Identity and Language Learning in Study Abroad

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Abstract: *Identity, and related conflict, can influence both qualities of language learning experiences in study abroad settings and learners' choices of language to appropriate or reject. The article offers an overview of research examining the role of identity in student sojourns abroad. This research includes (1) holistic, qualitative studies of the ways in which identities shape language learning opportunities, and (2) studies examining the development of specific, identity-related pragmatic abilities. After defining identity and study abroad, the researcher organizes this article in terms of salient demographic categories represented in the literature: nationality/"foreigner" status, gender, linguistic inheritance, age status, and ethnicity. Where possible, examples of both holistic and pragmatics-oriented research are included for each category. The conclusion suggests implications for language education and the design of study abroad programs along with some avenues toward greater ecological validity in research of both kinds.*

Key words: *conflict, identity, pragmatics, qualitative research, study abroad*

Introduction

As a 22-year-old American study abroad participant in France, "Bill" (Kinginger, 2008) enrolled in courses at a local university in Dijon, anticipating no doubt that the social organization of a classroom in a classical French university would resemble that of the academic institutions he had frequented in the past. To his astonishment, the norms for interaction in this new environment were quite disorienting:

> B: I don't get it. people *talk* during class, they don't pay attention to the professors, […] it blew my—it *blew my mind.* it still does.

> I: what else have you noticed? since you're in class with French students.

> B: they always *talk*. like they don't pay—they don't pay attention to professors, the professor doesn't really *engage* the class. he kinda just presents material, um and he says what *he* has to say, he needs to fit it all in, whether or not his students learn it. um it's up to=

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I: = it's up to them to learn it right? =

B: = yeah he just presents the material and *that's it*. […] the biggest thing is like just *talking* and not paying attention to the teacher. like *blatantly*. like having a normal conversation, and the teacher not even caring, like you you could tell where the international students are like especially the Germans and the Americans. they're in the front row, cause you can't sit in the back cause you won't hear anything, and especially if it's in French. (Kinginger, unpublished interview data; emphasis in original)

Like many of the other students in his cohort, Bill observed an apparent display of disrespect for university professors as the students in the class pursued their private conversations during the lecture. Meanwhile, the professor's failure to engage the students and to monitor their comprehension of the material also struck Bill as evidence of that professor's indifference to the well-being of the class. Bill's dramatic representation ("it blew my mind") attested to the depth of his emotions as he recalled this scene.

Patron's (2007) case study of a cohort of French students sojourning for a year in Australia recounted similar unpredicted and initially inexplicable academic practices. These students were shocked to find classmates and professors socializing on a first-name basis. An invitation to tea from a male professor prompted one female student to question the nature of the professor's motives. In the classroom, the students' dress and demeanor could only be interpreted as blatant lack of respect. According to "Brigitte,"

En classe [en France] on va être très formels … on va essayer de s'habiller formellement, on va pas venir en short à l'université. On se tient droit, on s'asseoit bien dans sa chaise, pas avec les pieds sur la table, allongés sur la table, en savattes et avec des trous partout. C'est dégueu-

lasse! En France les profs feraient des remarques. … C'est vrai qu'au début ça m'a un peu agressée, je dois l'avouer. J'avais envie de lui dire: "Pour qui ils se prennent? Se tenir comme ça en classe!" (Patron, 2007, p. 113)

[In class [in France] one is very formal … one tries to dress appropriately, one does not come in shorts to university. One sits up straight, correctly in the chair, not with feet on the desk, lying on the table, wearing thong sandals and with holes in one's clothes. It's disgusting! In France, the lecturers would criticize this. … It's true that initially this really irked me. I must admit. I wanted to say to [an Australian student] "Who do you think you are? To behave like this in class!"]

Brigitte's reaction, like Bill's, was to look on the scene with disgust and to recoil into discourses of national superiority (Block, 2007b).

