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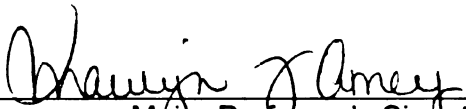
STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS AND THEIR EFFECT ON POSSIBLE
LANGUAGE 2 SELVES DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE
LEARNING STRATEGIES

presented by

MARIA VILLALOBOS-BUEHNER

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Ph.D degree in Educational Administration



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**STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS AND THEIR EFFECT ON POSSIBLE LANGUAGE
2 SELVES DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES**

By

Maria Villalobos-Buehner

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ABSTRACT

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS AND THEIR EFFECT ON POSSIBLE LANGUAGE 2 SELVES DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

By

Maria Villalobos-Buehner

Each year numerous language learners decide to travel abroad in order to improve their language skills. Many studies have investigated the linguistic and cultural gains that those students acquired during their study abroad. However, little is known about how these experiences influence the students' learning motivation, development of learning strategies, and future perceptions of themselves as language learners. The following study explored the role of study abroad programs in the development of possible second or foreign language selves and the effect of moving from a second language to a foreign language context in the development of possible L2 selves. Twenty subjects took part in the individual interviews and focus groups. This study employed qualitative data techniques such as color-coding to analyze it. The results show that most of the subjects held future images of themselves as language learners. Subjects with salient possible language selves after their abroad experience were more motivated, and were able to use multifarious language learning strategies in order to keep their language gains once they were back from their abroad sojourn. These students were also able to overcome obstacles easily by creating alternative approaches that helped them move towards the achievement of their possible L2 selves. On the other hand, students with less salient possible L2 selves after their abroad experience encountered difficulties maintaining their possible L2 selves salient. Some students' PL2Ss disappeared from their working self-concept. This study contributes to the development of a more holistic view of language

learning motivation. It also presents language educators with possibilities to enhance language learning. Furthermore, universities and adult education institutions could benefit from the results of this study in order to create mechanisms to promote student achievement and student retention.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

L2 – Second or Foreign Language

L2self – Language 2 self

IS – Ideal Self or Ideal Selves

IL2S- Ideal second or foreign language selves

PS – Possible Selves

PL2S – Possible Second or Foreign Language Selves

SA – Study Abroad

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Origins of the Study

Study abroad programs are becoming an essential component of a student's college experience. According to the Open Doors 2007 report by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number of U.S. students going abroad for academic credit increased by 8.5 percent in 2007-2008 to 241,791 from the previous year. Since the academic year 1995/1996, the number of U.S. students studying abroad has gone up by almost 150%.

Students' accounts state many positive outcomes from these programs. Some of these are an increased internationalist orientation, an enhanced knowledge of the world, greater maturity, improved communication skills and life changing experiences (Hulstrand, 2006; Ingram, 2005; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Wilkinson, 2002). The field of language learning, in particular, has promoted study abroad as one of the best opportunities to build, use, and improve foreign language skills outside the classroom (Wilkinson, 2002). SA¹ provides the opportunity to live the language and to engage in meaningful and authentic communication in the target language and personal interactions with native speakers (Pellegrino, 1998). Research has revealed that study-abroad programs can enhance students' acquisition of a foreign language (Carroll 1967; Freed, 1995), improve their knowledge of the host culture, and even transform their worldviews (Ingram, 2005).

¹ SA is a short form for study abroad.

Various studies have concentrated on the impact of a study abroad experience on a range of academic measures such as vocabulary and grammar acquisition, cultural adjustment measures, and employability measures (Barker, 1985; Freed, 1995; Huebner, 1995). Much of the research done in the area of language learning focuses on how the experience of studying abroad increases students' cognitive knowledge of the language and improves the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Yet, relatively little is known about how this experience might have influenced the way students learn, their second language goals and their perception of themselves as second language learners or second language speakers that could demand a different educational approach once they are back in order for them to maintain their language achievements and for this experience to have long lasting gains.

Many students have expressed how the abroad sojourn helped them better understand themselves as learners (Weltens & Grendel, 1993). Educators also declared that SA students are more motivated and engaged in expanding and improving their language knowledge when they return home: "they are more curious and more actively involved in their learning process" (Gray et al., 2002, p.49). However, learners have expressed concern about the possibility of losing the skills acquired during their experience abroad after returning from their trip (Freed, 1998; Jimenez, 2004). Exploring this area could inform curricula and classroom practices by highlighting the importance of a strong connection between the experiences of studying abroad, the home curriculum, and learner needs. There must be a link between them that ensure continuity and that consider the study abroad experience part of the whole language learning process rather than an isolated event in a student's education. Not connecting the SA sojourn with a

student's learning needs back home could promote attrition and even language loss. By examining this connection, different institutions could offer more articulated and accountable programs that could gain support from policy makers. Carl Herrin, a Congressional lobbyist, insists that policy makers want to see results before apportioning money to abroad programs. He said "If you give me a study that tells me about the impact of study abroad, or how it works, or what makes it more effective, that informs in very useful ways the arguments that one makes to policymakers about how programs ought to be structured, whether or not they ought to be funded, if so at what level, and why they're ultimately valuable to the national interest" (Hulstrand, 2006, p.1). The following study focused on the students' motivation for and development of learning strategies after the experience with the aim of maintaining language gains and increasing the fluency acquired during their experience abroad. This study also looked at changes in the students' self-perceptions as language learners after the experience.

This study contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of motivation and possible L2² -self in the students' development of learning strategies and their desire to pursue further language learning. Markus and Nurius (1986) define "possible selves" as representations of the self in the future that one could become or are afraid of becoming. These possible selves are the cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals, and threats that could help understand future behaviors. Greene and DeBacker (2004 in Leondari, 2007) state that future time perspective can be a powerful motivator of current behavior. A sense of purpose for the future is an important factor in moving individuals to engage in activities perceived to be instrumental in achieving valued future outcomes (Simmons,

² L2 means second or foreign language.

Dewitte, and Lens, 2000 in Leondari, 2007). To be primarily responsible for and in control of one's knowledge is critical to survival and prosperity in a world of continuous personal, community, and societal changes (Caffarella, 1993).

Part of my interest is also in how the transition between second language contexts to foreign language contexts affects motivation for language learning among students, including engaging in continued language-related experiences. These questions help flush out deeper understanding of how students develop possible L2 selves.

Research Question

This research has a major research question and two sub questions that helped me explore the role of the L2 self in the field of language learning motivation.

How do students develop possible L2 selves?

1. What is the role of Study Abroad in the development of possible L2 selves?
2. What happens when they return from Study Abroad? What is the effect of moving from a second language to a foreign language context in the development of possible L2 selves?

This study contributed to the body of research on study abroad, language learning and motivational theories by providing a more multidimensional picture of student motivation and by focusing on the development of learning strategies used by students after the study abroad experience in order to develop and retain language skills.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions and abbreviations help readers to understand the main purpose of this research as well as its findings and its discussion sections:

SA: Study Abroad

Second or Foreign Language: it refers to a language different from the native one.

Second Language Acquisition: refers to the process of learning a language different from the mother tongue in a country in which the target language is the official one. For instance, if an English speaking student learns Spanish in Mexico, Spanish would be considered his second language.

Foreign Language Acquisition: refers to the process of learning a language different from the mother tongue in a country in which the target language is not the official one. For instance, if an English speaking student learns Spanish in the United States, Spanish would be considered his foreign language.

L2: This abbreviation refers to a second or a foreign language

Possible Selves: reflect the images, senses and thoughts people have about their future.

“Possible selves represent the individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989, p. 212)

Possible L2 Selves: images, senses and thoughts people have about their second or foreign language self in the future (Dörnyei, 2005).

Ideal L2 self: refers to the representation of the attributes that one would ideally like to possess.

Ought L2 self: refers to the representation of attributes that one believes one ought to possess as a L2 speaker.

Feared L2 Possible Self: refers to the representation of attributes one does not want to possess as a second language speaker.

Integrativeness: the desire to learn an L2 of a valued community so that one can communicate with members of the community and sometimes even become like them.

Organization of the Thesis

The following study consists of five chapters, the first of which is this Introduction Chapter. Chapter two contains the literature review for this study, which is an examination of the development of motivational theory, the ideal L2 Self theory and the student involvement theory as well as a description of the latest studies in the study abroad field based on those theories. Chapter three describes the methodology used. I discuss and explain my research methods and the rationale behind the design of my research instruments. This thesis was qualitative and used individual and focus group interviews as primary sources for collecting data. In this chapter I explain some of the major considerations affecting my approach and justify why this is a legitimate and principled strategy. Chapter four presents the findings of this study, which are organized in four major themes: first, L2 self availability and goal setting before, during and after the abroad experience; second, L2 self accessibility during and after the abroad experience; third, the presence of L2selves and academic selves; fourth, the presence of L2selves and other selves. Chapter five discusses and interprets those findings from an L2 self perspective. Chapter six presents the conclusions, limitations of the study and implications for future studies as well as some suggestions for practical uses of the L2 self theory in the classroom and other university areas to improve students' motivation and retention.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Study Abroad and Language Learning Research

The different studies in the area of foreign or second language learning and the impact of study abroad programs on this area have been dominated by linguistic and sociolinguistic approaches. However, very few have explored how abroad experiences affect students' motivation and the way they approach their learning. The following chapter provides an inclusive description of the different types of research done in the area of language learning, study abroad, language-learning motivation and the possible selves construct. The purpose of this chapter is first to position the following study within the broad area of language learning and study abroad research, and second, to explain how this study contributes to the expansion of research done in the area of language learning motivation and student involvement.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section depicts the diverse literature about language learning and study abroad, which is organized into two general sub-sections. The first sub-section reviews research that demonstrates the linguistic gains of students after experiencing a sojourn abroad. These studies are mainly quantitative and made use of test scores to measure these gains. The second sub-section describes research that examined student perceptions of the study abroad living and learning experience and the impact of this experience on cultural awareness skills. The second section explores the different theories and studies that shape the conceptual framework of the proposed study. This section is divided into three parts. The first part describes the investigations in the field of motivation and language learning motivation.

The second part explores the research in the area of the possible self-theory and its role in language learning motivation. The last part looks into different studies that address both student engagement and study abroad experiences.

Recent Studies of the Impact of Study Abroad on Language Learning and Cultural Awareness

The following segment of the literature review describes studies about language improvement of explicit linguistic characteristics such as the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical structures after students come back from studying abroad. Then, it describes the research that examine student perceptions of the sojourn abroad and its impact on cross-cultural skills and global understanding.

Research on study abroad (SA) impact on language learning.

Research on the influence of study abroad in language acquisition is based on studies that measure the development of language abilities such as oral proficiency, sociolinguistic skills and literacy skills, among others (Freed, 1998). Carroll's (1967) study is one of the most widely cited because it relates to language proficiency gains deriving from the study abroad experience. He looked at the foreign language proficiency levels attained at the time of graduation by American college students who majored in French, German, Italian, Russian, or Spanish. He found that for all of the variables examined, the amount of time spent abroad was the strongest predictor of language gains in all the skills. Carroll stated, "Time spent abroad is clearly one of the most potent variables we have found... Even a tour abroad, or a summer school course abroad, is useful, apparently, in improving the student's skill" (p. 137). After this study, one can find a fair amount of research that corroborates the impact of study abroad on language

acquisition (Freed, 1995; Huebner, 1995; Lafford, 1995; Lisking-Gasparro & Urdaneta, 1995). These are mainly quantitative studies that have used the OPI³ (Oral Proficiency Interview) assessment method to contrast pre and post program results in different areas of language gains. Their results show significant gains in listening, reading and speaking after study abroad. Freed (1995) compared fluency gains of 15 college students of French and of a control group of 15 students in order to measure the impact of SA in the fluency or rate of speech. She used the OPI as the assessment method. This study shows that the rate of speech was significantly higher for the study abroad students than for the control group. However, the results of this study are limited to American students, to one-semester programs, and to short-term gains (Freed, 1998).

More recent studies have focused on specific linguistic features such as the use of fillers, modifiers, formulae and compensation strategies, and use diverse conceptual frameworks. Isabelli (2001) measured the extent that the language learners' internal factors of linguistic universals are impacted by the external factor of input in the study-abroad learning environment. According to Isabelli (Ibid.), research in second language acquisition (SLA) has shown that second language (L2) learners draw on two types of language sources when learning or acquiring an L2: an internal source, such as language transferred from the learners' first language (L1), cognitive processes, and linguistic universals; and an external source, such as social variables, input, and interaction. Therefore, she decided to study three properties of the null subject parameter (NSP) that are very common in the process of learning a second language: (a) missing subject pronouns; (b) verb-subject inversion; and (c) that –trace filter violation. The subjects

³ The Oral Proficiency Interview – OPI- assesses oral proficiency in a modern language. It measures language proficiency by identifying patterns of strengths and weaknesses in oral communication. The specific aspects evaluated are: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

were 31 American intermediate learners of Spanish during their one-year-study-abroad stay in Spain. The control group consisted of 18 native Spanish speakers. The data were collected before and after the study abroad from grammar judgment tests and oral narratives. The statistical results showed that the learners improved on all three syntactic properties of the NSP over the nine months.

Those studies mentioned are mainly quantitative and their results rely on test scores. Most of this research demonstrates the linguistic advantages of a sojourn abroad. However, there is a lack of longitudinal study of these gains over a long term period. Longcope's study (2003) tries to fill this void by investigating long-term effects of study abroad on second language (L2) learning. The results revealed that study abroad had no long-term impact on any aspect of interlanguage⁴. He also found that the study abroad context was more conducive to language learning than the pre-study abroad English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context because learners had more contact with English and because conditions such as negotiation for meaning were more available on an interaction-by- interaction basis. However, this study lacks deep analysis of the results to explain why the study abroad context was not conducive to long term results in language learning.

Even though these studies prove the linguistic advantages of study abroad experiences, little is known about specific qualitative changes in students' language proficiency (Freed, 1998) and language learning processes after the experience. One study that is worth mentioning because it is an attempt to explain possible causes of language attrition is Jiménez's (2004) research on the linguistic and psychological

⁴ Interlanguage is a form of language typically produced by learners of a second language, which combines elements of two or more languages.

dimensions of second language attrition during and after a study abroad experience. The main purpose of this research was to explore an innovative approach to the study of language attrition that links social participation to linguistic production and psychological functioning. This study was carried out within a Sociocultural and Activity theoretical framework and followed a longitudinal design. Jiménez interviewed and collected written and oral story narrations from ten L2 adult learners of Spanish who took part in a five-month study abroad program. He interviewed them during and after the program for a seven-month period. Jiménez collected information on types of Spanish mediated activities and the amount of time spent on them after the study abroad experience in Spain, divided the subjects into two groups- participants and non-participants-, and performed a linguistic and psychological analyses. This study suggests that a higher level of participation in Spanish mediated activities translates into an enhanced ability to maintain self-regulation. It also shows that over time, those who did not maintain contact with Spanish upon returning to the US had considerable problems maintaining self-regulation during linguistic performance. However, it is important to mention that this study used only two tasks, video-based storytelling and writing, and the results obtained may be representative of only these two elicitation methods.

The present study delves deeper into the concepts of activity and participation than the Jiménez's (2004) study, and it expands this body of research by using engagement, the self and motivational theories as ways of looking at the types of involvement in the development of language learning strategies after the experience abroad. The results reveal new outcomes from the SA experience that could facilitate the development of curricula and new pedagogies that support further language engagement

and motivation for achievement. In the next section, I address a more qualitative body of research that delves into more personal accounts about the impact of the study abroad on future goals and world perceptions that can be relevant to my topic of how these experiences could shape future projections of the student's L2 self.

Student perceptions of the study abroad living and learning experience.

This section describes research that is relevant to the present investigation and that presents a view of the study abroad experience from the students' perspective. Research on this topic fell into these broad categories: race and gender identity, professional and cross-cultural skills development, and student persistence.

Talburt and Stewart (1999) examined SA by exploring individual and curricular implications of the potential for race and gender to affect profoundly students' cultural learning. They used semi-structured individual interviews of 6 students who described and reflected on their experiences in Spain. These interviews show that peer groups constitute sources of identity and cross-cultural understanding for students abroad. Lindsey (2005) explores how a study abroad experience affected students with respect to their personal and professional values. The author describes findings related to values development from a larger qualitative study of how social work students perceive their study abroad experience to affect them both personally and professionally. The findings from this study indicate that study abroad may have an important role in fostering appreciation of and commitment to professional social work values. This experience also seemed to enhance students' commitment to the integrity of the profession.

Hernandez De Santis (2004) examined the reflections of twelve American exchange students who studied for one semester or an entire academic year in different

Mexican universities in order to show how these students' academic and intercultural experiences impacted their lives. She used interviews and journal entries as data collection methods, and content analysis and the constant comparative method as the analytical technique. The findings demonstrate important linguistic, cultural, academic and professional impacts such as a development of intercultural sensitivities, a significant determinant in their career direction, and advancement to better job opportunities.

Other studies provide evidence on the impact of study abroad programs in the development of cross-cultural skills (Armstrong, 1984; Black & Duhon, 2006; Dowell, 1996; Forgues, 2005; Wortman, 2002). Kitsantas (2004), for instance, examined the broader impact that study abroad programs have on students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding and the effect that students' goals have on these outcomes. Two hundred and thirty two (N=232) students enrolled in study abroad courses took part in this study and were administered the Cross-cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) prior to departure and after coming back from the experience. The results show that overall students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding improved, but students' goals for study abroad influenced the outcomes. Kitsantas' study shows a strong correlation between the interest of students in studying abroad in order to improve cross-cultural competence before the experience and their achievement of higher levels of cross-cultural skills after the experience. However, she does not explore the reasons for these outcomes.

Other research supports the effects of SA programs on study persistence (Young, 2003), students' attitudes and behavior with regard to language learning (Armstrong, 1984; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003; Teichler & Steube, 1991), and language retention (Oxford, 1982; Tucker, Hamayan, & Genesee, 1976). However, there is a lack of studies

that examine students' motivation and involvement in language learning beyond the classroom after the study abroad experience. As described above, the majority of the research done in the field of language learning is quantitative and examines discrete outcomes. The qualitative research takes place mainly during the study abroad or right after coming back and focuses on students' recounts of their experiences and assessment of cross-cultural skills. This study helps to provide a more multidimensional picture of the students' language learning involvement after returning from the abroad sojourn and of the development of strategies that could help students retain what they accomplished after the experience. The present study examines the development of strategies from motivational and student involvement theoretical perspectives and from the possible selves construct. The combination of these three constructs can provide a more comprehensive explanation of the students' decisions, attitudes and actions to further engage in language learning after the abroad experience.

Shaping the Conceptual Framework: Research on Motivational Theories, the "Possible selves", and Student Engagement Constructs

Motivational Theories

Motivation has been considered a significant construct in an individual's learning development that people would like to predict but as Wlodkowski (1999) points out, motivation as a way to explain why people do what they do or behave as they do "evades any simple explanation or prescription" (p.1). In the field of education, motivation has been considered a vital ingredient of learning; therefore, one can find a large body of research. For the purpose of this study, I briefly describe the motivational research done in the field of adult learning, and I focus on the motivational research done in the field of language learning.

Adult learning motivation.

The literature in adult learning motivation is very extensive and diverse. One of the first studies that tries to simplify the types of adult motivational orientation of participation is Houle's (1961). He conducted a series of 2-hour interviews with about 25 residents of the Chicago area from different socioeconomic backgrounds, ages, gender and marital statuses. He found that his interviewees held three learning orientations: the goal-oriented student that sees learning as an opportunity to get ahead; the activity oriented student that is in the search of social stimulation, and the learning-oriented student that is addicted to learning (Dollisso & Martin, 1999). One of the many critiques is that his classification lacks statistical respectability and it is very simplistic. However, Houle makes clear that this was a pilot study that so frequently precedes more ambitious, comprehensive and rigorous examination (Whipple & Williams, 1963). Other studies have tried to classify adult motivational desires in different categories such as the desire to know, to reach a social goal, to reach a religious goal (Burgess, 1971) and to gain skills (Oaklief & Oaklief, 1982). Other studies have classified adult learning motivation in different factors such as internal ones (Knowles, 1984) and practical, applied and instrumental ones in order to adapt to a changing environment (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; Mezirow, 1985).

Another common thread in the literature concerning adult motivation is the importance to respond to the adult learners' needs, interests and culture in order to establish conditions to enhance learning experiences and to maintain motivation. One of the most influential pieces of work in human needs is Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs, which he divides into deficiency and growth. According to Maslow, an

individual is ready to act upon the growth needs (self actualized and self-transcendent) if and only if the deficiency needs are met; as one becomes more self-actualized and self-transcendent, one gets wiser. Bandura (1994) stated that people with high confidence in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided.

Wlodkowski (1999) offers a model of teaching and learning that values motivation and culture to promote extensive learning. The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching is a systemic representation of intersecting motivational conditions that teachers and learners can construct and enhance. These conditions are: establishing an inclusive learning atmosphere, free of anxiety; developing a favorable attitude toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice; enhancing meaning by creating challenging learning experiences that include learners' point of views and values; and engendering competence by creating an understanding that learners are effective in learning something they value (Wlodkowski, 1999).

Keller's (1999) ARCS model is another approach to address the challenge of stimulating and maintaining learners' motivation. He offers four categories of motivational concepts that help analyze the motivational characteristics of a group of students and help in the design of strategies to enhance motivation. The steps are to gain the learner's attention, to build relevance of the strategy in the student's life, to promote the learner's confidence in the attainment of learning goals, and to encourage the learner's intrinsic feelings of satisfaction.

