by Di Silvio, Donovan, & Malone in Spring 2014 issue of *Foreign Language Annals*
- ▶ Questions?

fdisolvio@cal.org

mvandenberg@MVBassociates.com



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