In comparing these experiences, it becomes clear, on one level, that the speakers had encountered unfamiliar academic "face systems" (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Bill was accustomed to American university classrooms where hierarchical asymmetry is expressly muted, classmates compete with each other for the good graces of the instructor, and knowledge is publicly co-constructed (Poole, 1992). Brigitte, on the other hand, had been socialized to anticipate that academic hierarchies would be explicitly marked through the use of formal address terms and attire, and that students would construct relations of solidarity with each other as they assumed primary responsibility for their own learning.

On another level, these students encountered challenges to their moral sense of what is right and good or wrong and bad. That is, they met with practices running counter to the "more or less permanent ways of being and behaving" that Bourdieu (1991) called *habitus* (Kramsch, 2009, p. 112). As Kramsch further explained, the durability of

the primary habitus, acquired at home, emerges from the "historical sedimentation … of attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews that have been reinforced over time" (p. 113). Thus, in secondary socialization, as in cross-cultural encounters, an individual's personal history may come into conflict with the history of another society's institutions or other social structures, and this conflict may (or may not) prompt destabilization of the habitus, and thus, of identity.

Identity and Language Learning in Study Abroad

Among language educators, students, policy makers, and the public, study abroad has been routinely interpreted as a context for language learning. A broad overview of the research (Kinginger, 2009) indeed paints an encouraging picture of this phenomenon. Particularly in areas related to social interaction, such as awareness and use of sociolinguistic variants or command of pragmatics, the research has provided concrete and convincing evidence to substantiate the claim that students learn languages while abroad. In fact, study abroad has the potential to enhance language learning in every dimension, whether it is defined in terms of general constructs such as proficiency or fluency, in terms of skills, or in terms of components of communicative competence, such as strategic or discourse abilities.

However, research on outcomes has consistently revealed striking individual differences; some students thrive while others founder. In light of these findings, applied linguists have embarked on a quest to understand the study abroad experience in relation to language learning. In order to clarify this relationship, scholars preferring a quantitative orientation have attempted to specify precisely how students use their time (e.g., Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004), or to trace the development of in-country social networks offering access to learning opportunities (Mitchell et al., 2013). While correlations between language contact or

social networks and language development can sometimes be established, these do not necessarily explain *why* some students become more engaged in language learning than do others. Other scholars have examined the qualities of study abroad experiences, showing that these experiences are highly varied. Their success depends both upon how the students are received in the contexts they frequent (e.g., classrooms, homestays) and upon how these same students choose to interpret the social, cultural, and linguistic practices of their host communities. In this way, the challenges that students face in study abroad settings can be seen as related to identity.

In documenting the rise of identity as a construct relevant to second language (L2) acquisition, Block (2007a) highlighted the potential "negotiation of difference" that takes place in immersion settings. Block situated his argument in reference to poststructuralist accounts of identity as a contested site of struggle involving challenges to one's habitus. Specifically, Block defined identity as follows:

> Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of past, present, and future. Individuals are shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on. The entire process is conflictive as opposed to harmonious, and individuals often feel ambivalent. (p. 27)

The negotiation of identity, he noted, often takes place in contexts of unequal power relations and can be interpreted in terms of traditional demographic categories such as nationality, gender, or social class. For Block, this definition seems particularly well suited to immersion environments where identity is destabilized and people must strive to achieve a new emotional and moral balance. Exposure to unfamiliar practices can upset taken-for-granted worldviews, but the outcome is more than just adding new perspectives to the old. Rather, what emerges is now famously known as the

"third place" (Bhabha, 1994; Kramsch, 2009), where "there is what Papasteragiadis … called a *negotiation of difference* during which the past and the present 'encounter and transform each other' in the 'presence of fissures, gaps, and contradictions …'" (Block, 2007a, p. 864; emphasis in original). Crucially, the negotiation of difference is characterized by ambivalence:

> Ambivalence is the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart. It is the mutually conflicting feelings of love and hate. Moreover, it is the simultaneous affirmation and negation of such feelings. … Ambivalence, it would seem, is the natural state of human beings who are forced by their individual life trajectories to make choices where choices are not easy to make. However, a natural state is not necessarily a desirable state and in studies of individuals' life stories, there are attempts to resolve the conflicts that underlie ambivalence. (Block, 2007a, pp. 864–865)

Key to understanding the emergence of foreign-language mediated identities is appreciating the work that people do to craft a third space and the pain that people experience as the durability of their habitus is questioned and old identities lose their relevance and transparency, especially in cases where these transformations are not voluntary. Negotiation of difference requires access to new sociocultural environments and willingness to participate actively within these environments. It requires a genuine investment in learning. It can yield discomfort, ambivalence, anxiety, even sorrow, but it can also generate insights and capabilities of the type that are routinely attributed to programs of education or student mobility abroad: intercultural awareness, empathy, global civic engagement, and multilingualism.

Block devoted one chapter of *Second Language Identities* (2007b) to the literature on study abroad, a phenomenon on a continuum between tourism and migration that has been defined as "a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes" (Kinginger, 2009, p. 11). In this chapter, Block reviewed a number of research projects in light of the constructs outlined above, questioning whether students become sufficiently engaged in local communicative settings to experience the ambivalence necessary for the formation of target language identities. As Block observed, this literature has significantly overrepresented the experiences of American students for whom study abroad does not typically represent a significant investment of time or effort. As a result, Block's review suggested that negotiation of difference is a rare occurrence in study abroad: When confronted with challenges to their habitus, or socially positioned in unfavorable or unfamiliar ways, American students typically recoil into a sense of superiority, invoking discourses of national identity or representations of the gender equity that supposedly reigns in their country.

Block did allow for exceptions. For example, he cited the case of "Alice" (Kinginger, 2004) as demonstrating that American students can develop foreign-language mediated identities. Alice's situation was unusual in that she imagined becoming a speaker of French as a way to reinvent herself as a cosmopolitan, multilingual person whom she could admire. Her working-class background influenced both her struggle to study in France in the first place, and then the nature of her experience. In comparison with the other members of her cohort, she was older, less privileged, and more experienced in the travails of adult life. Because she was determined to learn French, and distanced from her compatriot students, Alice persisted in developing a local social network and eventually acquired a large and diverse communicative repertoire.

Half a decade after Block's review, the pages of the qualitative literature on language learning in study abroad have continued to be populated mainly by

Americans, perhaps because language is a relatively apparent learning goal of students from the United States, where the significance of foreign languages has historically been downplayed in both policy and educational practice in general (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). As outlined elsewhere (Kinginger, 2009, 2010a), a number of forces are at work to constrain the negotiation of difference by American students abroad. These include a steady but dramatic decrease in the amount of time students spend abroad, now typically a "short-term" program of three to six weeks. The proportion of foreign language specialists going abroad has also decreased in favor of students choosing business or social science–related major fields. Globalization and the triumph of English as a *lingua mundi* have constrained the language learning opportunities of Anglophone students, even as mobile European students may avoid conversations with native speakers of English, paradoxically, because they do not master English as a lingua franca and fail to accommodate to their interlocutors (Dervin, 2013; Kalocsai, 2009). Surrounding all of this have been explicit prejudicial attitudes in the academy at large, devaluing international education and framing study abroad as a feminized, elitist, and decorative pursuit (Gore, 2005).

Thus, five years after the appearance of Block's critique, the qualitative literature on language learning in study abroad continues to portray American students as they encounter, but may refuse to engage with, cultural differences—a phenomenon characteristic of American students but by no means their exclusive province, as students of other backgrounds have also displayed this tendency, particularly in short-term stays or the early phases of longer-term stays.