The previously cited studies look at motivation from a goal-oriented standpoint and offer some models to enhance adult learning motivation. The present work

contributes to this body of research by looking at adult motivation from a future perspective, in order to provide a more holistic view of the motivational construct. As formerly stated, the literature about adult motivation is very varied. There are more works that could be mentioned in this section but I have cited the most relevant ones to this study.

Motivation in language learning.

As one can see, motivation is a complex construct to define but one cannot deny its importance in language learning because it not only helps determine the level of involvement in learning (Okada, Oxford & Abo, 2003) but motivation helps maintain the students' language ability beyond the classroom (Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1985 in Okada et al., 2003). Gardner (2001) stated that this construct encourages greater effort on the part of the learner and thus, greater success in language performance. He affirms that language-learning strategies probably will not be used if the individual is not motivated to learn the language. One of the most cited theories in language learning motivation is Gardner's (1988) socio-educational model of language acquisition. His model makes a distinction between two classes of motivational orientations: integrative and instrumental (Gardner, 2001; Schmidt, Boraie, & Kassabgy, 1996). The instrumental orientation results from recognition of the practical advantages of learning such as academic achievement or economic and social advancement. An integrative orientation is identified when learners state that they want to learn a foreign language in order to interact with the other community (Schmidt, Boraie, & Kassabgy, 1996). According to Masgoret and Gardner (2003), individuals who want to identify with the other language group will be more motivated to learn the language than individuals who do not.

A critique of Gardner's conclusion is that the majority of his studies were done in Canada, which is a bilingual country (Dörnyei, 1990) and therefore, it offers the advantage of second language contexts in which subjects have more regular contact with the target language community. Dörnyei (1990) argues, "Foreign language learners often have not had enough contact with the target language community to form attitudes about them" (p.69) and that students often learn a foreign language for purely practical reasons; therefore, an instrumental motive would be more likely to lead to successful learning of the language.

In continuing the attempt to depict the complexity of motivation, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) suggest an expanded definition of L2 learning motivation "in terms of choice, engagement, and persistence" (p. 502). They state that motivation to learn a language has both internal and external features. Their motivational structure includes four internal attitudinal factors such as interest in the L2 based on experiences, relevance, expectancy of success or failure and outcomes or rewards. It also includes external or behavioral characteristics such as the student's decision to engage in L2 learning, the student's perseverance, and the student's maintenance of high activity level.

Dörnyei (1994a) stresses that many aspects of L2 motivation do not neatly fit into earlier paradigms. He suggests additional components such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, goal setting, and cognitive components such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, need for achievement, and course specific, teacher specific and group specific components (Oxford, 1996). Ryan (2006) points out that motivation and individuals are not fixed, and that motivation changes over time and in response to interactions with others and the target language. Dörnyei (2001) offers a model that

explains the temporal variation of motivation and adds to its dynamic character already indicated above. He states that learners could experience a dramatic variation in their motivation over a longer period of time and in order to capture this variation, he proposes to adopt a *process-oriented approach* that can consider the changes of motivation over time. This approach has three stages; preactional, actional and postactional stage. The preactional stage is when the motivation needs are generated and the individual selects the goals or tasks to be pursued. The actional stage is when the motivation needs are actively maintained. The postactional stage is when after an action is completed; the individual makes a retrospective evaluation on how things went. Even though this model helps to think about motivation as a construct that can change over-time, it provides a very linear representation that perceives every motivated individual as a self-directed learner.

Dörnyei's (1990) study was among the first ones to attempt broadening Gardner's integrativeness orientation. He conducted research among 134 Hungarian learners of English to investigate the difference between motivation in foreign language learning and a second language acquisition environment. The results from a questionnaire indicated that the motivation at an intermediate level was instrumental and at a higher level, motivation was integrative. He questioned the applicability of the concept of integrativeness in foreign learning contexts where learners of a target language have little direct contact with an L2 community. After Dörnyei's research numerous studies echoed his concerns (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; McClelland, 2000).

Noels, Pelletier, Clement and Vallerand (2003) tried to expand Gardner's instrumental and integrative orientation by considering how intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation might inform the understanding of motivation. They describe intrinsic motivation (IM) as the reason “to engage in an activity because that activity is enjoyable and satisfying to do” (p.38). Extrinsically motivated (EM) behaviors, on the other hand, are actions accomplished in order to achieve some instrumental end, such as getting a good grade or avoiding a penalty. This study suggests that those who naturally enjoy the feeling of learning an L2 may not necessarily feel personally involved in the learning process; “they may view language learning as a puzzle or a language game that has few repercussions in everyday life” (p.53). It points out that low perception of freedom of choice and perceived competence are also indicative of higher levels of amotivation. Finally, this research found out that the more internalized the reason for L2 learning, the more comfortable and persevering students claimed to be. Noels et al. suggest that students who learn an L2 in an autonomy-supportive environment where feedback enhances their sense of competence in the learning task are likely to be those students who learn because it appeals to their self-concept. This study contributes towards a more comprehensive conceptualization of motivation and emphasizes the importance of learners’ effort and achievement in the L2.

Dörnyei and Csizér’s (2002) study contributes to the multidimensional picture of the relationship between motivation and learning outcomes achievement by looking at motivation as a concept that explains why people behave as they do rather than how successful their behavior will be. They surveyed 8,593 pupils of 13 or 14 years of age twice, in 1993 and in 1999, to examine attitudinal/motivational factors in light of two criterion measures related to motivated language behavior: (a) the students’ language choice for future L2 studies, and (b) the amount of effort the students intend to exert on

learning a given language. The researchers found that “these two measures are central concepts in motivation research because they concern the two main aspects of motivated human behavior, its direction and its magnitude” (p.2). They also mentioned the possibility of looking at integrativeness within the larger framework of the *Ideal Self* or *The Ideal L2 Self* (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in order to provide integrativeness with a broader sense that could explain its superior position in diverse learning contexts. Dörnyei and Csizér claim that if one’s ideal self is associated with being proficient in L2, then the student’s motivation can be described as having an integrative disposition. Dörnyei and Csizér propose to redefine L2 motivation “as the desire to achieve one’s ideal language self by reducing the discrepancy between one’s actual and ideal L2 selves” (p.12). The present study contributes to this new research trend by exploring the influence of study abroad language programs in the development of an ideal L2 Self and its impact on the students’ integrative or instrumental motivation in the development of learning strategies. Since SA programs offer the opportunity for a learner to move from a second language context back into a foreign language context, it sheds light about the types of motives that might encourage students to engage in further language learning.

The Possible Selves Construct

To move beyond motivational and attitudinal questionnaires and to personalize motivation, researchers look at the individual’s psychosocial and sociocultural development as important factors in one’s motivation (Syed, 2001). The social cognitive research has focused on one’s idea of oneself in the future and suggests that people expect likely outcomes of prospective actions; they set goals for themselves and plan courses of actions to achieve hoped futures; “They motivate themselves and guide their

actions anticipatorily through the exercise of forethought” (Bandura, 1988, p.37). Having a sense of purpose for the future is an important factor in moving individuals to engage in activities perceived instrumental in achieving valued future outcomes (Leondari, 2007). Some theorists conceptualize this orientation to the future as the Future Time Perspective construct (FTP) which is understood as the mental representation of the future that individuals create at certain points in their lives (Hoyle & Sherrill, 2006; Lens, 2001; Leondari, 2007). Leondari (2007) asserts that the FTP provides the basis for setting personal goals and life plans that may affect the individual’s life course and it could influence how far into the future a possible self can be projected. For Markus and Ruvolo (1989), needs and goals are fundamental elements of the self-system and in order to understand their functioning, one must look into the self-system.

According to Crookes and Schmidt (1991), students’ expectations of self and self-evaluations of likelihood of success appear to have important motivational effects and it is this concept of the self that has been the focus of recent research in learning motivation. One self-construct that is spearheading this trend is Markus and Nurius (1986)’s possible self. They define “Possible selves” as individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming. They explain that an individual is free to create a variety of possible selves but only those linked to the individual’s particular socio-cultural and historical contexts and social experiences are the most significant and the most likely to occur. For Ryan (2006) the ‘self’ perspective offers the possibility of a more rounded, more complete description of learning motivation. “Instead of describing motivation in terms of a desire to integrate externally, this model is based on the learner as a social being, as a real member of an

imagined community attempting to square hopes and aspirations with perceived responsibilities and obligations as members of a community” (p.40).

Other research explores how possible selves may influence ongoing performance or behavior in different areas, in school, at work, in the streets or along a life span. Ruvalo and Markus (1992), using a guided imagery task, attempted to activate either positive or negative possible selves in the working self-concept of ninety-one undergraduate women. The goal of this study was to determine whether the enhanced performance accompanying success imagery was a consequence of imagining one’s own success in general, or of imagining success as a direct result of one’s own efforts. Subjects were told to “imagine themselves in the future” and then were given one of four different descriptions of this future:

- (a) Success Work: everything had gone well because they worked hard and succeeded in achieving their goals.
- (b) Success Luck: everything had gone well and they were very fortunate and had some ‘lucky breaks’ along the way.
- (c) Failure Work: everything had gone badly and they had worked very hard but failed to achieve their goals.
- (d) Failure Luck: they had been very unlucky and had some ‘bad breaks’ along the way.

Their study showed that the subjects in the success-work condition worked much longer on the persistence task than did the failure subjects. Furthermore, respondents in the success work conditions were significantly faster than the failure work group to say “yes, it is possible for me” to be prestigious, successful etc. These subjects were also

faster to say “no, it is not possible for me” to be a failure, lazy etc. Ruvolo and Markus (1992) concluded that those in the success-work condition had working self-concepts that were dominated by positive possibility. In contrast, those who were focused on future failure were probably consumed by conceptions or images of negative possible selves. Cross and Markus (1991) designed a study in order to examine the nature of possible selves at various points in the life span. They found that the respondents between the ages of 18 and 86 were able to generate hoped-for and feared possible selves that they could describe vividly and specifically. Cross and Markus suggested that representations of the self in future states may be indeed relatively accessible features of the self-knowledge repertoire.

Other studies explored possible selves as self-regulators in professional domains and academic achievement. For instance, Inglehart, Markus, and Brown (1989) hypothesized that possible selves focus actions in the pursuit of the desired end state and that they energize a person to persist in the activities necessary to achieve a goal. They found that the more students focus on medicine as a career (in their study), the better they did academically than those students that had two or three possible professional selves. Additionally, they found that students who saw medicine as the most satisfying career before entering the program did better academically than those students who saw it as a satisfying career. Another study that looked at the relation between possible selves and academic performance and motivation was Leondari, Syngollitou, and Kiosseoglou’s (1998) study. Their assumption was that envisioning a desired end-state produces information processing favoring the desired state and, as a consequence, the action seems more likely and people are able to construct more efficient plans. They hypothesized that

academic performance is best for subjects who are able to produce well-elaborated, vivid pictures of future selves. Their statistical analysis showed that those who endorsed specific elaborated positive selves outperformed the other groups in academic achievement. There was also indication that this group of students showed more persistence on task. Other studies confirmed the influence of possible selves in students' self-regulation in order to attain academic and professional outcomes (Lee & Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry & Hart- Johnson's, 2004). Moreover, Oyserman, Bybee and Terry's (2006) study looked at possible selves among low-income and minority teens. The researchers hypothesized that academic possible selves (APSs) alone are not enough unless linked with plausible strategies, made to feel like "true" selves and connected with social identity. They found out that when APSs are linked with strategies to achieve them, students were successful in moving toward APSs goals. The subjects' grades and depression levels improved and in school misbehavior and absences declined.

Other studies address the importance of balance among one's possible selves. For instance, Oyserman and Markus (1990) conducted semi-structured interviews with 238 youth who varied in their degree of delinquency from no official involvement with delinquency to those confined to the state training school for delinquent youth. They hypothesized that becoming involved and staying involved in delinquency reflects a lack of balance among one's possible selves and thus a lack of specific motivational control over one's actions. The researchers asked these youth to describe three "expected" selves and three "feared selves" for next year. A pair of responses was considered "in balance" if the expected self and the feared self represented a positive and a negative aspect of the same content area. For instance, an expected self of "pass ninth grade" might be paired

with a feared self of “flunk out of school”. Their results showed that over 81% of the public school respondents had at least one clear match between their feared possible selves and their expected possible selves. The number of matches was fewer among the other more officially delinquent groups. Furthermore, youth who lacked balance in their possible selves subsequently reported higher levels of delinquent behavior than youth whose possible selves contained some balance. Norman and Aron’s (2003) study examined the motivational impact of hope for and feared possible selves in the attainment or avoidance of possible selves. In a sample of 116 participants, motivation to attain or avoid an important possible self was significantly predicted by its availability (when a possible self can easily be pictured or constructed), its accessibility (when a possible self can be brought into awareness) and the extent to which its attainment or avoidance is perceived as under one’s control (the degree to which individuals believe their behaviors can influence the attainment or avoidance of a possible self).

As described earlier, most of the possible selves’ research to date focused specifically on young learners. In an attempt to expand the PS construct into adult learning and adult education, Rossiter (2007) designed a study to gain deeper understanding of the impact of educational helping relationships on adult students’ range of possible selves. It suggests three primary interfaces between adult learners’ interactions with educational helpers (teachers, mentors, and advisers) and their positive selves. The investigator reported that educational helping relationships can be the source of new positive possible selves for adult students through comments or suggestions for possible futures. For instance, one student explained how one of her teachers introduced her to the possibility of becoming an audiologist. Another finding was that educational

relationships function as the context within which adult learners' existing positive possible selves can be elaborated, detailed, and more fully developed. For example, one student considered his future as a high school science teacher because of experiences in his science class and admiration to his science teacher. A third finding is that educational relationships strengthen confidence and efficacy beliefs in relation to positive possible selves for adult learners. For instance, a student in this study began to envision a Pd.D. possible self due to the encouragement of a professor. The positive and practical feedback from a trusted teacher or mentor is a potent force in strengthening that sense of efficacy for an adult learner. Rossiter (2007) considers the possible selves perspective as an unfolding story in which the development and elaboration of possible selves is a process of self-storying that could help us understand adult learner motivation and persistence.

Other works offer different approaches based on the possible self-construct that could help enhance performance and motivation. For instance, Plimmer and Schmidt (2007) offer a five-step approach that adult educators can employ in order to facilitate the development of positive new possible selves and their benefits to performance and motivation.

- 1) Encourage narratives in which the students can explore where they have been and where they are going in order to identify possible selves.
- 2) Suggest potential career opportunities and recognize an individual's potential.
- 3) Help adult students find the fit between their possible selves and career options.
- 4) Develop vivid representations of the self through mental imagery or mental rehearsal.

- 5) Develop positive pathways by setting goals for information seeking or goals to measure.

The cited literature on possible selves affirms that having a sense for the future is conducive to attainment of valued future outcomes. Furthermore, the presence of elaborate and vivid possible selves can energize people's efforts to achieve desired objectives.

Research on possible selves and language learning motivation and language identity.

The majority of the research using the self-construct has been done in the area of social work. Only recently is this approach being developed in other areas. In the area of language learning, Dörnyei (1994b) spearheaded this new direction of research in language learning motivation as a response to the ongoing debate about integrative motivation. During the last decade Gardner's integrative concept has been at the center of debate in the area of language learning motivation research because of his basic premise. It claims that the L2 learner "must be willing to identify with members of another ethno linguistic group and take on very subtle aspects of their behavior" in order to acquire a second language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p.135). Dörnyei (2005) stated that the integrative concept only applied to contexts of second language learning where the target community surrounds the students. He added that this concept falls short in contexts where the target language is learned far from the community that speaks it. Therefore, he included the possible selves construct as important to understanding and to deepening the concept of Gardner's (1973) integrative motivation and as a way to rethink this integrative concept. Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) claimed that the integrative concept would be "better explained as an internal process of identification within the person's

self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group” (Dörnyei, 2009, p.3). Dörnyei (2009) offers a model that defines the main source of language learning’ motivation as the successful engagement with the actual language learning process rather than with internally or externally generated self-images. He proposed that the L2 Motivational Self System consisted of three components:

- (1) *Ideal L2Self*, which is the L2-specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self’. He said “if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves”. (p.29)
- (2) *Ought-to L2Self*, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes.
- (3) *L2 Learning Experience*, which concerns situated, ‘executive’ motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success).

He also offers a set of motivational techniques associated to this self-based approach model that language educators can use in order to promote motivation. He said that the Ideal L2 Self is an effective motivator if the learner has a desired future self-image that is elaborate and vivid, and is perceived as plausible and in harmony with the expectations of the learner’s family, peers and other elements of the social environment. Furthermore, the Ideal L2 Self must be regularly activated in the learner’s working concept and accompanied by relevant and effective procedural strategies that act as roadmaps towards the goal. Finally, this Ideal L2 Self must contain elaborate information about the negative

consequences of not achieving the desired end-state. Therefore, a language educator could encourage motivation by following these steps:

- (1) *Creating the vision*: The first step in a motivational intervention is to help learners construct their Ideal L2 Self through ideal-self generating activities and through role models of successful L2 learning achievers.
- (2) *Strengthening the vision*: to promote ideal L2 self images using creative or guided imagery in order to help students elaborate in a vivid fashion those ideal L2 selves.
- (3) *Substantiating the vision*: to make the Ideal L2 Self plausible. Dörnyei suggests that in order for an Ideal L2 self to sustain behavior; it must hold a sense of realistic expectations.
- (4) *Keeping the vision alive*: to activate the Ideal L2 Self through classroom activities such as communicative tasks, films, guests that could serve as potent ideal self-reminders.
- (5) *Operationalising the vision*: to develop action plans for the ideal self to be effective in motivating the language learner. A successful action plan will contain a goal-setting component and individualized study plans and instructional avenues.
- (6) *Counterbalancing the vision*: to consider failure. Future self-guides are most effective if they are offset by the feared self and utilize the cumulative impact of both approach and avoid tendencies (Dörnyei, 2009; Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

Over the past three years a number of quantitative studies have been developed to specifically test and validate the L2 Motivational Self-System. Taguchi, Magid and Papi

(2009) designed a comparative motivational study in order to validate Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System in three Asian contexts: Japan, China and Iran. They looked at the two types of instrumentality in Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System in order to draw their conclusions. The first is called instrumentality-promotional and it relates to the ideal L2 self as it regulates goals and hopes of becoming professionally and personally successful in the L2. The second type is instrumentality-preventional and it relates to the ought-to L2 self as it controls negative outcomes associated with the duties and obligations individuals perceive they have toward others. Five thousand participants answered a questionnaire that measured the learner's attitudes and motivation concerning English learning. They hypothesized that if learners have a strong ideal L2 self, this will be reflected in their positive attitudes toward language learning and they will exhibit greater efforts to learn that target language. Their results indicate that the ideal L2 self achieved a better explanatory power toward learners' intended efforts than integrativeness did. One significant cross cultural difference was that in the Japanese model, the impact from attitudes to L2 culture and community on the ideal L2 self is nearly twice as large as from instrumentality-promotion, whereas in the Chinese and the Iranian data the contribution of the two aspects is roughly equal.

Another quantitative research that tried to provide empirical support for the theory of the L2 Motivational Self System was Csizér and Kormos' (2009) study. Their aim was to investigate the role of the ideal and ought-to L2 selves as well as L2 learning experience in two language learner populations who study English in a single context, Budapest, the capital city of Hungary. They compared how the motivational and attitudinal dispositions of secondary school pupils and university students differed. Their

findings show that both in the case of secondary school and university students, motivated learning behavior was partly determined by the ideal L2 self, that is, the extent to which students could imagine themselves as competent language users in the future. They also found that other important determinants of language learning effort was the dimension of language learning experiences, the effect of which was found to be stronger than that of the ideal L2 self in the case of secondary school students, while for university students the ideal L2 self and language learning experiences played an equally important role. Their findings show that the ought-to L2 self seemed to be marginal, as its contribution to shaping students' learning behavior was weak and reached the level of significance only for the university student population. Furthermore, their study shows that how students see themselves as future language users might change with age, and therefore the impact of future self images on motivated learning might also vary.

As previously stated, the majority of the research is quantitative. However, there are a few qualitative studies in the area of possible selves and language learning. One relevant to this study is Kim's (2009). She explored the nature and interrelationship between ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self by analyzing two adult Korean English as second language (ESL) students' L2 learning experiences. Joon and Woo were males in their mid- 20's who travelled to Toronto for the purpose of learning English. According to the data, Joon's goals for learning English were to get a job in Korea and to socialize with members of L2 communities. His communication in L2 contexts was diverse. Woo's goal for learning English was to work at a steel company in South Korea in the future. Kim collected data from four sources: interviews, ESL classroom observations, picture-cued recall tasks, and language learning autobiographies. She found that instrumentality,

or pragmatic orientations, in learning an L2 can be merged into either the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self, depending on the degree of internationalization. Another finding was that the learner's ideal L2 self needs to be aligned to the learner's life experiences in a variety of communities in order to support a positive, competent, and promotion-based future L2 self-image.

The Possible Selves construct in language learning is a new development and there is still a need for more research. The majority of the studies in possible L2 selves and language learning are quantitative, and their population is mainly high school students. Very few studies include university students and adult learners. So far, none of the studies have been carried out with American students and in a combination of settings such as different countries. The present study can help expand this body of research by incorporating several elements that have not been considered before such as a variety of contexts in the ideal L2 self development, the impact of study abroad programs in the development of ideal L2 selves, having American university students as a population and the development of a qualitative study that could help expand the pieces of research already done in this area.

Study Abroad and Student Involvement

One of the theories that focus on student motivation and behavior is Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement. It states that students who get involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience enhance their chances of persistence. It posits that students play an integral role in determining their own degree of involvement in college classes, extracurricular activities and social activities. The more quality resources available, the more likely students who are involved will grow.

However, Astin also states that by simply exposing the student to a particular program without eliciting sufficient student effort and investment of energy may not bring about the desired learning and development. He affirms that “the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (Astin, 1999, p.519).

Astin’s involvement theory affirms that the amount of physical and psychological effort a student invests in a program is directly proportional to the quality of involvement that student will experience in that program. He states that different students manifest different degrees of involvement at different times. Astin asserts “the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or that practice to increase student involvement” (p.512).

Astin’s theory informs my study and helps toward the development of my conceptual framework because it emphasizes active participation of the student in the learning process, which is relevant to the development of this thesis. The combination of the involvement theory and the “possible selves” construct could provide a more holistic view to the instrumental and integrativeness motivation from Gardner’s (2001) motivational theory that may offer better explanations of the intricate phenomenon of learner’s behavior and motivation. Furthermore, student involvement theory can assist my study in suggesting institutional practices to design more effective learning environments for student engagement beyond the classroom. It allows me to propose changes to the different curricula and programs in order to increase participation that could result in long lasting learning.

There is a dearth of research that explores Astin's (1999) theory in a study abroad context, although Crust's 1998 study attempted to apply the Theory of Student Involvement to an academic experience in an overseas setting. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not environmental and involvement factors were similarly interactive in a foreign setting as they were in a domestic setting. Crust used data collected from the program evaluations of 79 students who participated in the Oregon University System exchange program in Lyon, France during a five-year period. Students were asked about the relationships that existed between pairs of the following six student engagement factors: extracurricular involvement, overall program satisfaction, housing satisfaction, residence hall satisfaction, academic achievement, and language level. It only found one significant result, that the relationship between extracurricular involvement and language level is not independent. Students in the higher language level group (Direct Exchange) were more involved in extracurricular activities than were the lower language level group of students that stayed at their home institution. The number of significant findings for this study is very low. My study contributes to increasing this body of research by using the students' own voices to attain deeper insights about student involvement after the experience abroad and its possible causes or reasons. Furthermore, exploring opportunities for students' further engagement could inform other universities about programs to provide support for past, present and future study abroad students.

In sum, on one hand, most of the research on study abroad and language learning has concentrated on measuring linguistic and cultural gains. On the other hand, the research on language motivation has taken place mainly in bilingual contexts where the language learners have access to the target community. Motivating oneself to maintain

the linguistic and cultural gains acquired abroad is equally important to the acquisition of these gains mainly in foreign language contexts. Therefore, the following study contributes to broaden the field of language learning motivation research by looking at how abroad experiences could enhance language learning motivation in contexts where the target community is not as accessible. Using possible selves, an aspect of the self-concept that represents how one can be in the future, this study looked at the role of study abroad in the development of these possible selves during and after the experience and their effect in language learning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of possible L2 selves in students who have been abroad and the effect of these selves on language learning motivation and learning strategy design. This study has a major research question and two sub questions that helped me explore the role of the L2⁵ self in the field of language learning motivation:

How do students develop possible L2 selves⁶?

1. What is the role of Study Abroad in the development of possible L2 selves?
2. What happens when they return from Study Abroad? What is the effect of moving from a second language to a foreign language context in the development of possible L2 selves?

These questions help flush out deeper understanding of how students develop possible L2 selves. Part of my interest is also in how the transition between second language contexts to foreign language contexts affects motivation for language learning among students, including engaging in continued language-related experiences.

I used a qualitative research design to gain insights into the various possible influences on involvement for language retention or language development as well as to understand how SA experiences shape the L2 learner. A qualitative design allowed me to hear directly from the subjects about their lived experiences and perceptions.

⁵ Second or foreign language

⁶ Possible selves represent an individual's ideas of what one might become. For this study, it represents the individual's ideas of oneself as a L2 learner or as a L2 speaker in the future.

Furthermore, it enabled me first, to develop a deeper level of detail in order to answer the proposed research questions (Creswell, 2003) and second, a deeper understanding about language learning motivation from a possible self-perspective through the use of a case study approach.

This study consisted of individual open-ended interviews and a focus group that helped provide data triangulation about the type of involvement, its possible reasons, and particular experiences that facilitated further engagement and the development of possible L2 selves. The open-ended interviews allowed me to have a flexible agenda in order to explore the subjects' points of view and unfolded the different meanings of their experiences by using their own voices. These interviews also provided opportunities to gain insights into interesting and unexpected findings. The focus group offered a rich understanding and multiplicity of views (Gibbs, 1997) about the participants' experiences in language learning after their sojourn abroad that were omitted in the interview but yet were of great significance for the development of the study.

By using both individual and focus groups interviews, I gained greater and more diverse data. The individual interviews presented more personal and in-depth accounts about the goals to maintain language gains, how to achieve a possible L2 self after the abroad sojourn, and how this study abroad experience might have influenced these goals. The focus groups allowed me to explore the types of activities in which students were able to engage, the extent to which the students were involved in these activities, and the difficulties they faced in order to accomplish their goals to maintain their language gains.

In this chapter I describe the subjects who took part in the study and the setting. Then, I explain the data collection procedures, and the data analysis used to interpret the data. Finally, I describe the study limitations and discuss the trustworthiness of the study.

Population

The participants in the study were twenty undergraduate students who studied abroad in a non-English speaking country for a month, a semester or a year during the Winter, Spring, and Summer 2008 semesters and then returned to their undergraduate institution to continue pursuing their degrees in the Fall 2008 semester. Some (but not all) of the students were majoring in the second language and most (but not all) enrolled in a course in the language they studied after they returned from their abroad experience.

I chose different lengths in stay to have access to a larger group of possible participants and to provide me with interesting insights about the types of involvement to better answer my research questions. Researchers agree that longer stays allow more time for the student to be exposed to authentic language input and more time for the student to adapt to the new culture. Dwyer (2004) states that students from long-term study abroad programs (1 semester to 1 year) are more likely to experience more significant and enduring impact in the areas of continuing language use, academic attainment measures, intercultural and personal development, and career choices. Even though my study could have benefited from longer stay programs, I would have run the risk of not being able to find enough participants for the study. I made sure that each participant's program offered a variety of opportunities for interacting with the culture, such as living with a host family, doing social work and making new friends through a friendship program as a way of compensating that not everyone was part of a longer stay program.

According to the data provided by the university's international office, 536 students went abroad and 345 students met the criterion of returning to campus after studying abroad in a non-English speaking country during the 2008 fall semester. Of those 345 students, 31% went to Spain, 18% went to Italy, 12% went to France, 12% went to Mexico, 2% went to El Salvador, 3% went to Argentina and Chile, 1% went to Dominican Republic, and 21% to other non- English speaking countries such as Africa, China, Japan, Russia and India.

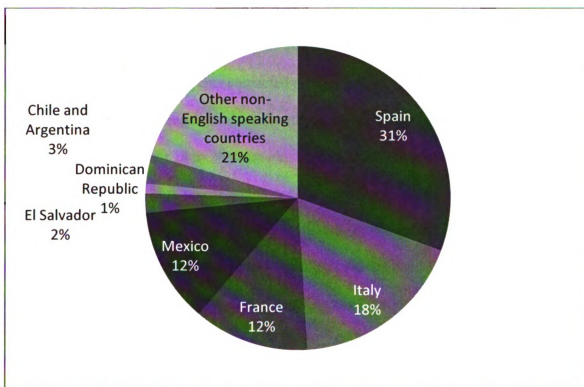


Figure 1: Percentage of students abroad in non-English speaking countries

For the purposes of this study, it was decided to focus on 20 students who were enrolled in classes where the target language is offered. My intention was to get redundancy of information or 'theoretical saturation' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and "richly textured understanding of experience" (Sandelowski, 1999, p.183) as well as to

understand the development of students' identity as L2 learners from a second language context to a foreign language context.

In order to find possible participants, I contacted the director of the international office that is in charge of study abroad programs and explained the purpose of my study. I asked the office for help in identifying possible participants for the study and also to help me send the invitation to prospective subjects (see Appendix E). In this invitation, I explained the purpose and procedures of the study and informed individuals how to contact me. I also approached colleagues with an email (see Appendix E) explaining the purpose and the procedures of the study so they could pass the information to prospective participants. Once the participants contacted me, I arranged individual appointments for the interview. The following chart describes the students that took part in this study. The subjects' ages range from 18 to 26 years old. The majority had at least 5 years of language study during high school and/or college and in one language. Most of the participants were in their junior or senior year of college. Seven out of twenty did not have any abroad travel experience, and two students did not have a language minor or major. Only one student was male, Steve. I made use of pseudonyms for the students in order to protect their confidentiality.

Table 1: Participants

Name	Age	Study Abroad Program	Years of language study	Previous abroad experiences	Years at the university	Language major or minor
Carol	19	France, Niece 5 weeks	4 years	Dominican Republic Mexico 1 week	3 years	French Minor
Christine	20	France, Niece 5 weeks	4 years	No	3 years	French Minor
Emily	22	Mexico for 5 weeks	2 years	No	3 years	Spanish Minor.

Table 1 (cont'd)

Erika	26	Costa Rica Homestay 9 weeks	10 years	Mexico 2 weeks	21/2 years	Spanish Major
Gena	21	France, Niece 5 weeks	10 years	No	4 years	French Minor
Isabelle	21	Sevilla- 1 month	9 years	No	4 years	Spanish Major
Jane	22	Honduras Language Class 3 months	8 years	Mexico- mission Trip 3 days Guatemala 1 week	5 years	Spanish Minor
Jill	22	Mexico for 5 weeks	5 years	Germany 10 days	2 years	Spanish Minor
Joy	21	Mexico for 5 weeks	7 years	No	4 years	Spanish Major
Katie	19	Mexico for 5 weeks	8 years	Mexico for 1 week.	1 year	Spanish Major
Kelsey	19	Mexico for 5 weeks	5 years	Europe 2 weeks	1 year	Spanish Major
Margarita	22	Bilbao Spain 1 ½ months	8 years	Nicaragua 1 month	6 years	Spanish Major
María Romero	22	Nicaragua Internship 2 months	5 years	France 1 week	4 years	None
Paula	20	Mexico for 5 weeks	2 years	England 1 month	31/2 years	Spanish Minor
Rachel	19	Spain- Malaga 6 weeks	5 years	Mexico for mission work 2 weeks twice	1 year	Spanish Minor
Sarah	19	Mexico for 5 weeks	7 years	No	2 years	Spanish Major
Siena	18	Italy Florence 2 months	1 semester	Italy 12 weeks	2 years	None
Stephanie	20	Mexico for 5 weeks	8 years	Mexico 1 week	4 years	Spanish Minor
Steve	22	Mexico for 5 weeks	2-3 years	Mexico 1 week	5 years	Spanish Major
Victoria	21	Internship Program in Paris for 31/2 months	10 years	No	4 years	French Major

Setting

Universities differ in the number of students enrolled in second languages and in the numbers who study abroad. Some universities have substantial offices of study abroad; others send their students to programs run by other universities. Second language learning at any given university must be studied and understood within the context provided by that university. The population for this study was from one major public university that has an extensive variety of study abroad programs, a vast reputation in international education, a good number of extracurricular activities to practice a foreign language, a growing diverse community and a large number of participants that allowed me to find subjects for the research. It is a comprehensive university with an enrollment of over 20,000 students and study abroad programs in over 25 countries.

This institution provides opportunities for students to get involved in meaningful extracurricular activities for language practice after their return such as language round tables, educational trips, and conferences with international speakers and voluntary work. The language round tables are discussion sessions scheduled on different days during the semester during which L2 students meet with a professor and talk about different types of topics from fashion to politics in the target language. Some leaders from the language honor societies plan educational trips to museums or conference sites in which influential people from the target language will be present. Furthermore, the L2 students have different types of opportunities for social work through different organizations that help the international community such as the Hispanic Center; English language tutoring, translation services and through the “big brother, big sister” program.

Data Collection

I collected data from these students for a period of one semester after they returned to their home institution. This data collection period was divided into two main phases. Phase 1 took place right after students came back from their trip abroad and involved face to face interviews of approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length with participants (see Appendix B). The main goal of this phase was to establish the existence of possible L2 selves or early development of these selves and gain insights about particular experiences during the study abroad program that could have influenced future goals or expectations about language learning after the experience. I used semi structured and generally open-ended interview questions in order to elicit views and opinions from the participants and gain depth of understanding of the individuals' experiences and concepts of L2 possible selves. These experiences and L2 possible selves helped to explain the choices students made to maintain their gains when they came back to their home institution. I let the participants know that these interviews were audio taped before hand and that I needed their written consent to do so. I also made sure they knew that I would be the only person allowed to listen to the tapes.

I started the interview session by inviting students to choose a pseudonym as a way to protect their identity and to respond a short written survey (see Appendix A) in order to create a profile of each of the participants with information relevant to the development of the study. The purpose of these questions was to get background information that was able to assist in the progress of the in-depth face-to-face interviews or in the interpretation of the results. I included questions that addressed length of language study and previous study abroad experiences that might have influenced their motivation to develop learning strategies and their possible L2 selves. Knowing about

their present strategies, goals and future plans assisted me in understanding possible L2 selves and their effects on strategy development subsequent to the SA abroad sojourn.

After they answered the written survey, I started the interview by asking participants about their reasons to go abroad. Then looked at any changes in perceptions they had of themselves as language learners. These questions provided some insights about the development of the speaker from a learner to a meaning negotiator that might have influenced their future perception of themselves as fluent speakers. The questions guided the conversation during the interviews and opened possibilities for further exploration. Another set of questions looked at the goals students had as a way to keep what they gained during the experience as well as the perceptions of themselves as L2 speakers in the future. I audiotape recorded each interview and transcribed them.

Phase 2 took place at the end of the second month and beginning of the third month of the semester, after mid-term exams evaluations, so that the students were not so overwhelmed by possible academic requirements that might have affected participation in the focus group. This second phase consisted of a follow up focus group to find information about the development of the participants' motivation to engage in language learning, the development of their actual L2 self, and a visualization of a possible L2 self. I was interested in the diversity of these experiences and what they meant to the subjects' motivation for and involvement in language learning. Furthermore, I inquired about possible involvement in extracurricular activities and/or possible impediments for further engagement. These activities could be described as the ones in which the target language is the meditational tool of communication, such as productive modes (e-mails to the host family and friends, e-forums etc.), receptive modes (reading journal articles, newspapers,

listening to the radio), or interactive modes such as round tables, chats living in a language house, cultural field trips etc. (Jiménez, 2003).

The focus group method helped participants explore and clarify their views in ways that would have been less easily accessible in a one to one interview due to its social nature (Kitzinger, 1995). According to Krueger and Casey (2000), a group possesses the capacity to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone do not possess. That is, the possibility of sharing similar experiences can promote more input by a group of students than one-to-one interviews. Furthermore, the use of a focus group allowed me to interview 5-8 participants at a time that was more time effective than another round of individual interviews.

To form the focus group, I sent an electronic invitation, two weeks in advance to all study participants using the email they provided me at the beginning of the semester. I used the blind copy function so the subjects' actual emails were not disclosed to other members of the study. I asked them about their availability, described the nature of the meeting, and gave them an agenda for the meeting. The items of the agenda were: introductions using the pseudonyms chosen during their first interview⁷ and a series of 7 open questions to be discussed during the meeting (see Appendix C). I let them know that the session was being videotaped and that I needed a signed consent from each participant. I assured them that I was the only person allowed to see the video for research purposes and that their privacy was protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. However, due to time issues and students' engagements, I had to interview four students individually and I had to form three focus groups with 8, 3 and 5 members each.

⁷ Even though students might have known each other the use of pseudonyms helped maintain the confidentiality of those who did not know the other participants. Furthermore, it helped me to maintain consistency in identifying the subjects during the data transcription process.

I also asked one of my colleagues, one who was familiar with study abroad experiences, to assist me during these meetings by taking notes and helping with the recording so I could focus on listening and helping the conversation along.

I decided to divide the data collection into two phases. On the one hand, it helped in the collection of the data at moments where the different processes of involvement or disengagement might have been taking place. On the other hand, the participants were able to provide relevant and important information that might have been lost if a lot of time had passed since the moment of importance. Furthermore, it might have reduced the possibilities for participants' withdrawal by demanding less of their time. I did not have any withdrawals and the students were very helpful in accommodating their schedules. As a way to compensate participants for their time, a pen with a 'thank you' message and some mints were distributed at the end of the focus group meetings.

In sum, the main research questions and the two sub-questions were answered by using a mixture of data collection strategies in order to achieve a broad perspective about the type of involvement or obstacles that students faced in order to retain and improve the acquired language skills and a development of L2 selves. This study also examined involvement from a motivational and "possible selves" perspectives in order to understand the process of motivation.

Data analysis

The data analysis started simultaneously with the interview transcriptions. After I transcribed each interview, I started coding the responses and looking for general themes. After the transcriptions of both individual interviews and the focus groups interviews, were completed, I took one question at a time and carefully read all the answers provided

to that question. Then, I began color-coding these answers in the general and numerous themes (Schneider & Conrad, 1983) previously recorded and created new ones. I continued until I had exhausted all the questions. Later, I focused the coding by carefully reviewing the list of general categories, eliminating less useful ones and combining smaller groups into larger ones. When it was necessary, I created subthemes within a large theme. The following table shows the final record of themes and subthemes that were identified in the present study:

Table 2: Data Themes and Subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
1. L2SELF AVAILABILITY AND GOAL SETTING (there is a clear image of them as fluent speakers of the language)	A. Explicit individual goals for going abroad. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Intrinsic goals (learning is a goal in itself) b. Extrinsic goals (getting rewards or good grades are the main motive) B. Language learning is nonformal and experiential. C. Working towards a possible language self while abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ownership of their language learning process. b. Identification of language needs. c. Embracing challenges (not deterred by difficult situations). D. There is an identity as language speakers during and after the experience.
2. L2SELF ACCESSIBILITY (refers to opportunities for that self to emerge, to become)	A. Searching for more opportunities beyond the classroom to keep their gains. B. Students who were highly motivated about their L2 learning, identified L2 needs clearly and exhibited clear goals for L2 self achievement. C. Students who exhibited low self-esteem in their language ability, exhibited more grade dependence and had a less accessible L2 self. D. Fears of losing the language.
3. L2 SELF AND THEIR ACADEMIC SELF	A. Clear goals about what they want from their language classes. B. Realization of L2 selves (becoming minors and majors after the experience) C. More risk takers and more tolerant towards mistakes D. Disconnection between their classes' content, methods and the other students' attitudes in their courses, and their L2 goals. E. Some significance of grades in their L2self achievement.
4. L2SELF AND OTHER SELVES	A. Competition of other selves and time with their L2 learning goals. B. L2self was perceived as a tool to obtain other significant possible selves. C. L2self was envisioned together with other selves.

Credibility and Transferability of the Study

The trustworthiness of this research lies first in its data collection. The use of individual interviews and focus groups as data sources helped in the development of constant and coherent groups of themes. Second, in order to improve the accuracy of the subjects' accounts, the researcher asked a peer debriefer, in this case the same person that helped with the videotaped recordings during the focus groups meetings, to review the transcriptions and the themes in order to check for significance and inconsistencies (Creswell, 2003). Third, at the end of the study, the researcher presented the project to an external auditor who helped generate relevant questions that other researchers might ask (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Finally, the number of participants in the study helped reached evident redundancy in the data, which can be of significance to similar contexts, even though it cannot be transferable to other settings.

The Researcher

I, the researcher, have been a language professor for 19 years and a linguist for 12 years. Research on language learning motivation has been one of my main interests in the pursuit to improve long lasting language learning. My knowledge in language learning theory is extensive, which has helped me develop an in-depth understanding of the possible L2 selves' phenomenon and its impact in language learning. I am also a language professor at the university where the study took place as well as the study abroad program director of seven of the subjects that participated in the study. Being a professor and a study abroad program director might have not only increased the likelihood of introducing bias into the data collection process but also might have influenced the responses from some participants. That is why I used peer debriefing, rich

descriptions in the findings and an external auditor as ways to increase the authenticity and credibility of the study.

Limitations to the Study

The present study has some limitations. First, the purposive sampling comes from one institution and there were an unequal number of males (1) and females (19). Thus, the experiences of this group of participants may not be transferable to all language students who traveled abroad for longer trips or of male students more generally. Second, due to time and schedule constraints, it was not feasible to use other data collection methods, such as journals, that would allow for additional data triangulation. Third, the interview format of the focus groups may have enhanced data through participant interaction, but may have reduced response time of individuals who are less verbal and able to share their perspectives and discourage those with different perspectives to speak up. Four, the data collection did not follow the first individual interview with a second individual interview that could have provided important information about explicit possible selves' changes over time. Finally, this study could have benefited from a longer period of data collection that might have provided significant information about how the presence of possible L2 selves might influence the development of language learning approaches. However, this limitation could be developed into a new study.

In conclusion, in order to investigate the developments of possible L2 selves and their effects on the creation of language learning strategies, twenty university students answered several questions at two different points in their semester. The following case study made use of qualitative methods such as individual interviews, focus groups in order to collect data and color-coding in order to analyze data. Even though the study

experienced some limitations, the researcher took some measures to enhance its credibility and transferability.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Four themes capture the presence and the development of L2 selves in students who have studied abroad and returned to their home institution to continue their studies. First, students have an image of themselves as fluent speakers (L2Self availability) and there are evident goals to attain their L2selves before and after their abroad experience. Second, students search for opportunities for that self to emerge (L2Self accessibility) during and after the experience. Third, students' academic selves and their L2selves are concurrent in order to attain their goal of language proficiency. Fourth, the subjects' L2selves are in competition with other selves.