Identity and L2 Pragmatics

In addition to examining new evidence from ethnographic and other narrative or qualitative studies portraying students' evaluations of study abroad experiences, this article explores some linguistic dimensions of identity negotiation in study abroad. In Block's account (2007b), the development of a foreign-language mediated identity is an all-or-nothing affair. However, given that most academic sojourns abroad are by design temporary, and usually involve voluntary engagement with host communities and languages, it is in some ways unsurprising that study abroad does not normally pose serious challenges or threats to a young person's identity. Yet it may be true that more modest changes occur and that students are offered glimpses of identity-related possibilities through their exposure to the practices of their hosts.

In a recent article entitled "Study Abroad and the Development of Second Language Identities," Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, and Brown (2012) suggested that a sojourn abroad can, in fact, lead to identity-related development on a relatively modest scale. Specifically, they pointed to the potential for development in three domains: (1) identity-related proficiency, or pragmatic competence; (2) linguistic self-concept, which can include such attributes as self-esteem, confidence, or communicative autonomy; and (3) L2-mediated personal development, or the ability to get things done, e.g., to successfully navigate a service encounter. Although all three categories are worthy of consideration, the most relevant for this article is the first, identity-related proficiency, whose significance Benson et al. described as follows:

> The development of pragmatic competence in the study abroad setting may also have an impact on second language identity by influencing the student's ability to do things with words, to function as a person, and [sic] express desired identities. Language competence is a pre-requisite for the projection of identities in a second language, but more importantly students' acquisition and use of pragmatic competence partly depends on the kinds of identities

they want to project and the responses they receive to them. (pp. 182–183).

These authors make the important—and, in the study of L2 pragmatics, infrequently acknowledged—point that learners exercise agency in selectively adopting local pragmatic norms according to the identities they wish to display. Their choices depend, on one level, upon the pragmalinguistic resources at their command, i.e., mastery of speech acts, routines, or address forms; strategies such as directness or indirectness; and the like. On another level, these choices depend on the student's awareness of sociopragmatics, or the perceptions informing the interpretation and performance of communicative action. It is one thing to know what functions are served by different linguistic features, and quite another to

determine how to behave "properly," as "proper" behavior is to some extent a matter of personal preference (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 3). The recent literature includes a number of studies showing that study abroad enhances both pragmalinguistic resources and sociopragmatics awareness, but that here, too, identity-related conflict can arise.

Identity in the Study Abroad Literature

The remaining sections of this article examine studies highlighting the salience of identity categories best represented in the literature, including national identity, "foreigner" status, gender, linguistic identity, age status, and ethnicity (see Table 1). The sources for the article have been

TABLE 1

Demographic Identity Categories in Selected Research on Language Learning in Study Abroad

Categories	Qualitative studies	Research on pragmatics
Nationality	Patron (2007) Kinginger (2008) Jackson (2008) Perrefort (2008)	Shively (2011)
"Foreigner" identities	Siegal (1996) Iino (2006)	Brown (2013)
Gender	Polanyi (1995) Twombly (1995) Talburt & Stewart (1999) Isabelli-García (2006) Kinginger (2008)	Masuda (2011)
Linguistic heritage	Riegelhaupt & Carrasco (2000) Petrucci (2007)	N/A
Age status	Wilkinson (1998) Pellegrino-Aveni (2005) Kinginger (2008) Perrefort (2008) Spenader (2011) Tan & Kinginger (2013)	Iwasaki (2013)
Ethnicity	Talburt & Stewart (1999) Anya (2011)	N/A

selected for their particular relevance to questions of identity from research of various focus and methodology, including case studies of individual learners, ethnographic studies of cohorts, and research on the development of pragmatic abilities. As Coleman (2013) has recently remarked, neglect of the dimension of historical time in accounts of language learning in study abroad is problematic given the changing nature of international experience in an era of globalization. For example, ready access to travel and to technology-enhanced social networking (e.g., Facebook or Skype) has changed the nature of study abroad to the point where today's experiences are fundamentally different from those of earlier eras. Therefore, where possible this review emphasizes relatively recent projects.