L2Self Availability and Goal Setting

The majority of the subjects for this study had clear goals about what they wanted to accomplish from their abroad sojourn in terms of their language ability and their overall experience. Many of those goals related to their desire to become speakers of the target language and to their perception that language learning is informal and experiential. Once at their destination, the subjects took an active role in moving towards the achievement of an L2self.

Prior to departure, many subjects had intrinsic goals in which learning was a goal in itself. They perceived their abroad experience as an opportunity to improve their foreign language skills and to widen their cultural knowledge. Erika, for instance, wanted to go abroad to improve both linguistically and culturally:

First of all I went for fluency. I knew that I would not be able to do that in a classroom and then secondly, to experience the culture and also just to expand my own variety. And just the things that I wanted to do to enhance

my learning experiences overall as a student included going to another country studying...

Others like Margarita stressed the importance of just learning more about the differences in the Spanish language: “I wanted a different dialect and a different perspective in Spanish language. I wanted to see the differences between the ways it is spoken in Central America versus the way it was originally spoken in Spain. That’s why I wanted to go to Spain specially and Bilbao...” Paula said, “I really wanted to learn the language and I think the best way is to be in the country. You can learn by being in the classroom but not as much as being immersed in the culture.”

Others had extrinsic goals to go abroad such as getting college credits, getting more experience and being more marketable for future jobs. For some like Carol and Rachel, getting a certain amount of credits was crucial in their decision to go. Carol said, “For my French minor I needed a certain amount of credits. I always wanted to go to Europe so the Nice program would provide me with six credits towards my French minor plus I would get to go abroad like I always wanted to so. This was a summer program and I had this summer free so it worked perfect...” For Sarah, going abroad was important in her formation as a teacher:

I hope to be a teacher someday whether I’m a Spanish teacher or a social studies teacher, and it’s important to know more about the world not just your own country. If you’re a Spanish teacher, it is important to actually experience the Spanish culture.

For others like Jane and Gena, the combination of intrinsic and extrinsic goals was important in their decision to go abroad:

I wanted to improve my fluency. I wanted to help in a mission’s trip and it was with a Christian organization and I also needed a practicum for my major,

which are human rights with the liberal studies program. That's why I wanted to serve and get credit (Jane).

For Gena going to France was an opportunity to not only “try out” her skills but to “get more experience for the international relations major”. Three of the subjects expressed that their decision to go abroad was more for fun, good timing and affordability. Emily said:

...My husband and I have a kind of funny relationship and I said hey I want to go to Mexico for five weeks. He said oh yeah five weeks of video games. So I started to look at it and sounded like fun. Well, I just applied and see what happens.

Joy chose going to Mexico because it was shorter and not as expensive

I did not want to lose an entire summer. My advisor wanted me to go to Spain, which sounded really great but it was too expensive. I did not want to be gone all the summer so I wanted to come back and make some money so that is why I chose Mexico.

During our first interview, most of the participants expressed the importance of their trip to be immersed in the target language in order to become language speakers. They also saw their language learning process transcending formal language learning environments such as the classrooms. Katie affirmed that if she wanted “to advance anymore” she really needed to go outside of the country and be actually in the culture, “more of hands on experience with it”. For Carol and Christine, language classes alone did not provide the needed immersion to become a language speaker

I think that being immersed in the language is better than ...I mean language classes are good but in Nice I spoke French from 8:00 in the morning to 3:00 then I went home and spoke French to my family. So it was immersion. (Carol)

Christine said, "...Taking the classes here would not be the same experience. It would be very different there. You can learn it here but I think is from the far. And it is like you're surrounded. That's what I wanted".

Once the subjects were at their destination, their L2self was more available. That is, there were more opportunities for them to move towards becoming more fluent L2 speakers. Students started to take an active role in their learning process in order to achieve their goal of becoming fluent in the target language. All of the subjects were able to experience the language and identified themselves as speakers of the target language. For Jill and Carol, being surrounded by Spanish and French was "like a second nature"; "it was constant, it became natural". Christine recounted how speaking in French just "started clicking" and how she "started thinking in French instead of translating back and forth between the two languages. It became easier". Others described how they were able to negotiate meaning in their target language. Paula said:

It was interesting going to Burger King and ordering food in Spanish and doing it at Starbucks and everything. I think it was one of the best experiences going to the mall and speaking to people and just meeting people that way. Like the first couple of days I went the wrong way and got lost and so I actually talked to someone in Spanish and she give me directions back to my place that was kind of cool.

Some of the subjects also compared their experience learning in a formal environment like the classroom with their abroad sojourn and how the latter gave them the opportunity to identify themselves as speakers:

I felt for the first time I was able to speak French. It's one thing to be able to speak in French in class but to be able to live, exist...It takes an amount of ability in order to order food, to buy in a store. It takes a certain amount you don't need to be perfect but it was really gratifying just to be able to do that. (Carol)

Christine said,

Having conversations at the dinner table every night it was a really good practice actually and specially for working on different tenses because I know my host mom would ask what are you doing this weekend and then what did you do last night and to switch back and forth. It worked. It wasn't a cookie cutter conversation from the book like in class just fill in the blank, fill in the word. Everybody's saying the same thing. Everything is spelled out for you. It was a real conversation where you have to think about your own response and why not just what they would ask you to continue.

During their trip, the majority of the subjects was able to identify their language needs and created strategies in order to accomplish their goal of becoming fluent speakers. Some of them like Margarita spent time meeting the locals so they could have more natural conversations and in that way, they could increase their fluency and grammatical levels:

I said I can't speak English because my Spanish is not good enough to be where I am now at. I need to learn. So I did that and went out to a "pincho" bar and I made friends with the owners and they would teach me how to do it. I would tell them correct me please correct me because I need to know if I'm wrong. And they laughed but they corrected me. We write letters back and forth so it's really good. He is 60 years old but hey; he knows the language better than anybody I know.

Others like Sarah created their own strategies such as a "Spanish only" policy when they were among English speakers "Ok we're here to speak Spanish is not to speak English unless we have to. So we challenged ourselves by doing that". Emily, for instance, built a list of words and expressions that could help her and her roommate express their ideas better in the target language and avoid defaulting back to English:

My roommate and I wrote down words that we wanted to learn. Like when we were thinking about the mummy museum, we didn't know any words for eerie, creepy or gross. So we would write those down and on the busses we

would go back and forth with what we remembered and how the other person guessed. We did that a lot and then our mom and dad whenever they would speak to us and we would try to talk about jellyfish in Puerto Vallarta and we were trying to describe a jellyfish because we could not think about the word. We had to grab our dictionary eventually because I think they use Medusa. We have one page in our notebook where we wrote what we didn't know and tried to go over it and use it.

Throughout their abroad experience, many of the subjects embraced everyday challenges because doing so provided them with “real” learning opportunities. Stephanie, for instance, explained how a bus episode was the perfect situation for her to learn:

We definitely went on to some adventures you know. We talked to taxicab drivers and bus drivers you know. One time we got on a bus, we got on the wrong route; they had already passed our stop. We had to go all the way back around the route. We had already gone an hour outside of where we lived and we realized when the bus pulled over to the bus station. OK this is not good because we didn't get off on our stop. So we went and asked the guy and he was “oh you missed your stop. Where do you need to go?” and we explained to him you know a big market on the city and asked if he could get us there. He said all well hop back on I will take you there. If we would have been very intimidated to speak Spanish and explained to him where we needed to go, we would have been lost and stuck in the city. But as situations like that, not just sitting at home speaking Spanish to each other and to our mom but the situation you know like the bus, the taxi, even just going to restaurants and all those things forced us. OK you might not be that comfortable explaining where you live in and why not. You have to. That's the only option. I personally like that. It made me want to go out the next day and do something else where I was, you know, forced to really thinking and explained myself in a language that is not my first.

Some subjects also made sure that their needs were being met by not letting the locals make things easier for them. Kelsey and Gena recounted how discouraging it was when native speakers wanted to speak English to them:

Whenever I went out it seemed like anyone I'd talk to spoke English to me, which was kind of discouraging sometimes because I was like no I am trying to speak Spanish to you so stop trying to make things easier for me and for yourself. Like obviously they wanted get the conversation and the business over with so they speak English for our benefit but I was like so frustrating sometimes like in the market or at a restaurant sometimes. (Kelsey)

Gena said

...Sometimes people just start talking to you in English; that was kind of frustrating. Because you kind of think ohhh my French is bad so they're trying to make it easier for me. It was kind of sad but I just tried to keep going to French. When we would go to a restaurant, we would ask the waiter to talk to us in French since we were there to learn French. They're pretty understanding about that.

Once they came back, the majority of the students from the study could see a clear picture of themselves in the future as fluent speakers of the language together with the realization of other selves such as a working self, an academic self, a mom self etc. For most of the subjects, like Steve and Gena, a very fluent L2self was their “ultimate” goal:

Hopefully, it doesn't take five or ten years to be that good at Spanish. My ultimate goal, hopefully, within the next year or two is be able to engulf myself in a culture by myself. I don't need a group of Americans around or anything like that to help me and I just go by myself and to be able 100% communicate with them. My ultimate goal is fluency. (Steve)

I hope to be fluent in French and taking at least two other languages to the point to be able to speak it. Not necessarily for writing by just to be able to communicate with people. (Gena)

For Maria and others, a fluent L2 self in combination with other selves were part of their future:

Hopefully, I see myself fluent because I would like to work for the military effort in central or South America. My goal is to move down there after I finished the military or after I secure some kind of career I might be able to work down there and so hopefully I will be fluent so I can get my work done.

For Joy, however, the availability of an L2self in her future was not very clear:

I'm hoping that as I said I'll have a job where I can speak Spanish so hopefully I won't have declined in my speaking, and listening and writing skills but hmm, it is hard to say because I don't really know what I want to do after I graduate. I know I'd like to do something with Spanish but I have nothing specific in mind. So pretty much see what comes in my way but hopefully I will have something where I can use Spanish every day.

In sum, for most subjects a clear image of an L2self was constant before, during and after their abroad experience. They were also very active in the pursuit of their goals and many expressed how important informal learning was towards their L2Self attainment. The majority had a clear vision of themselves as fluent speakers of the language in their future.

L2Self Accessibility

Immediately after the subjects came back from their experience abroad, they faced a period of adjustment between their identities as L1 and L2 speakers. They also looked for opportunities for their L2 selves to emerge in order to keep their language gains and continue improving their language skills during the semester. Furthermore, most of them showed some concern about the possibility to lose their ability to speak the language.

As soon as they came back from their abroad sojourn, all of the subjects faced a period of adaptation between their identities as L1 and L2 speakers. Some experienced times when they would talk to English speakers in Spanish or French. Victoria for instance, recalled asking a man at the Miami airport if he could help her with her luggage in French and how odd that moment was for her when she realized that she was not in Paris anymore. After two months of coming back, Joy continued thinking in Spanish:

Sometimes I miss it. Like, right when I came back whenever I go out somewhere I would start thinking in Spanish but I would say no way it is English not Spanish. I still do it even though it's been like two months since we've been back

Christine remembers a similar experience when she came back off the plane in Cleveland and had difficulty thinking in English:

When we came back off the plane in Cleveland and I remember walking up to the guy in customs and he spoke English to me and I just remembered kind of stuttering, thinking on the response. And I was so embarrassed I was like they're not going to let me into the country because I had to think about English. It was the weirdest feeling but it felt so good and that's when I knew it worked because I had to think about English.

Erika had a moment in which she did not even know what world she was in when she got back. "When I flew into Miami I wanted to keep speaking Spanish and asking like when I ordered food, I wanted to do it in Spanish. It was weird. I didn't know in what world I was in. I didn't know. It didn't seem like the U.S. yet so that was like very odd". Other participants such as Emily recollected how strange it was for them to even read and listen to the media in English:

...and it was really strange in media to experience all English paper, TV, radio everything was English and I mean even just getting into the airport in Atlanta like man sounds funny to me like we spoke English to each other here and there but we tried to speak Spanish to each other at home.

Once they came back and during the semester, students all looked for different opportunities to practice and to maintain what they have learned, as well as for their L2 self to emerge. Some considered going abroad again; others like, Jane, watch more television channels and read more books in the target language, watch more foreign movies, listen to music, take more language classes, get

involved in social work in communities where the target language is spoken, look for more teacher support, meet more people that speak the native language, and buy software that can help them with their language skills. As soon as Steve came back, he “got crazy” with his class schedule and enrolled in four language classes so he could have more language exposure. He comments:

Some of those classes are literature classes but that's not really my thing. The biggest reason I'm taking these classes is to expose myself to the language more. I have experienced in both of the literature classes that the teachers will lecture a lot and that allows me to listen a lot more and interact more speaking and listening...because the hardest thing for me was when I got back here it was all English. I didn't really like that so much. I only had class for two days a week for three hours; that was basically my Spanish practice. To involve myself in many classes, I will have lots of opportunities to continue learning. I just come to class every day speaking Spanish and I go home and study Spanish, and I go to work and continue doing that and I continue to involve myself four days a week with that much Spanish. It's like keeping myself busy with Spanish to the point that I cannot speak English. That's the closest setting to Mexico, engulfing myself so much in Spanish that I don't have an opportunity to speak English. That's how I'm going to learn.

Kelsey highlighted how important her abroad experience was in her motivation to try other resources as ways to practice the language and to even consider going abroad again:

Being in Mexico and taking classes there really prompted me to try and get some other Spanish language influences such as trying to look for children's books in Spanish that I can start reading. Maybe some more Spanish music or I have a book here that is obviously a huge novel but because I love to read and maybe I need to start incorporating some Spanish books and maybe get a Spanish book and an English book - same thing so I can reenact them. So, OK, I totally didn't understand that part. So I can go to the English book, "what did that say?"...I'm really leaning towards going to Bilbao next semester so I am thinking well I need to start looking online for some facts

about the culture in Spain, which is totally different from Latin America, that I need to like obviously by myself go and find out different facts.

Others, like Paula and Stephanie, found in their Hispanic friend a great resource to perform in Spanish:

It has been frustrating because a lot of people feel uncomfortable speaking. I really miss speaking [Spanish]. When I got back, there are a lot of people from Mexico and I got over to a lady's house and she cooked dinner and she tells you about her experiences in Mexico and I try to speak a little bit to her. Where I work, there are a lot of people who do the cleaning. They are from Guatemala and Guanajuato. I'd talk a lot about my experiences there. I can practice Spanish like this. (Paula)

...then I get back and tried to speak Spanish to anyone I possibly can. I have a friend that I worked with in a restaurant. I went to visit him two days after I got back because he speaks Spanish and I just went and sat there and spoke Spanish for half an hour. I just needed it. I am like, I just did all this work to speak Spanish and now I have nobody even, you know, to chat, you know. I was watching Univision. Just trying everything I can, you know, looking into another study abroad program so I can go and learn more Spanish and it was almost like I felt it was not time to come back. I would have liked to have more time there obviously. (Stephanie)

For some participants, their L2 selves were very accessible and they were able to have clearer goals about their language ability and to express how far they wanted to get with the language. As soon as Paula got back from Mexico, she went straight into 300 level classes and volunteered in her sister's Spanish classroom where there were a lot of Latinos. She was planning on going abroad again to the Dominican Republic because she wanted to become really fluent. For Steve, his biggest thing was speaking without errors and "being conversational". He said:

My focus is developing my Spanish whether people want to help me or not so. If they want to speak English it's their lost. I'm taking the Spanish class so why not speak Spanish there? You can speak English any other time. I tried to

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speak to [other students] in Spanish but conversations are hard when you respond to them in Spanish and they respond to you in English.

Christine, for instance, considers French a part of her and makes use of every opportunity to keep her language gains

I'm already planning on ways to keep up with the language after I graduate and I hope to be taking classes in other places and I can still keep up with it because it's either use it or lose it and I don't want to lose it. I want to be able to share that. I have been researching places in [city name] and my aunt speaks French too and I have already been calling her and like I need to talk to you. We need to converse. I am afraid to lose it, I guess. I have been getting movies and I have been pursuing it stronger I guess now than before because it was just kind of like you know it is French like I do it four days a week. It is becoming more a part of me. I don't want that piece to drift away. It wasn't like that before I went. It is more important to me now I guess.

For others, their L2 selves were not very accessible due to the fact that there were not many native speakers of the target language, which made finding opportunities to maintain their gains much harder and to reach their language goals very challenging. Victoria said that she tried to find people who spoke French but it had been difficult because there were not many French native speakers:

I am a French Major and there is not a big French community anywhere around here so it's kind of frustrating. I became a French Major to keep working on it. However, it has been almost impossible to find someone that speaks French. I worked with a bunch of Bosnians. When I applied for my job my boss did my interview in French and everything, and now I translate for social services for refugee services. It is really hard to find someone that speaks French.

Erika and Rachel both had a difficult time finding Latino friends to practice with.

Erika said, "It is sort of disheartening because I wanted to continue speaking as

much as I have been but it's really hard when people around you do not speak Spanish. People that are native speakers you know". For Carol, this semester has not been easy. She even doubted the value of French in her life and she felt very frustrated with her level of French at the moment of the interview:

Right now I am really in a bad place. I am just really frustrated because I feel like I have been in a school forever and with a nursing major, I really want to get this French minor when I really should be learning Spanish 'cause that's what everything is going. I am stronger in Spanish. I have dedicated time to my French minor and to quit would be like a waste of time.

Many of the study participants feared losing their foreign language due to lack of practice but they also considered ways to avoid this loss. Maria, for instance, was very nervous about the idea of losing her skills but she had some ideas about how to keep practicing such as listening to more music and reading more books. For Joy, losing her skills was a possibility but she felt it was up to her to avoid it. She said that she needed to take the initiative and do something about it. Rachel was very scared of forgetting everything during the summer. She said:

I feel like if I don't go somewhere and use it I'm going to forget it all over the summer. I won't but it just feels like during a semester you always have at least two classes in Spanish but during the summer you have three months. I'm going to be back like to a 200 level if I don't use it. I won't be but I am scared of it.

Stephanie, on the other hand, was not nervous about losing it. She felt very strong about her passion for the language and how that feeling was going to provide her with the resources to keep her gains:

I am not nervous of losing it only because OK I have thought about it before. If I don't enroll in a Spanish class I'm going to start back 123 but it's almost like adrenaline rush in me when I start speaking. When I find a little kid to speak to in Meijer, when I pick a book or in the bus when they see signs out

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cover up the English part and translate the Spanish part, like little things like that and then I think to myself that it is like riding a bike. I feel like I have gotten it. I just know exactly. It might take some minutes to get warmed up and you will stumble with some sentences. As far as losing it, I feel it is something that has now solidified in my brain because I lived there and I feel like I just can put myself back in Mexico and just be like sure. I just start speaking Spanish. I don't know if that is just something that I developed on my own because I have a love and passion for the language...I don't know. It is something that excites me and I look forward to it when I find something to read or when I find a kid to talk to. OK there is Spanish and I still got it.

In sum, after coming back, the students all experienced a period of adjustment between their L1 self and their L2 self. All of the participants tried to find ways to practice their L2 language. For some, the possibilities for their L2 self to emerge was very feasible. For others, it was more challenging. Most of the students expressed some type of concern about losing their language abilities.

L2self and their Academic Self

In terms of their identity as language speakers and how fluent and accurate in their target language they wanted to become, the subjects from the study experienced noticeable changes and faced some challenges as learners. These changes are related to the way they used to behave in the language classroom before the abroad experience and their perceptions as language speakers. The challenges they faced are related to the disconnection between their goals and their experiences in and outside of the classroom.

Changes in their Role as Learners

18 out of 20 students asserted that their experience abroad boosted their confidence levels, which have allowed them to become more actively involved in their classes. Rachel, Katie, and Siena, for instance, stated that thanks to the increase in their

confidence levels, they have been able to learn more and become more “proactive” towards their learning:

I have learned a lot. I know more and I feel more confident. I have become more proactive like I want to learn it more. Before, I always wanted to study Spanish. I have always had a passion for that. Now that I have been over there like I even have more desire to learn it and not just study before the exams. I feel like I want more. (Rachel)

You feel a lot more confident. [I am] able to raise [my] hand and be the first person to say something because [I] know that. I have all ready been there and had to go through the embarrassing moments of actually speaking to people not knowing what was going on. (Katie)

I think now that I have been there and I have seen the people, the culture and I like heard speaking it. It has given me more of a purpose. I am more attentive whereas before when I took other languages I really didn't know what was going on. I didn't understand...and now that I am back here I am finding that I am losing any of the Italian I had. So I tried to be more attentive in class and do things outside of class that I can still build vocabulary and hopefully when I go back to Italy I will be able to speak and understand people a lot better. (Siena)

For Maria, the increase in her confidence level has prompted her to use her skills in nonacademic contexts such as the grocery store:

I would say definitely that my confidence and comprehension levels have gone up. I am more confident speaking to people outside the classroom now, wherever I am at in my grocery store, when I am doing the laundry I would just start speaking to people in Spanish and because I am more confident in the public arena.

For Erika and Sarah, on the other hand, their confidence levels went down and their nervousness has not allowed them to continue improving and get the most of their classes. Erika described it as a mental block that has been so difficult to overcome:

I still get nervous in class depending what class it is. I necessarily don't know why. I wish I would not react like that but sometimes I don't want to try and I feel bad. I know answering questions would be good for me but I feel like, I am still nervous and I don't want to. Around certain professors I don't feel as much comfortable. I want to pass that but I have that mental block. I think it is the image of the professor that I have built up about them in my mind. It is not necessarily that they are harder to speak to it just happens like that for me. That is the main block that I feel different than when I was in Costa Rica. (Erika)

The big challenge for me is the nervousness. Sometimes I feel like I can't speak Spanish. It is even worse because everybody knows that I studied abroad and they want to know what other people are saying and I react and say don't put that on me. (Sarah)

Three out of the 20 students stated that they are more risk takers and are not afraid of making mistakes. For Sarah, Jill, and Christine, mistakes are opportunities for learning:

I want to talk more; that's the only way you get better. In high school, I was so afraid of being wrong that's probably why I didn't talk that much. The only way you get better is by talking and making mistakes and having to explain yourself or having people correcting you (Sarah)

I am even more of a risk taker now. Anybody who will speak it with me now I will. Before, I was intimidated by professors. I did not want to feel stupid because I was supposed to know things but I realize it is OK to forget and just try anyway. And I knew that before but I was still afraid and timid about it. I was not concerned so much about the grade but at the feeling that you should know this and why is not coming out, you know. (Christine)

I'm more confident. I'm OK with making mistakes. Everybody there is really understanding and willing to help. It's OK if you don't get it perfect. I think I'm more excited. I feel better and more confident. I like this subject just as much but this experience has given me a more firm background. We've reviewed tough subjects such as subjunctive. And more comfortable using that and I think I learned more and just increases my interest. (Jill)

Studying abroad has not only influenced the subjects' confidence levels but it has also expanded their notion of language learning opportunities beyond the classroom. For some students these learning opportunities signify ways to create connections between the classroom and the community and for some others, it translates into bringing real life situations into the classroom. For Stephanie, "getting the community involved instead of being in a boring class surrounded by four walls" will teach them far more than literature classes. Katie emphasized how important a Hispanic culture class was for her learning because it had many community work opportunities that showed her more about the Latino culture:

The link of the classroom to the community is very important. I never had a class like this one before and I'm learning the most in this class. The professor gives us opportunities all the time. Every day he sent us an e-mail saying hey by the way this is going on downtown if you are interested in this. Go to a Catholic church and just listen to the ceremony in Spanish. I am very excited for Thursday to go downtown to do "día de los muertos" walk. I am excited for it. I learned the most when its hands on and you are with the people.

For Sarah, bringing real life situations into the classroom was very important for her learning:

I think the classes should do more activities for everyday life. Right now in [course #] 321 we're making a podcast thing you have to come up with a sci-fi story. It is fun but some groups are talking about aliens. That is so good and fun but when I went to Mexico, I wanted an extra pillow and I didn't know the word for pillow because you forget those words. [I would like to talk] more about everyday life topics.

Most of the students affirm that their abroad experience changed their purpose of being in a language classroom. They said that before it was another subject and another requirement to fulfill but that after being abroad, this view changed. Margarita, for

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instance, recounted how Spanish was just another subject before going abroad but now it has become a way of life for her. “Before it was like I have to do this so I get the grade. I have to do this so I can graduate. Now I’m doing it because I want to identify and being part of that community”. Maria was more excited about her Spanish class now than before the experience because she saw it as a “gateway” to speak more Spanish:

Not so excited before I was like “oh no another Spanish class four days a week, why” but I am actually really excited to take it. I am looking at as a gateway to speak more Spanish. I really like to speak Spanish. I am like please let’s go back to the restaurant again I like to speak Spanish. I did not have the same passion to the class. It took this experience to get the passion to further my education....

For Victoria, the reasons to take French became clearer after the experience and for Siena, being in Italy has given her more of a purpose to be in a language class back home:

I didn’t like international relations and didn’t like French. I was just doing it to do something and French I like but it was too hard and discouraged me. But then when I came back it was totally different. I love French classes! I’m still bad at it but I love going to class. Before I would do my homework and just read the thing real quick but now when I do my homework, I’d take notes and I’d look up every word. I keep a list of every word I don’t know. Like if I get a paperback, I keep a list of every grammatical mistake I make because I’m so determined to be good at it. (Victoria)

I think now that I have been there and I have seen the people the culture and I like heard speaking it. It has given me more of a purpose. I am more attentive whereas before when I took other languages I really didn’t know what was going on. I didn’t understand. (Siena)

Studying abroad has presented some of the subjects with views of themselves as language speakers and has influenced their decisions about becoming language minors and majors as ways to get closer to their L2self. For the majority of the students, their

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L2self meant a better speaker, for others, it meant mastering the language grammar, and getting better grades. For some, their L2self was a combination of being fluent and grammatically correct.

Learning Goals

The majority of the subjects' ultimate goal was to acquire fluency in the target language. For these students it was imperative that language classes offered a lot of speaking opportunities, were conducted in the target language, and provided real life scenarios that would help them communicate easily in the real world. Students shared that learning a language was about being able to function in that language in real contexts. They equated their meaning of learning a language to what they experienced abroad. Christine, for instance, wanted more speaking in her classes and more interaction. She also expressed how important it was for her to become fluent and how four days a week of French classes were not enough to reach that fluency. That was why she tried to surround herself by downloading French music and by using the language lab more often. Victoria stated that she used her French all the time in her classes and emphasized how these speaking opportunities have helped her towards her goal of becoming a fluent speaker. Steve decided to "involve" himself in many classes so he could have lots of opportunities to speak and think in the language. For Jane, on the other hand, being able to speak the language in the classroom deters her from becoming fluent because from her point of view "you will always sound like whom you talk with". She does not want to sound like an "American" speaking Spanish:

I'm kind of scared that when I get to class I'm going to pick up the bad accent that people speak in class because they're all gringos. They say things a lot different in class than there. So there, I am going to be more fluent.

Margarita was a Spanish minor before going abroad; after coming back, she decided to make it her major. Grammar was her main focus because she needed to make sure that she did not sound like she was “not a Spanish major anymore”. For Jill and Margarita, getting good grades and good sentence formation would get them closer to their L2self goal:

I'd like to get out of my class with an A. I'd like to get out and know that I learned something from my trip. Before I felt like I was grabbing words out of air to put them in to sentences and make them fit but it was an English format but Spanish words you know. I want to use Spanish sentences to write Spanish papers oppose to think in them in English and writing down. I consider that as a goal.

Emily decided to make Spanish her minor because her ultimate goal was to become fluent. However, she also stated that nailing down some grammatical concepts to the point that she did not have to think so much about it was important in order to get where she wanted with the language:

The expectations for me would just be to kind of nail down some of the things that I would know in a conversation, which forms to use like a command - you have to use the subjunctive. I know that but I don't remember all the other uses of the subjunctive. There is always a part of me that has a couple little things like “Por vs. Para” not really sure. A couple of uses of “era and fue” but I'm not really sure. Kind of be able to pass that to the point that I don't have to think so hard about it. Obviously, I'm going to have to put thought on constructing my language in Spanish but just the kind of not thinking so much into the little things and to be able to get a broader idea.

Most of the subjects stated a set of goals that they wanted to achieve from their language classes after their return and they indicated how those goals influenced their decisions about what classes to take and in what activities to engage. However, many of them experienced critical disconnections between their goal and what the language classes offered them.

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Challenges Related to the Type of Class Instruction

For the majority, fluency was their “ultimate goal” and for some others, mastering their target language’s grammar was their main purpose. For Steve, getting the maximum L2 exposure was the reason to enroll in 4 Spanish classes. “The biggest reason I’m taking these classes is to expose myself to the language more. I have experienced in both of the literature classes that the teachers will lecture a lot and that allows me to listen a lot more”. For Stephanie her Spanish class was “the only one chance” she had to really be engaged. That is why she tried to “soak up” as much as she could. Maria’s goal was also to become fluent. That is why she was considering volunteering at a migrant camp in order to find “outlets” where she could speak to people all the time. Christine also emphasized how important it was for her to get really fluent and how that goal influenced her decisions about the type of learning activities she decided to engage in:

I really want to be a fluent speaker. I want to be able to read and write in the language kind of pass that barrier. I really think that I’m going to jump into study first. Go to the Lab all the time, listen to music. I downloaded a bunch of music that I found when I was abroad and some new artists and playing it so that I can still be surrounded by it because I feel that fifty minutes a day isn’t really enough four days a week. I realize that now. No wonder why it was so hard for me because that’s not very much because you can go into your French class and be in French for an hour and then leave and forget about it so and I don’t want to because it’s easier when you don’t, when you are in it all the time. It becomes a lot faster so.

For Jane, getting better at grammar was her main goal and that was the reason why she decided to sign up for a grammar class in the winter. Margarita also stated that mastering her Spanish grammar was her main objective and she continued on describing the type of activities she would like to engage in order to acquire her objective:

I really need to focus about grammar. Grammar is my weakest point in everything. To comprehend it, I need to sit down and I need to write it. I really need to sit down and review subjunctive, regular verbs, past. [I need to] make sure that I'm not sounding like I am not a Spanish Mayor anymore. It's time to sound like you are a Spanish Mayor.

One-half of the subjects felt that what they experienced in their classroom was not in accordance with their expectations and language goals. They all mentioned how their classes did not provide enough opportunities for oral practice and that there was a lot of emphasis on lecturing rather than practice in the higher levels. They also highlighted that their classes lacked opportunities for practical use of the language and they emphasized how the majority of the classes focused on too much on grammar:

I do agree with that in the classroom it is more like diction. This is how to do it, do a worksheet on it and conjugate. Write an essay. We don't get much practice to speaking and using the grammar in a practical manner. (Maria)

Especialy in my class, we ever barely talk. We just learned about sounds like the mouse and stuff so it is hard to find time to speak because we don't ever have discussions and everything. (Rachel)

Challenges Related to the Type of Class.

Some participants questioned the effectiveness of the literature focus on the higher levels for language learning. They found the topics irrelevant to their goals:

I have three classes and I feel that the material isn't interesting or as real as when you really use language. I understand the reasons why you get a degree but I think that a literature focus causes us to lose interest. You're analyzing these things and you understand why you are using subjunctive and whatever may be but for when it comes to literature specific, I get frustrated because I'm sitting in class and I know I have to do these to get a grade. It doesn't excite me the way just being surrounded by Spanish does...I really didn't question it until recently, the focus of the degree, to start looking into what other schools do, specifically, for education. [I] learn more things than we actually are going to be able to use. When I graduate I don't know what my

degree is really saying. I really want it to say that she is really driven and passionate to become bilingual. There is probably a focus for analyzing literature but I'm not an English major. [I would like it to] focus more on Spanish and on everyday use. (Erika)

My classes are hard and I don't think they are benefiting my ability to speak very much because we are analyzing historical literature and I don't really see a lot of pertinence today. I mean yeah culturally yeah it's great but like you know I'm not going to be a teacher so I just really want to learn to speak it because what I care about is what's happening now in Nicaragua. It is not dead 600 years ago. (Margarita)

Paula and Steve considered taking classes with students who are not so passionate about Spanish or who have not been abroad a real challenge. According to these two students, it was very difficult to practice the language with other students in these classes because they would rather speak English all the time even in the Spanish classroom. For Paula and Steve, these students were not interested in becoming L2 speakers and they did not invest the same amount of energy and effort:

It is hard to go up to someone and want to speak Spanish when they only want to speak English. When I do group projects with people in my class, when we get together you know it is in English and not in Spanish. It is kind of hard being around an English community when you want to speak Spanish. (Steve)

I just sometimes find some of the Spanish classes a little bit boring because you are taking the class with the students who were just there to take it. They are not as passionate. I just felt that the way it was taught in Mexico you are freer to speak and learn how to group your grammar that way instead of doing worksheets about it. It was more hands on. (Paula).

The majority of the subjects experienced important changes in the way they approach their language subject and faced obstacles that made their goal of becoming fluent and proficient at the language less accessible. On the one hand, the majority experienced a big boost in their confidence levels as a result of studying abroad and

expanded their language learning opportunities beyond the classroom in search of opportunities to get closer to their L2 self. On the other hand, they faced discrepancies between their goals and the language classroom goals.

L2self and other Selves

During the semester after the subjects came back from their abroad experience, several factors influenced their L2selves' goals. The students perceived their L2self as a tool to achieve other selves; they visualized it together with other significant selves; and they faced some challenges such as other stronger selves, lack of time and lack of resources in their path to achieve their L2 self goals.

For many of the subjects, becoming fluent in a language and getting closer to their L2self represented a means to achieve other selves. Over one-half of the 20 students mentioned that they would like to become really proficient so they could put it in a résumé to open possibilities for jobs like a nurse, elementary teacher or social worker among others. Steve emphasized how companies nowadays are looking for people with cultural experiences or with foreign language experiences and he stressed the importance of being able to put it in a résumé as a way to get employed. Maria stated that in order to get her job done in the military, she would need to become really fluent:

Hopefully, I see myself fluent because I would like to work for the military effort in central or South America. My goal is to move down there after I finished the military or after I secure some kind of career I might be able to work down there and so hopefully, I will be fluent so I can get my work done. That's what I would like to see myself.

For Rachel, Sienna, Erika and Emily, their knowledge of a foreign language will make finding a job in their field easier. Rachel, for instance, wanted to become a nurse and pointed out how instrumental she could become in her field if she would speak Spanish:

I just work in the ER and the Triage and there are usually two translators there and they are always busy. You always have people waiting for the translator to get there. It is not like it is always urgent but a lot of times like people are uncomfortable and like it just would be so much easier if there are more people who knew Spanish. Probably, if two of the nurses knew Spanish...Ideally, I would love to use my Spanish every day, every time and at a hospital.

In ten years I hope to be fluent and be able to communicate. My overall goal is to own my own boutique or work in a fashion magazine. If I was buying I know I'd be like buying from Italy and like communicating in Italian and be able to speak to them fluently and travel there and be able to just fit right in language wise. (Sienna)

For Stephanie and Margarita, being fluent in that other language would allow them to reach their integrative self⁸. Stephanie affirmed that her motivation in learning Spanish was because she wanted to be able to help the target community:

The reason behind my motivation for learning Spanish is that I want to. I have seen how children who are either migrant children or just kids that don't speak English well, how much they suffer and once they are being ripped away from their country and culture and then they have to learn English. There is a chance that they lose their first language and that aspect, and I guess that the reality of that and you know, how traumatic that can be for a child's life is what has motivated me to want to learn Spanish.

When the participants described themselves in five to ten years from now in terms of their ability to listen, speak, read and write in their target language, other selves were repeatedly mentioned in the students' perception of their future. Almost one-half of the female students mentioned their desire to become fluent so they could teach Spanish,

⁸ I decided to incorporate and adapt Gardner's (2001) term *Integrativeness* into the possible self-construct. *Integrativeness* means a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community. From a possible self-perspective, an integrative possible self is that self that is and feels part of the target language community.

French or Italian to their own kids. Over three-quarters of the students mentioned the possibility to bring the target language and their profession together:

I hope to be an actual ambassador either to Mexico or Spain. I'm going to Law school so I can be more of a talker to be able to get there with a higher degree and I want to be some sort of ambassador to a foreign country but I wanted to be in the language of Spanish. I hope to get some sort of internship. I know a Spanish attorney in Grand Rapids that has a Spanish speaking law firm and I want to get to talk to him a little bit more and hopefully to be able to be an intern there with hands on and to be able to be with Hispanic people and the law side of it. (Katie)

I see myself as being a teacher hopefully in social studies and Spanish. And speaking Spanish and trying to inspire like my Spanish One teacher. She was the most amazing teacher. She made it fun, she made it exciting. That's the type of teacher I want to be. Getting students interested in it not taking it because it is a requirement [but] because they want to take it, because that's how I always felt about it. So that's what I hope to do. If I'm a social studies teacher, I hope to be like, when I was in Mexico blah, blah, or when I was in Spain blah, blah, blah. So, I would like to be able to inspire other people with a love for the language. I love social studies, I love politics, government and all of the stuff so I really want to teach social studies but at the same time; Social Studies teachers are not in demand whereas Spanish teachers with so many people coming in you can just walk into any school in the west coast, you will sign a contract the same day, you know. Job security and I love Spanish. (Sarah)

I see myself working in a job most likely non-profit, working helping families getting situated...helping people that don't know a lot of English. That's the kind of job that I imagine myself working in, a small nonprofit helping people. Some type of social work. My major is sociology. I want to go to grad school; I don't know when yet (Jill)

If I do the international development I can see myself doing projects and going back probably to Honduras and other areas that they need it also. Guatemala is opening an orphanage too. (Jane)

Isabelle, on the other hand, did not mention a specific job but she considered the possibility of continuing study languages so she could travel through Europe:

I'm hoping to be at least fluent in Spanish and Italian and hopefully learning Arabic and maybe another language may be traveling through Europe finding jobs there. I don't know. I am still eager to learn.

During the semester after their abroad experience, the participants faced several challenges in their pursuit of their L2Self. Some of the most mentioned challenges were lack of time, busy schedules, other jobs, and other minors and majors. Jane, Sarah, Gena and Erika explained how lack of time, grades and busy schedules stopped them from getting involved in more activities that could have helped them with their language learning goals:

I really want to do the AmeriCorps program but if I want to get good grades, you can have only so many extracurricular. There is a constraint of time I guess. I wish I could do more volunteering like that. (Jane)

I have not been able to do anything else because I have eighteen credits this semester. I have seen the flyer for the ESL program and I thought about it but to me grades are extremely important but I don't want to stretch myself too thin. That is why I have not been able to do as many cultural activities that I have probably liked to do. I love Spanish but that is not something that comes supernatural to me. It takes me a while if I want to read a book. It takes me twice as long. To me is just like I have too much to do. (Sarah)

I don't know if I have done anything to really maintain it so much but I think that might be because just my class load and stuff is like I just have one French class and a lot of other classes. (Gena)

I want to add another activity to practice but due to my schedule and other activities it is very hard to balance. At the beginning of the semester I was writing to some friends with whom I went to Costa Rica but we have been very busy. (Erika)

Carol stated that her nursing major was her top priority and that it required a lot of time and dedication. She explained how keeping both her nursing major and French minor have affected her performance in French:

I really haven't been working on my French. It is pretty disappointing but I am a nursing major so that really takes priority for the most part. So going to class, doing the reading is what I have been doing to keep up with my French. I do speak French a lot with my roommate because we both take French classes. I'm also planning another study abroad semester to Ghana so that's been taking a lot of my time. I haven't been spending a lot of my time on my French, which is disappointing.

Emily explicated how having a job prevented her from getting more involved with her Spanish and went on explaining how hybrid classes (a combination of online class with classroom meetings) could help her towards her Spanish learning goals:

In a perfect world I would not have a job. I would just have to come to school every day and take Spanish at school every day and I feel that will learn so much better that way. There should be a way that we could ensure more daily practice. Some classes I have taken before like the hybrid class where they have activities that we should do online and meet twice a week. That was kind of experimental. But offer more on a regular basis would help

Stephanie and Kelsey expounded on how a state passed a law requiring elementary teachers to have a major in one of the four core classes (math, science, English and social studies) and how that law interfered with their goal of becoming Spanish majors:

I have always had interest in bilingual schools and dual emerging schools and I have actually been doing biweekly observations in a dual language in [Rapid City] where the morning is in English and the afternoon is in Spanish. I thought that was a crazy goal but it has helped me to be in those environments. Then I wanted to teach elementary and it is frustrating because you cannot get Spanish certification to teach. If you want to teach elementary you need a different major from Spanish because you should be able to teach other subjects. There is a lot of politics behind it.

In their path to become proficient in their target language, the students perceived their language selves as part of other selves or as a stepping-stone to achieving other selves. However, they also faced challenges that impeded some of the students from moving closer to their language learning goals.

In sum, the students' possible L2 selves were visions of themselves in the future as fluent and accurate speakers of the language. During and after their abroad experience, the subjects looked for opportunities to make their PL2Ss more accessible in different ways. However, when these students returned, they faced many challenges to keep their vision alive. Most of the participants developed different strategies to keep that vision alive and were able to visualize how their PL2 selves could help accomplish other relevant possible selves. Some others experienced first, a decline in their motivation due to a lack of support and strategies and second, how other possible selves became more relevant in their working self concept.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of study abroad programs in the development of possible L2 selves and the effect of moving from a second language to a foreign language context in the development of these possible L2 selves. From interviews with twenty college students, it was found that first, these students had available possible L2 selves and clear goals to attain those selves before going abroad. Second, once back at their home university, the subjects searched for opportunities in which their possible L2 selves could become more accessible. Third, their academic selves influenced the accessibility of their L2selves at different levels. Finally, their L2 selves influenced and were influenced by their other selves. These findings are discussed in terms of what we know about possible selves and language motivation.

Goal Setting and L2 Self–Availability

Before going abroad, the 20 study participants had evident expectations of what they wanted to get out of their experience such as acquiring fluency and cultural knowledge. Therefore, one can say that this was a motivated group of language students for two reasons. First, they chose to study abroad instead of staying home and taking classes at their university. Second, they all had different purposes they wanted to achieve (Wlodkowski, 1999). Markus and Ruvolo (1989) affirmed that when one has a goal to achieve, it is the self or the “I” that has the intent or the goal and it is this self-representation that is a specific instigator of motivated or goal-oriented behavior. Furthermore, these purposes were “multi-determined” (Lens, 2001). That is, several types of goals fueled the motivation of students in this study. The students’ goals could be

grouped into three categories: intrinsic, extrinsic and integrative. The majority of the subjects exhibited intrinsic motivation in which learning the language was a priority in itself. Paula, for instance, stated that she chose to study in Mexico because she “really wanted to learn the language” and that the best way was to be in the country. For some others, their motivation was extrinsic or their motivating factors were external, i.e., going abroad was another way to get the required language credits for their major or minor. Other participants’ motives could be categorized under Gardner’s term “integrative motivation.” For Gardner (2001), *integrativeness* relates to a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the L2 language community. Siena’s main purpose, for example, was to be immersed in the culture so she could learn about Italian people and so represents this concept of integrative motivation.