National Identity

In Block's (2007b) chapter focusing principally on the reported experiences of American students, as noted above, a repeated finding was that these students preferred to avoid negotiation of difference, aligning themselves instead with discourses of national superiority. In a case study of the cohort and six case studies of individual American students in various semester-long programs in France, Kinginger (2008) reported that many of the students displayed the preference noted by Block. One case in particular stood out: "Beatrice," a Caucasian middle-class participant, was among the more serious language students in the cohort and began the study with relatively high documented proficiency and a stated desire to improve her speaking ability. Although her original ambition was to become a French teacher, her parents had intervened to insist that she select a business-related university specialization instead. Thus, Beatrice was enrolled in a Parisian business school offering special, segregated courses for foreigners.

In the early phases of the program, Beatrice realized that her efforts to befriend Francophone students at the university were not yielding the desired result and that her principal opportunities to engage in informal conversation in French would be with her host family. This family was in some ways ideal for a language learner, with host sisters of Beatrice's age and a regular practice of family dinner table conversation. However, also early on, Beatrice expressed reservations about living with a left-leaning Franco-Tunisian family in a highly diverse neighborhood. As the semester progressed, so did the conflict in Iraq, leading to the U.S.-led invasion of that country. As a supporter of U.S. foreign policy, Beatrice was offended when her hosts requested that she explain her point of view, invoking discourses of French-bashing that were circulating in the American press at the time. Based on American collective remembering of World War II, in which the French Resistance was invisible and the United States single-handedly saved France from its Nazi occupiers, these discourses predisposed Beatrice to accuse her hosts of anti-American sentiment. Eventually, a series of misunderstandings about proper behavior in classrooms cemented Beatrice's belief in the family's general hostility toward Americans, and she distanced herself from the only people willing to interact with her on a regular basis, having improved her speaking ability very little.

An interesting study of the salience of American national identity in relation to pragmatics is a recent investigation by Shively (2011) on Spanish language socialization in service encounters. Shively's participants were seven students in a semester-long program in Toledo who audiorecorded their interactions with service providers in an array of settings, such as shops, restaurants, and cafes. Research on service encounters involving expert or native speakers of Peninsular Spanish has shown that these interactions are typically hearer-oriented and direct, and can be realized as imperatives (e.g., *Dame un café*, "Give me a coffee") or as elliptical forms (*Tres barras de pan*, "Three loaves of bread"). The norms for U.S. service encounters are quite different and can involve greetings,

politeness markers such as "please," how-are-you question-response exchanges, and a speaker orientation (e.g., "I need/would like a cup of coffee, please").

Shively's findings showed that in addition to approaching service encounters from the point of view of the U.S. norm, some students had learned in Spanish classes to express politeness using the conditional or the past subjective (e.g., *Quisiera comprar una pila para este reloj*, "I would like to buy a battery for this watch"). Thus, for example, in the early weeks of the semester, "Greta" attempted to buy medicine in a pharmacy:[1]

> Greta: *hola*
>
> Pharmacist: *hola*
>
> Greta: *cómo estas?*
>
> (two-second pause)
>
> Greta: uh::::
>
> (2.4-second pause)
>
> Greta: uh- you *necesito*:: (.) *medicina?*
>
> (Adapted from Shively, 2011, p. 1825)

Shively's data showed that most of the students began to perform service encounters according to Spanish norms by the end of the semester. However, although Greta stopped using how-are-you routines, she never learned to interpret this aspect of interaction from the Spanish point of view and never noticed that small talk sometimes occurs at the end of a service encounter in Spain. Instead, she persisted in "viewing the inappropriateness of how-are-you greetings as unfriendliness on the part of Spaniards" (p. 1832).