For the majority of the participants, the goals for their study abroad experience were directly related to their language ability and their vision of themselves as fluent speakers of the language. For instance, Erika stated that she considered going abroad a necessity if she wanted to improve her fluency in a second language. Katie also affirmed that if she wanted to advance in her target language ability, she needed to go overseas. According to Norman and Aron (2003), these students exhibited available possible L2 selves. That is, most students were able to picture themselves as speakers of their target language before their trip and consider their abroad sojourn an opportunity to get closer to that vision of themselves as fluent language speakers. Available possible selves could provide incentives for action. Dörnyei (2009) asserts that possible selves can act as “future self-guides” that can explain how someone is moved from the present to the future. The majority of these students also had intrinsic goals or objectives that derived

from their inherent pleasure and interest in becoming fluent speakers (Noels, 2001). Ryan and Deci (2000) maintain that these feelings of enjoyment come from developing a sense of competence over a voluntarily chosen activity. Most of the participants' possible selves comprised positive images as bilingual or fluent and grammatically correct speakers before going abroad. However, one of the participants, Victoria, had an available "negative self" or feared self before going abroad, namely, a negative outcome that the individual should seek to avoid (Ryan, 2006):

I studied the language but I'm terrible at languages and I'm terrible at English and I'm terrible at French. So I figure if I went back at least I would be a little bit better. I chose the internship because I think it's so much better to learn and be with the people. I know different people that went on different programs and they said it was so great we went with my friends. We talk all the time and they spoke English. In the internships there were four of us that went and I didn't see any other American people and at my job no one spoke English. And at my home stay no one spoke English so is the best way to kind of learn.

Victoria's motivation, to change her actual feared self was the main reason to embark in her abroad sojourn. Her thoughts about what was likely allowed her to construct a possible L2 self that was different from the present one (Markus and Nurius, 1987). Furthermore, she had a possible self and a feared self in the same domain (i.e., fluent language speaker), which according to Dörnyei (2001) is a powerful combination to keep us moving forcefully towards achieving one's goals. Oyserman and Markus (1990) argued that a desired possible self would have maximal motivational effectiveness when a counteracting feared possible self in the same domain offsets this desired self. Others, however, did not have available language selves before going abroad but they had extrinsic goals that provided different purposes such as to be able to graduate faster and

get college credits. They were also very motivated about their study abroad experience and very eager to find out what this experience could mean for them afterwards. This particular group of students had more available *ought selves* that influenced their motivation to go abroad. Higgins (1987) defines ought self as a representation of attributes that one believes one must possess and which bear little resemblance to one's own desires. For instance, the sense of obligations or responsibilities that one holds at a particular time, in the case of this study, the obligation or commitment to graduate or to complete their language major or minor.

Once at their destination, the students' possible L2 selves were more accessible. That is, they were surrounded by opportunities that would allow them to become closer to these selves. For instance, living with a local family required them to be users of the language in order to negotiate meaning in authentic situations such as lunchtime or during family celebrations. They were able to move from being language learners in a classroom to being language speakers in the target language community. According to Norman and Aron (2003), "the more easily the possible self can be brought into awareness, the more attention will be paid to it, and the more influence it will have on the individual's behavior" (p. 501). During interviews, the participants explained the importance of immersion in their goal to become fluent L2 speakers and that their experiences beyond the classroom were the most positive and beneficial for their learning. Most of the students were able to take their language learning experiences beyond the classroom and realized that their learning could be embedded in the context of everyday life. Carol, for instance, stated:

I felt for the first time I was able to speak French. It's one thing to be able to speak in French in class but to be able to live, exist...It takes an amount of ability in order to order food, to buy in a store. It takes a certain amount of effort .You don't need to be perfect but it was really gratifying just to be able to do that.

Furthermore, Markus and Nurius (1986) proposed that possible selves, once activated into working memory and made accessible to the individual's conscious mind, act as a motivating element to actually attain these selves. During their abroad sojourn, many of the participants invested much effort and resources in seeking out opportunities to become fluent speakers. Many used strategies such as the "No-English" rule or created situational vocabulary lists to expand their language learning experience while others embraced challenges such as "getting lost" as opportunities to attain their possible L2 selves:

*...situations like that, not just sitting at home speaking Spanish to each other and to our mom but the situation you know like the bus, the taxi, even just going to restaurants and all those things forced us. ... It made me want to go out the next day and do something else where I was, you know, forced to really thinking and explained myself in a language that is not my first.
(Stephanie)*

Other participants tried to avoid situations that could potentially take them away from their goal to become fluent such as not allowing the locals to speak to them in English:

Whenever I went out it seemed like anyone I'd talk to spoke English to me, which was kind of discouraging sometimes because I was like no I am trying to speak Spanish to you so stop trying to make things easier for me and for yourself. Like obviously they wanted to get the conversation and the business over with, so they speak English for our benefit but I was like so frustrating sometimes like in the market or at a restaurant sometimes. (Kelsey)

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Kelsey explained how discouraged she felt about people trying to speak English to her. She was very conscious about the importance of expressing herself in Spanish at every moment in order to become fluent.

Once back at the home institution, the students articulated a noticeable representation of themselves in the future as fluent speakers and correct users of their target language. From a possible selves' perspective the majority had available possible L2 selves that could translate into a greater motivation to attain or to avoid that possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1987; Norman & Aron, 2003; Ryan, 2006). The present findings are consistent with Norman and Aron's (2003) study. Their findings indicated that the availability of an event or scenario is predictive of behavior associated with that event and that the possibility for the motivation to attain that possible self will increase. Ruvolo and Markus (1992) affirmed, "by envisioning possible self, one may anticipate, and perhaps actually experience, some of the effect associated with the end state" (p.97).

However, these L2 selves were not the only selves in some of the students' perceptions of their future. A number of participants had other possible selves available at the onset of the semester such as a working self, an academic self, and a mother self. These other selves were even more noticeable and available than their L2 selves. For example, when Rachel was asked about her future with regard to her Spanish ability, she immediately replied that she wanted to become a nurse and that ideally she would be able to work within a Spanish community so she could put those two goals together. Jill also replied that she could see herself working in a non-nonprofit organization helping non-English speaking families get situated in new places. She stressed the importance of a type of social work in her future. This corroborates the principle that possible selves can

be multidimensional and dynamic, i.e., they can change over time and the participants can face potential multiple goals (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Norman & Aron, 2003; Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Although all possible selves have the potential to influence current behavior, some are more likely to do so than others (Hoyle & Sherill, 2006). Furthermore, a possible self could lose its significance to the subject if it conflicts with other more relevant possible selves, lacks clear self-regulatory actions, or because it was difficult for this possible self to sustain self-regulatory effort (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). Carol's possible nursing self, for example, was more salient than her possible French self at the moment of the second interview. The latter was interfering with the former in that it was delaying her goal to become a nurse due to the extra amount of classes she needed to take in order to get her French minor. She admitted at that point that she just wanted to finish taking her French classes so she could concentrate on her nursing major and graduate. Later in this chapter, I explain in depth the influence that these different possible selves have in the development of the students' possible L2selves.

In sum, the participants were already highly motivated before their abroad sojourn with clear sets of goals and available images of themselves as fluent speakers of the language. Once at their location, they shaped myriad opportunities to work towards the development of their L2 selves by embracing experiential learning opportunities and by developing different strategies that could help them enhance their learning experiences and move closer to their L2 selves. For many participants this abroad language experience allowed them to visualize themselves as speakers of the language rather than just learners of the language.

L2 Self–Accessibility

As previously stated, the subjects from the study were motivated about their trip abroad and the impact of this experience on their L2 development and future careers. Once abroad, they were able to explore different venues for learning and took advantage of every opportunity to move closer to their possible L2 selves. Being abroad offered the students multiple moments for their L2 selves to emerge and become accessible to them. This accessibility motivated the students to invest many resources such as time and effort in their goal of becoming fluent and accurate speakers of the L2. Norman and Aron's (2003) study confirmed that accessibility in relation to a possible self increased motivation to attain or to avoid that possible self as "the greater the accessibility of a knowledge structure, the more attention it will receive" (p.505). The authors stated that once activated, the possible selves act as a motivating element to actually attain these possible selves.

Most students exhibited a strong L2 identity as speakers of the target language when they came back from abroad. The subjects recounted several instances in which they automatically spoke in the target language when they had to use their native language. Lee and Oyserman (2007) explained that life phases or changes in social contexts increase the salience of relevant possible-selves. For my participants, it was the effect that the study abroad context exerted over their fluency and accurate possible L2 self. Kelsey, for instance, could not believe she could not speak Spanish all the time once back and when she would talk to her American friends, she would use some Spanish expressions in her conversations. When Rachel came back from her journey to Spain, it took her more time to get used to her hometown again than it took to acquaint to Spain.

After returning to the States, the participants were even more energized to continue working on their possible L2 selves-representations. Most of them had their own language goals to accomplish such as improving grammar, working towards fluency and maintaining their language gains. Moreover, these students exhibited different types of strategic learning behaviors⁹ (Dörnyei, 2005) in order to make their possible L2Selves more accessible. Some participants like Steve had elaborate and well thought-out approaches to continue learning. For instance, he enrolled in four Spanish classes so he could have more “Spanish exposure” and therefore, get closer to being fluent:

To involve myself in many classes, I will have lots of opportunities to continue learning. I just come to class every day speaking Spanish and I go home and study Spanish, and I go to work and continue doing that and I continue to involve myself four days a week with that much Spanish. It's like keeping myself busy with Spanish to the point that I cannot speak English. That's the closest setting to Mexico, engulfing myself so much in Spanish that I don't have an opportunity to speak English. That's how I'm going to learn.

Steve understood the importance of language immersion in his goal to become a fluent speaker. Therefore, he tried to replicate his abroad experience by enrolling in many Spanish classes.

Rachel expressed excitement about her Spanish classes because she felt they were the only chance to continue using the target language. In order to have more opportunities to use her Spanish, she decided to choose Spanish courses that met three days rather than two. For Rachel and Steve, their language classes became one of the most vital resources in the goal to become closer to their possible L2 selves. Other participants were very

⁹ Dörnyei (2005) defines strategic learning as a purposeful effort to select and then pursue learning procedures that the students believe will increase their individual learning effectiveness.

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proactive and began looking for opportunities for that self to continue being accessible even before classes started. Stephanie, Victoria, and Paula, for instance, contacted several friends who they knew were native speakers of their target language as soon as they arrived from their abroad sojourn. They asked their friends to meet once a week to help them practice their L2 language. Others used different means such as watching movies and listening to music in the target language to keep their gains. One can observe different approaches in their commitment to retaining their language gains and attaining their possible fluent and accurate L2selves.

From the possible selves' perspective, these students tried to reproduce the high level of L2 self accessibility in the United States that they experienced abroad because it allowed them to continue moving forward towards their goal of becoming fluent or at least keeping their gains in the target language. Others had less sophisticated strategies such as listening to music or watching videos only. One can infer that at this point, some students had greater accessible possible L2 selves than others and that these different levels of accessibility could influence their motivation towards the attainment of these possible selves later in their future. Furthermore, some students faced difficulties with the availability of resources and time to make their possible L2 selves accessible. For example, students whose target languages were French and Italian, expressed that where they lived, it was very difficult, "almost impossible," to find French and Italian native speakers. Nevertheless, some of them were able to find other ways to move forward with their language goals. Victoria became a French major after her abroad experience so she could have more exposure to the language. She also decided to volunteer as a translator at an institution that provided services for refugees. Gena, on the other hand, did not have

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time to become involved with speaking French. Her nursing classes were very demanding and she did not have opportunities to speak in French. She said, “I would be more likely to use more French terms and phrases if I were around people who knew French.” Even though Victoria and Gena both have possible French selves, Victoria’s L2 possible self was more salient therefore; she was more invested in becoming fluent. On the other hand, Gena’s nursing self was more relevant and accessible for her at that moment and that is why she was more devoted to its attainment.

In addition to holding positive images of the L2 self one looks forward to becoming, possible selves include concerns for the future and the self-images one fears or wishes to avoid (Lee & Oyserman, 2007). Some students expressed concerns about the possibility of regressing in their language abilities or moving farther away from their Possible L2 selves. They contemplated the possibility of losing fluency and grammatical accuracy due to circumstances such as lack of time, less possible L2 self-accessibility, and the presence of other stronger possible selves that might affect their motivation to pursue achieving these possible selves. However, some of the students including Victoria and Steve were able to strategize so they could continue moving forward to their ideal L2 selves. Others, like Gena and Joy, had other stronger and more relevant ideal selves than their possible L2 selves. Therefore, these other possible selves became more salient and their possible L2 selves less significant. For Gena, it was her nursing possible self and for Joy it was her working self:

Like I said I really want to have a job where I can speak Spanish but because of mostly money and some medical stuff I need to have health insurance so I have to take whatever I can get after graduation. So if that happen, I guess I have to find my own way to keep speaking Spanish but I am really afraid that I’m going to lose it. (Joy)

Joy's working self was more salient and relevant than her possible L2 self. Therefore, her feared self, i.e., not a Spanish speaker, became more available.

According to the literature, when feared possible selves are paired with positive expected ones, important motivational consequences happen (Lee & Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). According to Lee and Oyserman (2007), "Balanced possible selves promotes attainment because linking a positive expected self to a feared self in the same domain pinpoints motivation to both work toward a positive future goal and to anticipate and strategize how to get around problems that may result in getting closer to one's feared possible self" (p.41). In Victoria and Steve's cases, one can infer that they had balanced possible selves. In Gena and Joy's cases, their possible and feared selves were not balanced. Therefore, other more relevant selves became more important to the expense of probably losing their possible L2 self.

To conclude, at the beginning of the semester back after being abroad, the participants had clear possible L2 selves they wanted to acquire. However, they realized that they needed to work harder after returning to campus on finding opportunities for that self to emerge and be more accessible. The most motivated students made use of elaborate strategies to continue in their process of becoming fluent and accurate in the target language. Others less motivated or whose possible L2 selves were less salient made use of more simplistic strategies such as listening to music in order to maintain their gains. Some participants faced challenges such as time and other more relevant selves that influenced their involvement and motivation to continue moving towards their ideal L2 selves. The majority of the students also had the presence of the feared self they did not want to become. However, the ones who were highly motivated were able to plan

strategies that could help them move closer to their more ideal self. The participants who did not have a salient possible L2 self were not able to strategize as much about how to get closer to this L2 self.

L2 Self and Academic Self

At the onset of the semester and after their abroad experience, all of the participants had a clear vision about where they wanted to be in terms of their language ability. Many of them had already started working towards their ideal L2 self by looking for opportunities that would help them reach their desired vision. They also had plans to keep moving forward towards their fluent and accurate possible L2 selves. Markus and Nurius (1986) affirmed that the possible selves construct gives form, specificity, direction, and imagery to an individual's goals and aspirations: "it is the possible self that puts the self into action that outlines the likely course of action" (Markus and Nurius, 1987, p.159). After her return from Mexico, Paula went straight into 300 level Spanish classes after only 1 year of basic Spanish at her home university. She volunteered in her sister's middle school Spanish classroom where there were many Latinos. At the moment of the interview, she was planning on going abroad the following semester to the Dominican Republic because she wanted to become fluent. For Christine, French became a part of her daily life and she tried to take every opportunity she could in order to continue honing her French abilities. Studying abroad provided this group of students not only with the possibility to speak and learn a foreign language but also with a strong image of a possible future as speakers of that language. They came back feeling motivated about what they had achieved and were ready to keep investing in their gains (Wlodkowski, 1999).

At the beginning of the semester, after their abroad experience, the students held expectations about what they wanted to gain from their language classes. For the majority of the subjects, language classes were not only instrumental in their goal to become fluent and accurate language speakers but also provided them with the opportunity for their possible L2 self to be more accessible and for their feared L2 self to be less accessible. Simons et al. (2000) explain that a sense of purpose for the future is an important factor in moving individuals to engage in activities perceived to be instrumental in achieving valued future outcomes. Leondari (2007) says, “perceived instrumentality is an individual’s recognition that his or her current behavior is instrumental to achieving a valued future goal” (p.19). For instance, students like Steve wanted to take as many classes as his schedule would allow so he could continue moving towards his goal of becoming fluent. Victoria, also, decided to take a French course about Africa because she expected to go there in the future and her focus was to learn more about the country. Others, like Carol, were hoping that her French class would help them to avoid a feared L2 self and get closer to their ideal L2 self. She said:

My biggest expectation is just to get a good idea of grammar, it is a grammar class. I’ve never been good at grammar and hopefully, a class completely focused on grammar will help me because I’ve got the conversational thing by going to France. I got that and hopefully now I can master grammar.

Carol experienced a sense of optimism about the likelihood of attaining her goal of mastering grammar by enrolling in that particular grammar class. From the self perspective, Carol’s desired and undesired possible selves served to promote instrumental action designed to decrease the discrepancy between her current L2 self and her ideal L2 self (Cross & Markus, 1991). By holding temporary negative feelings about her L2 self, Carol could become more accurate when speaking French. Higgins’ (1987) Self-

Discrepancy theory suggests that differences between one's current sense of self and future selves causes discomfort, which in turn motivates a person to increase resemblance between the two selves in order to reduce that feeling of discomfort.

The study participants also noticed significant changes due to their abroad experience not only in their self-perceptions as language speakers from language learners but also in their goal orientation. They were more task goal oriented than performance oriented ¹⁰(Simons et al., 2000). They felt more confident about their abilities, they took more risks about making mistakes, and they found that their purposes to be in the language classroom became more meaningful and more focused. They valued when their classes offered community involvement and further opportunities for possible L2 selves to be accessible. That is, they wanted more authentic and meaningful scenarios in and outside of the classroom that would allow them to continue working on their fluency and accuracy as speakers of their target language. Research on the possible selves' perspective supports the view that students with a positive perception of the instrumentality of school work to attain future goals are more motivated for school tasks, make more use of effective learning strategies, and perform better (Leondari, 2007). According to Bandura (1988) the stronger the belief students have in their capabilities, the greater and more persistent are their efforts.

At the moment of the second interview, in the middle of the semester, the group of students reported they were facing some challenges in regards to their language learning goals. The first challenge was the lack of support between their possible L2 selves' goals and their experiences in the classroom. Some participants attended their

¹⁰ Task goal oriented students focus on learning, take challenging tasks and believe errors provide information that guides their learning. Performance oriented students want to demonstrate their competence and take on less challenging tasks that guarantee success (Ames, 1992a in Simons et al., 2000).

classes with the desire to become more fluent and more accurate. However, what the classes offered to them was contrary to their expectations. These classes emphasized more lecturing and offer very few chances for oral communication and active involvement. Furthermore, participants found that taking the classes with other students who were not as invested in becoming fluent speakers was very discouraging because these students would not make the effort to use the language in the classroom and would constantly default to English. Participants felt that the most instrumental of the opportunities to achieve their goals, i.e., the language classroom, was actually undermining their chances to accomplish their possible L2 selves' goals. The third challenge was related to the type of class. For some of the students, taking mandatory literature classes was contradictory to their notion about majoring and minoring in their target language. They considered that the focus on literature was not congruent with their understanding of language learning. For these participants, learning a language was related to the ability to communicate fluently and accurately in that language.

An interesting finding was that the participants exhibited different levels of perceived control during these challenges. In the context of possible selves, perceived control:

is the degree to which individuals believe their behaviours can influence the attainment or avoidance of a possible self. If individuals believe they have control over attaining or avoiding a possible self, they will be more inclined to take the necessary steps to do so. (Norman & Aron, 2003, p.501)

Norman and Aaron's (2003) study supports the notion that if individuals consider they have control over accomplishing (or avoiding) a particular possible self, motivation relevant to this possible self will be greater. On the one hand, there are students like Steve

who found it very difficult to deal with other students from the class that only wanted to talk in English. He said:

When I do group projects with people in my class, when we get together you know. It is in English and not in Spanish. It is kind of hard being around an English community when you want to speak Spanish.

However, it is clear to Steve that the control is in his hands: “A lot of it is what I make an effort to do; it is not what is available to me. It is what I make happen”. Therefore, he decided to find other ways such to keep practicing by acquiring language learning software and by subscribing to XM radio so he could access the Spanish channels. Rachel’s class did not provide opportunities for oral communication, which she found very frustrating since her main goal was to improve her fluency and pronunciation.

However, she also exhibited a degree of control over this situation:

My class now it’s fine but is not like encouraging but like it has not really affected it that much my desire to learn more because I’m going to Peru. I’m going to work on an orphanage for six weeks and I don’t think my class has made me change. I am as excited to keep on.

Maria had a similar experience in her class. Therefore, she decided to take advantage of the tutoring center and created spaces in her schedule so she could meet with a tutor in order to continue working on her fluency. For Stephanie, the challenge was not being able to enroll in a class because it was full. Nevertheless, she decided to volunteer in an ESL program where she served as a pen pal for two young kids, one from Mexico and from Honduras. Stephanie also felt that the control of her learning was in her hands and that if she wanted to become fluent, she did not need someone else to tell her what to do: “I don’t have someone telling me what I need to do to continue and getting closer to being bilingual and to be fluent”. Steve, Rachel, Maria, and Stephanie had specifically

elaborated possible L2 goals that allowed them to energize and organize their performance even in the face of difficult situations such as not being able to get into a class or get additional help from other people (Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998). One can infer that these students had dominant possible L2 selves that gave rise to generalize feelings of control and optimism. These feelings allowed them to work around the complications and influenced their behavior to persist towards their intrinsic goal of acquiring fluency (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992).

On the other hand, students like Carol not only dealt with challenges in her French grammar class but also with her nursing major. For Carol, her advanced French grammar class was a source of anxiety. She felt that she could not give the time and the dedication required to learn the essential grammar structures due to her other demanding nursing classes. Furthermore, the fact that she was not surrounded by French in the same way as she was in France made her performance in her French classes very difficult and frustrating. This lack of preparation and L2 self accessibility prompted her to feel really frustrated and even questioned her decision to pursue French rather than Spanish, which would be more relevant in her career as a nurse. Her motivation to pursue her L2 goals was very low:

I'm kind of at a dead end like I really cannot learn any more. It is not sticking. It is frustrating. I don't really know because you might think that after you have been immersed in the language as long as I was, you might think that it would be easier but really what stuck with me was conversational and that has stuck with me a lot so the grammar part, I don't know, I think it is probably that I haven't been dedicating a lot of time. It takes a lot of dedication and a lot of time commitment to sit down and study and I have not been giving that.

Possible selves are powerful motivators but they can also be vulnerable. Unless tentative positive self-views are particular well elaborated or intentionally invoked and reaffirmed, they may easily leave the working self- concept to be replaced by negative possibilities (Markus & Nurius, 1987). The combination of several types of forces influenced the relevance and likelihood of Carol's possible L2 self in her working-self concept¹¹ and therefore, influenced her efforts to attain it. First of all, at the moment of the second interview Carol's possible L2 self was neither salient nor accessible. At this moment, she was more invested in her nursing self than in her possible L2 self since she did not believe that her possible French self was worth pursuing or investing any effort in it (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). Second, her goals to go abroad were mainly extrinsic, that is, goals to achieve some instrumental end. Carol's main goal to go abroad was to get the credits required for her French minor. The literature in goal motivation stresses that intrinsic goals are stronger predictors of increase in motivation than extrinsic goals. Noels, Pelletier, Clément, and Vallerand's (2003) study found that having external pressures does not reliably predict effort, persistence and attitude. "Rather, it might be expected that such people will be involved in the activity as long as the contingency is present but less involved if it is withdrawn" (Noels, 2001, p.50). Third, she did not have a perceived control over her goal of becoming grammatically accurate in French, which might have inhibited any attempt to achieve it (Norman & Aron, 2003). Erika's challenges in her three language classes were first the focus on literature and the less "real" content of the material used in class. She confided that this focus caused her to lose

¹¹ The working –self concept is that set of self-conceptions that are presently accessible in thought and memory (Markus & Nurius, 1987)

interest saying, “It doesn’t excite me the way just been surrounded by Spanish does”.

Second, her lack of confidence in her speaking ability:

I am still nervous and I don’t want to. Around certain professors I don’t feel as comfortable. I want to pass that but I have that mental block. I think it is the image of the professor that I have built up about them in my mind. It is not necessarily that they are harder to speak to it just happens like that for me.

Even though Erika’s possible self was still available (she still envisioned a future as a bilingual speaker), it was not as accessible as her feared L2 self, that is, a non-bilingual speaker. Since her feared L2 self was more salient and accessible, her motivation to incorporate detailed strategies that could have increased the likelihood of becoming bilingual decreased. Erika also mentioned that it was very difficult to engage in more activities to practice the language due to her busy schedule. Oyserman et al.’s (2004) study suggested that for the subjects’ possible selves to influence long term and outcomes that are difficult to change like participation in class and time spent in homework, individuals not only need to wish for success but they also need to articulate how they will get there. Erika stated that the confidence she once had was gone and that she did not know why. She also expressed how her nervousness was keeping her from showing what she actually learned. One can say that Erika’s actions were fueled by external motivators such as being a language major: “First of all, I am Spanish major and [professors] highly recommend that you go abroad” and professors’ endorsement of her abilities. This means that her possible bilingual self was motivated by extrinsic goals as Carol’s possible French self. From a possible self perspective, Erika’s confidence in her language performance was being undermined and this fact combined with a salient L2 feared self, external motivators and a lack of strategies to move towards her possible L2 self could have contributed to lower her motivation to attain her bilingual possible self.

In sum, the study participants faced some academic challenges that could have undermined the potential for their L2 possible selves to influence motivational behaviors to attain their language goals. However, this study showed that those participants with salient possible L2 selves, intrinsic goals, and specific behavioral strategies to attain those goals and some level of control over these strategies were able to overcome those challenges and maintain their motivation to achieve their possible L2 selves. On the other hand, those participants who had less salient possible L2 selves, extrinsic goals and no behavioral strategies either abandoned their possible L2 self goals or experienced a decreased in their motivation to attain those goals.

L2 Self and Other Selves

As stated before, the possible self construct is thought to influence the motivation process in two ways: first, by providing a clear goal to strive for or to avoid, and second, by energizing an individual to pursue the actions necessary for attaining those goals (Markus & Ruvoilo, 1989). This construct is also dynamic, complex, contextually interactive, and evolving (Rossiter, 2007). An individual can hold an array of salient possible selves that vary according to valence, temporal placement, and level of elaboration, accessibility and perceived control (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Norman & Aron, 2003). These possible selves, when they are activated into one's thinking, become part of what is called the working self-concept.

The students from this study experienced these salient possible selves at many levels. First, there was a group of students, who envisioned their salient L2 selves as a stepping-stone to get other prominent selves. For instance, one-half of the students considered how becoming fluent and grammatically accurate would help them to achieve

other selves such as a nursing self or a teacher self. These students were able to combine compelling and accessible possible selves that would help them to move towards valued outcomes (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Another group of students were able to hold additional possible selves together with a possible L2 self without one depending on the other. For example, Katie wanted to become an ambassador in a Spanish speaking country so her love for Spanish together with her love for Law could be combined in one job. Jill and Jane wanted to find a job in non-profit organizations where they could become instrumental in helping people from their target language community. From a possible self-perspective theory, these students held equally balanced possible selves - that is, possible selves that are both salient and accessible. This balance could allow them to have more varied motivational resources and more control over their behavioral drive (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Finally, there was a small group of students who had at some point salient possible selves competing for the students' resources such as time and commitment and whose possible L2 selves became less salient and less accessible. Carol's French self for instance became less relevant to the point that she even questioned if having dedicating so much time to French was really worth it. Sarah's academic performance self (i.e., getting good grades) was a priority for her, therefore, she was not able to get involved in more extracurricular activities that would have allowed her to become closer to her ideal L2 self. According to Markus and Ruvolo (1989) "unless one's possible selves derive from the domains of one's current involvement, and expertise, they are unlikely to be particularly effective in regulating performance" (p.213). Carol and Sarah's possible L2 selves were inconsequential in their attainment of their nursing self and academic performance self.

The study's data show that the students exhibited different degrees of language learning motivation before, during, and after the abroad sojourn. Nineteen out of the twenty students had already fulfilled the general education requirement of three semesters of language study when they decided to go abroad. Siena was the only one in the group not enrolled in a language course before going abroad. One can infer that this group of students was already motivated before going abroad and that the possibility of PL2 selves' availability was high. However, these participants experienced different degrees of PL2 selves' salience before, during, and after their abroad experience that affected their motivation to attain the future image of themselves as accurate and fluent language speakers.

The subjects could be divided in four groups according to their PL2S salience level. One group represents those students with salient PL2 selves' images before going abroad and who were able to maintain those vivid PL2S images during their SA experience and after they return despite the challenges they faced. In this group, we find Steve who had a clear vision of himself as a fluent Spanish speaker before going abroad and who developed different strategies in order to increase accessibility during the SA and after he came back to his home institution. The second group represents those students with salient PL2 selves before and during the SA. However, when they returned to their home institution, they faced challenges that affected their motivation to attain their PL2 selves' and the relevance of those PL2Ss in the students' working self concept. Erika, for instance, had a clear image of herself in the future as a fluent Spanish speaker before and during her abroad sojourn. However, when she came back, she found that her classes were not supporting that fluent image and that it was difficult to find other ways

to move towards the achievement of her PL2 self. Her motivation in attaining her fluent PL2 self had dropped and there was a risk that her PL2S could vanish from her working self concept. The third group represents those with a vague future image of themselves as accurate and fluent L2 speakers before going abroad. However, the students' experiences during their SA helped those vague images become more salient and that allowed them to create clear strategies to attain those salient images after they came back from their abroad sojourn. Emily, for instance decided to go abroad just for fun. However, when she experienced being surrounded by the language during her abroad sojourn, her PL2self became more salient. Once back, she implemented a series of strategies that allowed her PL2 self to be accessible.

The final group characterizes those students with vague PL2Ss before the abroad experience but they become more salient during their abroad sojourn. However, once back their motivation for language learning diminished. These students' PL2selves disappeared from their working self concept and other more relevant PSs became salient. In this group we find Carol who decided to go abroad to get credits for her French minor as a way to finish it quickly so she could concentrate on her more relevant nursing self. At the moment of the focus group interview, she questioned her decision to pursue French due to the amount of time that her French classes were taking away from her nursing major. The following chart illustrates the different degrees of PL2 Ss salience and its impact in the subjects' motivation.

Table 3 Possible L2 Selves Levels of Salience

Students	Before the Abroad Experience	During the Abroad Experience	After the Abroad Experience
1. Paula, Stephanie, Kelsey, Steve, Jane and Jill.	<u>Reasons to go abroad:</u> - To become an accurate and fluent speaker. -To experience and understand the culture. -To be better in the language.	<u>Motivated actions</u> -Looking for more language exposure. -Implementing rules such as the "No English allowed" rule. -Embracing challenges. -Thinking of errors as learning opportunities. -Identifying themselves as language speakers	<u>Motivated actions</u> -Looking for language use opportunities. -A stronger language speaker identity. -Creation of learning strategies. -Visions of other PSs together with PL2Ss in their future.
2. Erika, Joy, and Sarah			-Frustration with lack of speaking opportunities in the classes. -Lack of learning strategies. -Dependant on language classes for their PL2S to be stronger. - PL2Ss vanishes from their working self concept.
3. Victoria, Katie, Christine, María, Emily, Siena, Gena, Rachel, Margarita, and Isabelle	-To get course credits. -For fun. -Being suggested by professors.		IBIDEM
4. Carol			IBIDEM

Groups two and three are especially important because they can illustrate the influence of PL2Ss in language learning motivation. Erika, Joy and Sarah had salient

PL2Ss before and during their abroad experience. However, when they came back they faced academic challenges that undermined the existence of that PL2 self in their working self concept. Furthermore, they were not able to articulate clear strategies to get closer to their PL2Ss after their SA experience that would have allowed them to retain those PL2Ss in their working self concept. Victoria's group, on the other hand, experienced how their SA sojourns helped them develop salient PL2Ss and together with sets of clear strategies allowed them to face the different challenges when they returned to their home institution.

The L2 Motivational Self System

The participants' possible L2 selves' development and their affect on their language learning motivation could be explicated by using Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System. In an attempt to expand Gardner's integrative motivation concept, Dörnyei developed a model that would expand the integrativeness notion by including cognitive concepts in order to explain language-learning motivation. Gardner (2001) defines integrativeness as the desire to learn an L2 of a valued community so that one can communicate with members of the community and sometimes even become like them. However, many researchers have pointed out that the term is very ambiguous because it does not clarify what the target of integration is and in many language-learning environments such as learning a language far from the target community, the use of that term does not make much sense. Therefore, Dörnyei (2009) offers a model that takes into account different language learning environments and places imagery or vision at the center of his theory. Dörnyei feels that the secret of successful learners was their possession of a "super ordinate vision that kept them on track" (p.25). He argues that for

some language learners the motivation to learn a language does not come from internally or externally generated self images but rather from successful engagement with the actual language learning process and divides it into three components: First, the Ideal L2 Self, or possible L2 self, which is the L2-specific facet of one's self. This is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Victoria, for instance, considered herself terrible at languages but yet, her desire to become better fueled her motivation to keep working on her French: "I keep a list of every grammatical mistake I make because I'm so determined to be good at it". Steve's ideal L2 self was also very salient. He wanted to become fluent in Spanish and once he came back from his abroad sojourn, he organized his schedule in order to "engulf" himself in the language. Other students' ideal L2 self were not that salient. Carol's, for instance, questioned her decision to minor in French because she did not see its relevancy to her nursing major.

The second component is the Ought-to L2 self, which refers to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes. It considers more extrinsic types of instrumental motives. Many subjects had instrumental motives or exhibited ought-to L2 selves in their decisions to go abroad, others held a combination of internal and external motives and exhibited ideal L2 selves and ought L2 selves. Erika, for instance, decided to go abroad because she was a Spanish major (ought-to self) and her professors highly recommended her to go abroad (extrinsic motive). Jane wanted to improve her fluency so she could help in a mission's trip (extrinsic) and decided that going abroad could help her with her fluency (ideal L2 self) and at the same time fulfill the practicum requirement for her major in human rights

(extrinsic). Gena's decision to go abroad, for instance, was influenced by her interest in French culture and the French language (internal motives) but also by the possibility to get more experience for her international relations major (external motive).

The third component is the L2 learning experience, which considers the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success in the students' motivation. As previously discussed, different aspects of the L2 learning experience affected the subjects' motivation during their abroad experience and once back at their home institution. During their abroad experience, the subjects' ideal L2 selves were more available and more accessible, which allowed them to create a stronger future vision of themselves as fluent speakers of the language. Jill recounted how encouraging it was for her to be able to successfully communicate with her host family mainly during meal times: "We would leave the table so impressed with ourselves on what we could get across". Margarita, on the other hand, described how frustrating it was to live with other English speaking students who were not as invested as she was to become good at Spanish. Therefore, she decided to befriend the locals in order to improve her fluency: "I said, I can't speak English because my Spanish is not good enough... I need to learn. So I did that and went out to a "pincho" bar and I made friends with the owners and they would teach me how to do it". Once back at their home university, many participants experienced a disconnection between their ideal L2 selves and their experiences in the classroom. Some students like Steve felt disappointed by taking classes with other students who refused to speak in Spanish during and outside of class: "The only issue would be that a lot of people rather speak English in Spanish class..." Others were frustrated by the lack of speaking opportunities in the classroom and by the literature

focus of some classes. Erika felt that literature classes did not provide “real” language contexts, which were vital in order to improve her language skills.

The L2 motivational Self System could explain the different degrees of motivational influence exhibited by the participants’ possible L2 selves. According to Dörnyei (2009), an ideal L2 self is an effective motivator if, first, the learner has a desired future self-image that is elaborate and vivid. The self-image needs to be perceived as plausible and in harmony with the expectations of the learner’s family, educators, peers and other elements of the social environment. The image needs to be regularly activated in the learner’s working self-concept, and accompanied by relevant and effective procedural strategies that act as a road map towards the goal.

Finally, this image contains elaborate information about the negative consequences of not achieving the desired end-state. It is important to look at how these conditions translated into some of the subjects’ possible L2 selves’ development and motivational actions. As previously explained, Steve’s salient self allowed him to incorporate apparent learning strategies in his desire to acquire a fluent L2 self. He was also able to move around the different obstacles he faced when he came back from his abroad experience to his home institution (see figure 2). Katie’s possible L2 self, on the other hand, was not as vivid as Steve’s. However, her experiences in the classroom were the motivational forces to continue improving her language skills. According to Dörnyei (2001), motivation forces originating from the language classroom have great influence on how much effort students are willing to invest in language learning. Furthermore, Katie’s possible Lawyer self was also present and even more salient than her ideal L2 self. However, she was able to envision both as part of her future. The combination of

great experiences in the classroom together with another salient self could explain why Katie did not have a set of concrete action plans as Steve did. The following charts illustrate Steve and Katie's possible L2 selves within the L2 Motivational Self System:

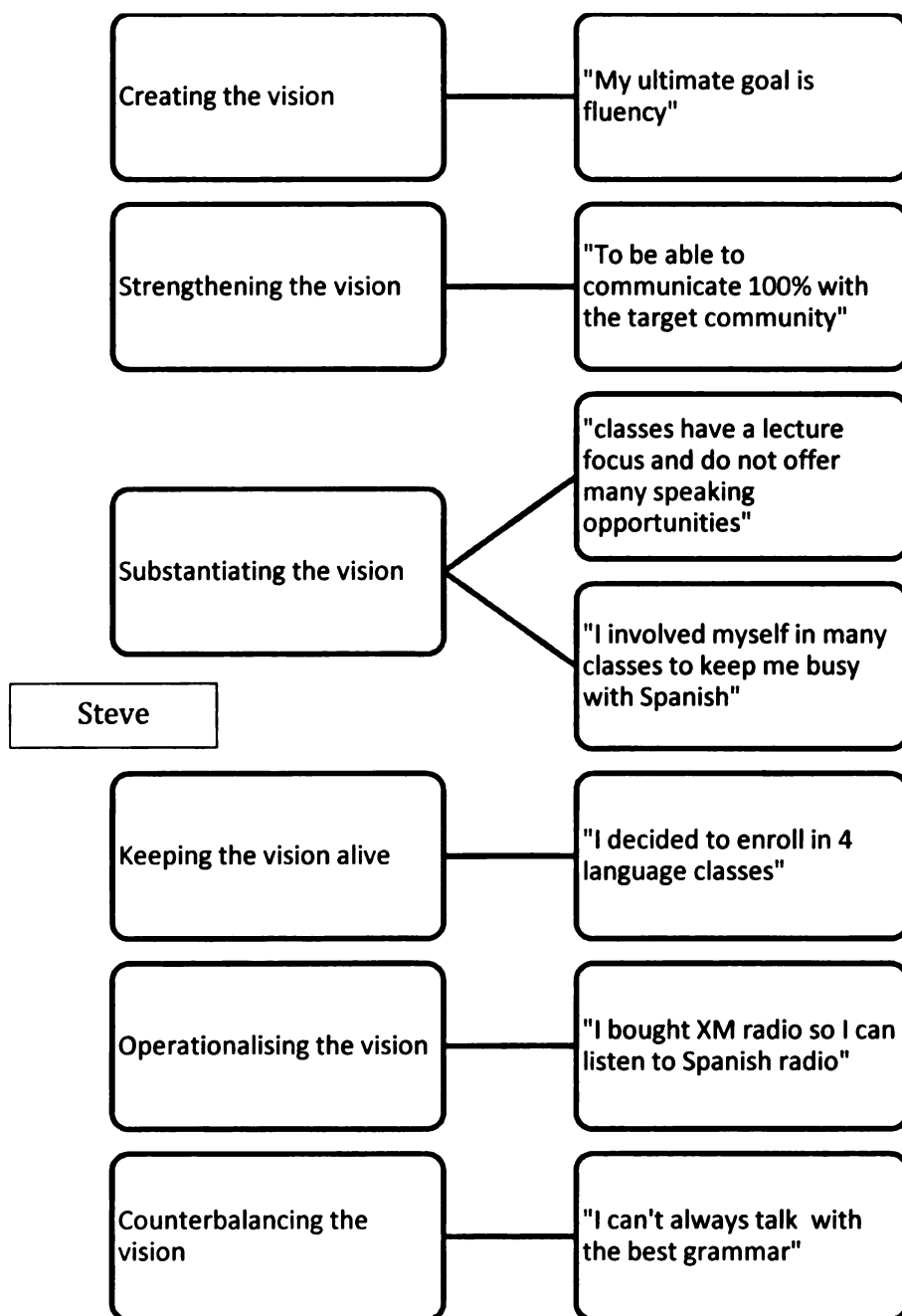


Figure 2: Steve's Motivational L2 Self System

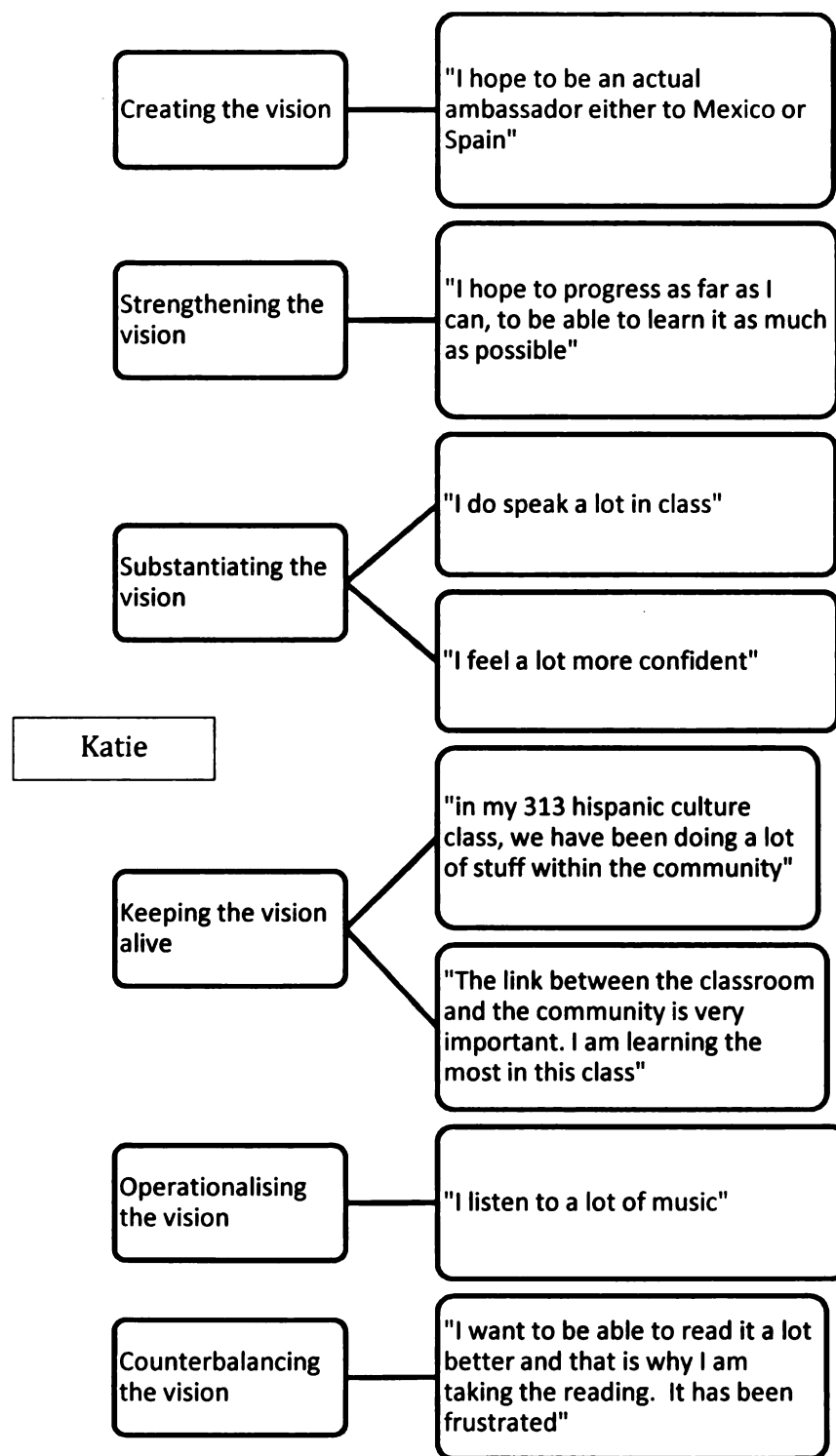


Figure 3: Katie's Motivational L2 Self System

Even though both Steve and Katie hold possible L2 selves, Steve has more possibilities to keep moving towards his ideal L2 self after he finishes his language classes because he exhibited a repertoire of self-regulatory strategies such as the decision to buy a language software and XM radio. Katie, on the other hand, was more dependent on what the classes offered her. At this point, it is not clear what will happen to Katie's possible L2 self after she finishes her language classes.

To conclude, this study supported the notion that possible selves are complex, dynamic contextual and mutable. A person can have several active, relevant and salient selves at one point but only those that are accessible, relevant and significant to the participants' goals could remain in that individual's working-self concept. The other prominent possible selves will become less salient and could even disappear. Dörnyei's (2009) L2 motivational Self System illustrates how an ideal L2 self could be an effective motivator provided there is a clear and plausible future self-image accompanied by effective procedural strategies.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

Study abroad experiences have proven to be vital in the field of language learning not only from a linguistic perspective but also from a cultural perspective. Most of the studies in this area focus on how these experiences have influenced the acquisition of discrete grammatical terms and pronunciation skills. However, we know little about how these experiences affect students' motivation in their language learning process once they return home to an area where they do not have the same availability of language practice opportunities as abroad. Study abroad experiences make it easier for people to situate their possible self in a target language speaking environment. This possible selves construct offers an interesting approach to language learning motivation that looks more closely at how the learner's goals and learning decisions are related to personal meanings, self-direction and determination. This construct offers a holistic perspective on language learning motivation because it explains motivational behavior as an internal process of identification within the person's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group as Gardner's (1973) integrative orientation theoretical concept explains.

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of study abroad programs in the development of possible L2 selves and the effect of moving from a second language context to a foreign language one in the development of these selves. I interviewed twenty college students at the beginning of the semester following their return from a study abroad experience in order to inquire about the likelihood of students having available L2 selves, their experiences abroad, and how these ideal selves might have influenced motivational behaviors overseas. Then I did a focus group interview in the

middle of the semester in order to explore how their L2 selves developed through the contextual changes of returning to campus after studying abroad.

This study found that, for this group of students, their ideal L2 self was a fluent and accurate user of the target language. Subjects with salient L2 selves seized more opportunities abroad to allow their L2 selves to be more available and more accessible. Once at their abroad destination, some participants decided to implement rules such as ‘no English allowed’ during their stay abroad. Others decided to make friends with the locals as a way to have more language practice opportunities. Furthermore, this accessibility helped participants develop an identity as speakers of the target language with well-defined salient ideal L2 selves.

Upon their return to the United States and at the beginning of the academic semester, most of the students held available PL2 selves with evident L2 goals. Consequently, they looked for opportunities to make these L2 selves as accessible as they were abroad. For instance, some decided to minor or major in the language in order to have more exposure. Others decided to get involved with the target community with the aim of broadening their experiences in the target language.

Moreover, the subjects faced some challenges at their home institution that made their possible L2 selves vulnerable to remaining salient in the students’ working self-concept. For the majority of the subjects, language classes were very instrumental in their goals to attain fluency and accuracy and for some others, the only chance to access their possible L2 selves. However, for a group of students, these classes did not facilitate the much-needed opportunity to keep moving forward to the attainment of these selves. On the one hand, the students, who had clear goals and well-defined possible L2 selves were

able to overcome these challenges by designing strategies that compensated the lack of opportunities offered in the classroom such as enrolling in several language classes or getting involved in the target community programs at their local churches or community centers. On the other hand, the students with less salient possible L2 selves had other more relevant and vivid selves in their working self-concept and became less actively involved in their language learning. Gena, for instance, questioned her decision to minor in French and stressed the importance of nursing in her future.

Another interesting finding was the way in which other salient selves, different from their L2 selves, became part of the subjects' motivation to attain a possible L2 self or to jeopardize the existence of that L2 self in the subjects' working self-concept. This depicts how different possible selves can be interconnected through a web of life roles, beliefs and identities that diverge in degree to which they are active and attached to the present (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). These selves can either be well integrated with each other (possible social worker self gets on well with possible L2 language self) or fractured (my PL2 self is interfering with my more relevant nursing self).

These findings support the premise that individuals create mental representations of themselves in future states (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and that these representations combined with detailed strategies promote significant motivational behaviors to goal attainment. According to Markus and Nurius (1987), the possible self is the one "that puts the self into action and that outlines the likely course of action" (p.159). This study also supports the principle that those individuals with a well-elaborated representation of themselves in a future state that is current in the domain of one's present involvement and expertise will be motivated and able to regulate effectively their performance even during

challenging times. On the other hand, if their possible selves are neither well elaborated nor reaffirmed, then these possible selves could vanish from their working self-concept to be replaced by negative possibilities or by other more salient selves. The more availability and accessibility of a possible self and the more perceived control one has over one's behaviors, the more predictable is one's motivation to either achieve or avoid that possible self (Norman & Aron, 2003). Furthermore, this study supports the concept that possible selves are active, flexible, dynamic and contextual. Moving from a second language context to a foreign language one, some subjects' L2 selves went from salient and influential over their actions to being less salient or almost disappearing from the subjects' working self- concepts. Subjects with a detailed self and clear strategy for executing their L2 goals were able to maintain their possible L2 selves in their working-self concept.

This study was able to exhibit how the motivational theory could profit from this concept in order to add a more individual and personal variable to understand why people behave the way they do. Furthermore, it helps widen the scope of the motivational language theory by considering a future perspective, which is not well explored and that could provide interesting results in the way to enhance language learning. Gardner's (1988) integrative orientation has influenced most of the research in language motivation theory done to date. However, many researchers have pointed out that Integrativeness' main premise "that the learner must be willing to identify with members of another ethno linguistic group and take on very subtle aspects of their behavior" (Dörnyei, 2009, p.2) falls short and does not consider contexts in which learners do not have the target community available. By considering a perspective on an internal process of

identification within the person's self concept, rather than identification with an external reference group (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009), the concept of language motivation could be enhanced by including a closer personal account. Finally, this research incorporated foreign language contexts and other languages besides English that are not examined often in the language motivation theory into the possible self-concept.

It is important to point out that the students from this study did not mention the use of technology as an option to help them move closer to their PL2Ss once they came back from their abroad sojourn. One could infer that the importance of technology in order to sustain language learning is not as obvious and that language departments should emphasize the different possibilities that technology offers in the development and availability of PL2Ss in contexts where the target language community is not accessible.

Educators could benefit from this research by offering more opportunities in the classroom in order to facilitate students L2 selves' availability and accessibility, and in that way to enhance and possibly maintain students' motivation to learn. Csizér and Kormos (2009) state that the motivational forces that originate from the language classroom have great influence on how much effort students are willing to invest in language learning. According to Dörnyei (2009), language teachers have great resources to create and keep the vision of possible L2 selves alive by creating communicative tasks. For instance, by inviting role models to class, playing films and engaging in cultural activities, a language educator could make possible L2 selves available. Language teachers with the help of technology could design experiences to help make an imagined community visible or create one for learners, in which students' discourses are linked to this community. For instance, the use of communication software, chat protocols, or

Internet media could enhance the vision of these imagined communities. From this study, one can affirm that these instructional strategies are important to sustain the vision of a PL2 self especially when there is not a language community readily accessible with which the student can interact.

Additionally, the possible selves construct could also offer instructors a way to help struggling or less motivated students by presenting them with a meaningful L2 future to which they could relate. Dörnyei (2009) offers a six point self-based approach to motivation that could be implemented by language instructors in order to increase language-learning motivation. By helping learners create, strengthen, substantiate, keep, strategize, and counterbalance a vision of ideal L2 selves, teachers can increase the significance of these selves in the students' working-self concept in order to keep students engaged in their language learning. This approach can also take advantage of the motivational effectiveness of a possible L2 self in the students' achievement of their ideal L2 selves. Furthermore, universities can maximize the study abroad experience by designing more flexible curricula that could support those experiences once the students are back. That is, language departments could offer courses where there is less emphasis on literature and more emphasis on language skills development or to provide a more visible role of the literature in language learning.

Lave and Wenger (1991) affirm that learning occurs in communities of practice "with learners gradually moving from a position of legitimate peripheral participation toward fuller participation through their engagement in interaction with more experienced members" (in Lamb, 2009, p.230). Universities could also profit from these abroad sojourns by collaborating with international communities in the implementation of

agreements that would allow cultural exchanges via academic-centric instant messaging systems that would expand the students' opportunities for language practice. Looking at study abroad experiences from the possible self-construct has shown that the exposure to other cultures could offer significant gains in addition to the increase in vocabulary and improvement in pronunciation and grammar. It could enhance student motivation for further learning and it could also influence a student's language identity from being a learner to being a speaker of that language. Since the learner gains are evident, and universities and students have invested numerous resources such as time and money on these abroad experiences, universities, especially language departments, should continue benefiting from these gains by creating and maintaining more congruent curricula for these students when they are back.

Finally, the results from this study could also present university officials with a way to approach student retention by looking at how the students' possible selves could assist these students to navigate the college arena more successfully. By sponsoring programs that aim at creating, strengthening, and strategizing visions of ideal selves, higher education institutions could capitalize on the motivational effectiveness of students' possible selves that could, at the same time, augment graduation rates.

Despite its accomplishments, this dissertation has its weaknesses. This study could have benefited from a longer period of data collection in order to gain a better perspective of the development of possible selves. Additionally, some of the participants' responses might have been influenced by other subjects' answers in order to avoid conflict during the focus group interviews, or by the knowledge that I was both the researcher and a language instructor who takes students on study abroad experiences. It is

recommended that the next study make use of individual interviews in order to obtain answers less influenced by group interactions. Finally, the use of diagrams or pictures may complement the data collected from the interviews and the focus groups. Drawing on the work of Cameron (1999), Al-Shehri (2009) emphasizes that the power of imagination is critical to the process of visualizing possible or ideal selves. Thus, drawings could better explain about a phenomenon that might be otherwise difficult to express with words.

Further research could explore if the presence of possible L2 selves in low performing students is less salient than in higher performing students. How does the presence or absence of possible L2 selves affect student performance in the classroom? How different are English possible selves from other language possible selves in terms of students' motivation and language identity? How do possible L2 selves develop abroad? Finally, how salient or non-salient are the possible L2 selves of students who were abroad compared to students who have not been abroad?

The findings from this study show that the presence of possible L2 selves could be powerful motivators for further engagement. The possible selves construct could complement Astin's (1999) student involvement theory by including a future perspective that could better explain student engagement beyond the investment of student energy in the academic experience. Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to the growing body of possible L2 selves' research by considering different contexts in the development of these selves. However, there is still much to learn about the language learning experience that cuts across nationality and culture. There is also a need for more research in order to

provide a practical perspective on the potential of possible selves in the motivational theory of language learning.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Choose a name different from your own.
2. How long have you been studying at this university?
3. Do you have a language major or minor?
4. How long have you been studying L2?
5. Have you been out of the country before this most recent study abroad? If yes
where?
6. In what type of study abroad program did you enroll?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes, which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover.

Introduction

My research project focuses on understanding how Study Abroad experiences influence students' identity as L2 learners, including what language learning experiences, if any; students participate in upon their return from study abroad. You have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about Study Abroad experiences. My study will not assess your Study Abroad experience or how you may have continued your language learning upon return. Rather, I am trying to learn more about you as a L2 learner and your Study Abroad experiences to help improve student language learning on campus.

1. Interviewee Background

- a. I will provide the following questions in a short written survey format at the beginning of the interview
 - ❖ Choose a name you would like me to use during this study in order to report your answers (different from yours); if you cannot think of a name, I will make up a name to use when putting together my study.
 - ❖ How long have you been studying at this university?
 - ❖ Are you Spanish, German, French... Major or Minor?
 - ❖ How long have you been studying L2?
 - ❖ Have you been out of the country before this most recent study abroad? If yes where.
 - ❖ In what type of study abroad program did you enroll?

2. Study Abroad

- a. Why did you decide to go to Germany, France etc...?

3. L2 Identity

- a. How do you describe yourself as a L2 learner?
 - ❖ Probe: Imagine yourself in a classroom, how do you see yourself? What do you do?
- b. How does the type of student you are now differ (if at all) from the one you were before going abroad?

- ❖ Probe: Do you do anything different?
- 4. Motivation, Possible-selves and Study Abroad
 - a. Tell me what it was like speaking the language during your abroad stay?
 - ❖ Probe: How did you practice the language while you were abroad?
 - b. Now, tell me what it has been like being in back in your home country in terms of speaking the language.
 - ❖ Probe: How do you feel about not being able to communicate in (Spanish, French, German, etc.)?
 - c. Now that you are back, what do you want to accomplish as a L2 learner?
 - ❖ Probe: What are you L2 goals, if any? What are you going to do to try and achieve those goals?
 - d. How do you describe yourself in 5 or ten years from now in regards to your ability to listen, speak, read and write in.....(Spanish, French, German, etc.)?
- 5. Post interview comments or observation

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Students will be asked to arrive 10 minutes early; Room must be set up at least 30 minutes before; rapport will be established with students as they arrive; the facilitator will welcome each participant.

Stage One:

- Welcome everyone and express appreciation
- Introduction of my assistant and myself.
- Purpose of today's focus group

Stage Two

- Confidentiality: highlight definition of confidentiality
- Recording: highlight the presence of audio/video equipment, purpose of items in qualitative design (accuracy).

This session is being taped in order to gain the fullest information from the comments you make. The tapes will be transcribed and listened to or read only in strict confidentiality. Your comments will be transcribed only as information will be used only as those made by participant 1, participant 2, etc. Again, this information will be used only by those involved in this evaluation.

Stage Three

- Ice breaker comment in order to facilitate the dialogue among participants. A comment about the weather or study abroad in general.
- Start the dialogue with the following questions:
 - How has it been for you coming back to an environment where English is the main language?
 - Tell me about things you have done to maintain or improve your language skills since you returned from study abroad, if anything.
[Probe: How often have you engaged in those activities?] If you have not done anything, that's ok but I'm curious as to why not.
 - What challenges have you faced that keep you from developing or maintaining your language skills?

- Tell me about the activities you are able to do in order to maintain or develop your language skills further.
- How has your performance in language classes been affected by your SA experience? [Did you feel that you were able to perform better in the language classes due to your SA experience? Why?]
- How do you think language classes might be improved to help students maintain or improve their language skills [or L2 possible selves]
- How do you see yourself in five years from now in terms of your language ability?

Any closing comments?

Thank you for participating.

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY

This research study is designed to explore the role of the L2 self in the field of language learning motivation. It is being conducted as part of my graduate program dissertation requirement. Despite the well known linguistic advantages after the abroad sojourn, little is known about how students approach language learning after the experience. Your participation in this research study will help us to better understand student's engagement after they come back from studying abroad.

The research study involves a 30-60 minute interview and completion of an information form. The interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. You may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time. The tapes will remain in my office in a locked file and I who will transcribe and analyze them will only review them. Regulations require that research data and the information form be kept for at least three years, after which time they will then be destroyed. It is unlikely, but you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to and you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of Grand Valley State. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Participation is anonymous, which means that no one will know what your answers are. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will identify your answers throughout the study.

The second meeting is a focus group meeting. This will take place about two months after the first interview at a classroom at Allendale Campus. Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group. This group meeting will be videotaped and I will be the only one allowed to review this taped.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way. I will be the only one allowed to hear and see the tapes and you will choose a different name for the research. All tapes and written materials will then include this pseudonym for identification purposes. Benefits, which might be gained by participating in the research study, include a forum for reflecting on your experiences while abroad with an interested interviewer and insights into yourself and your experience as a result of the experience.

Please indicate on the information form if you would like me to provide you with a

copy of the findings of the research study, a bibliography of resources for further reading on the topic or both.

If you have study related questions or problems, you may contact me at 616 331 8503 or at buehnem@gvsu.edu or my advisor Dr. Marilyn Amey at 517-432-1056 or at amey@msu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact-anonymously, if you wish- Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Director of the Human Subject Protection Programs at Michigan State University by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email address: irb@ores.mus.edu, or postal mail 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Marilyn Amey,

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions I had regarding the experimental procedure and they have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Participant _____ Date: _____

(please print)

Signature of Participant _____

Age: _____ (Note: You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. Let the experimenter know if you are under 18 years old.)

Audio/Videotape Addendum to Consent form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Study Abroad Programs: Opportunities for Further Engagement conducted by Maria Villalobos-Buehner. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio and videotape you as part of this research study. If you decide not to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the main researcher. The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and labeled with subjects' chosen pseudonym and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the

consent form without your written permission.

Signature of Participant _____

**This research proposal
08-164-H has been
approved by the Human
Research Review**

APPENDIX E

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY TO POTENTIAL STUDENTS.

Study Title: Study Abroad Programs: Opportunities for Further Engagement.

Dear Student,

My name is Maria Villalobos-Buehner. I am a professor in the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at Grand Valley State University as well as a doctoral student from Michigan State University. I am conducting a research study as part of my graduate program on the influences of study abroad programs in language learning and I would like to invite you to participate.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview about your experiences abroad and your goals after returning back from the sojourn as well as to participate in a group discussion about activities you engaged in during the first two months after coming back to Grand Valley State. The meeting for the first interview will take place at my office or a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 40 – 50 minutes. The interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. You may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time. I who will transcribe and analyze them will only review the tapes. They will then be destroyed.

It is unlikely, but you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of Grand Valley State. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Participation is anonymous, which means that no one will know what your answers are. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials.

The second meeting is a focus group meeting. This will take place about two months after the first interview at a classroom at Allendale Campus. Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group. As with the interviews, this group meeting will be videotaped and I will be the only one allowed to review this taped.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way. Benefits, which might be gained by participating in the research study, include a forum for reflecting on your experiences while abroad with an interested interviewer and insights into yourself and your experience as a result of the experience.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 616 331 8503 or at buehnem@gvsu.edu if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Grand Valley State University at 803-777-7095.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me at the number listed below.

With kind regards,
Maria Villalobos-Buehner
Spanish Professor
616-3318503

APPENDIX F

E-MAIL SENT TO FACULTY DIRECTORS OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Dear colleagues,

I am in the process of finishing my degree and I am in the dissertation stage at this moment. The focus of my research is students' motivation from a L2 self perspective and its influence in the development of learning strategies. In order to answer my questions, I need students who were abroad during the winter, spring or summer semester, are coming back to continue their degree and are enrolled in a language class. I would like to ask you if you could help me identify students who would be interested in participating. If you know of someone, I have attached an invitation letter to be distributed to these students with more information about the study and with my information so they can contact me in case they decide to participate.

Thank you so much, I really appreciate any help you could give me.

Maria Villalobos-Buehner

APPENDIX G

E-MAIL SENT TO STUDENTS VIA SERVER LISTS

From: Maria F Villalobos-Buehner <buehnem@gvsu.edu>

To: "SPANISH.STUDENTS":

Date: Sun, 13 Apr 2008 22:08:48 -0400 (EDT)

Subject: A request to participate in a study: SPANISH.STUDENTS

Dear students,

I need your help. I would like to invite those of you who are or will be studying abroad this Winter, Spring or Summer 08 semesters and are planning to continue with your language classes after this trip to participate in a study that will help me to understand how study abroad programs might influence your motivation for language learning. I have attached a letter of invitation in which I explain in more detail what the study is all about.

This is an opportunity to share great memories with a friendly ear.:)

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