As noted above, some recent research has suggested that the tendency to recoil into a sense of national superiority is not an exclusively American phenomenon. In addition to Brigitte's initial negative assessment of Australian classroom interaction, in the initial phases of their time abroad other French students in Patron's (2007) study found fault with many aspects of Australian society. They were appalled by the local

youth culture, particularly the practice of "bring your own bottle" parties and, like Beatrice, retreated from defense of their country's nuclear testing program in the Pacific. In Jackson's (2008) ethnography of Chinese students from Hong Kong on a short-term intensive language program in Britain, some students developed close relationships with their host families and learned to value English for communication and not just as a utilitarian object of study, but others never emerged from their initial ethnocentrism. "Ada," for example, struggled throughout her stay with her own hostility toward British cultural practices, worrying about how British food would affect her health and at one point even suspecting her host family of deliberately undermining her well-being with a constant flow of sandwiches and burnt breakfast toast. She tended to interpret others' curiosity about her as racism. Her interactions with her host family, in particular when they repeatedly mislabeled her as Japanese, only heightened her awareness of her own national identity. Finally, in examining how German Erasmus (a program sponsored by the European Union called the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of European Students) participants represented their experiences in France, Perrefort (2008) found that these students categorized themselves as "spectators" in much the same way that American students have recently been portrayed (Ogden, 2007). Their main point of contact with French peers was the German classroom, where they were received as intimidating interlocutors to be avoided. Frustrated and disappointed in their inability to engage in significant local interaction, these students tended to condemn their French counterparts, based on German stereotypes, as passive and immature in comparison to Germans.

Overall, then, the evidence has suggested that, regardless of their nationality, when some students encounter challenges to the habitus associated with their national identity, their reaction is to withdraw from

the negotiation of difference. Particularly if their sojourn is short term, they may never overcome the tendency to interpret the cultural practices of their hosts in terms of their own sociocultural history. Further, Shively's (2011) findings demonstrated that even when students learn to perform speech acts in locally appropriate ways, they have not necessarily learned to value or appreciate the local *meanings* of these acts.

"Foreigner" Identities

In contrast to conflict involving national identities, which emerges when study abroad participants retreat into familiar stances, conflict surrounding "foreigner" identities tends to emerge when study abroad participants are positioned as such by their hosts. This dimension of identity was signaled in the applied linguistics literature by Siegal (1996) in a study showing how Western women learning Japanese struggled for access to advanced language competence, including honorific language considered to be beyond their capabilities as non-Japanese. A more recent study, Iino (2006), documented how American students were positioned in interaction with their Japanese host families. Iino identified a continuum of approaches on the part of families. On one end was a two-way enrichment ideal, where the families saw the homestay as a learning opportunity for themselves and family interactions over dinner became settings for intercultural exchange. On the other was an approach that Iino called "cultural dependency," in which student guests were construed as fundamentally helpless and in need of massive assistance for managing everyday life in Japan. In its extreme form, this approach yielded situations in which the student guests were positioned as exotic *gaijin* ("foreigners") and complained that they were treated like "pets" (p. 162). Iino noted that regardless of the approach taken, the Japanese host families tended to avoid correction of both grammatical errors and instances of inappropriate language use. When one student, upon arrival, used an

appropriate formulaic expression to accompany the presentation of a gift (*tsumaranai mono desu kedo douzo*, "this is a useless thing, but please accept it"), the family's reaction was to laugh, in part because the student's utterance violated their assumption that the humble demeanor conveyed by the expression is unique to the Japanese and cannot be learned by foreigners.[2]

It follows that being positioned as a foreigner will have consequences for the learning of pragmatics, particularly at advanced levels, as Siegal (1996) predicted. Brown (2013) examined the learning of honorific forms in Korean by four male students of varied national origin (British, Japanese, Austrian, and German). *Contaymal* ("respect speech") and *panmal* ("half-speech") are strongly associated with the performance of Korean identity and are essentially unavoidable: "In every single Korean utterance, the speaker is forced into choices between different honorific verb endings and lexical forms" (Brown, 2013, p. 270). The students entered the study with advanced proficiency in Korean and a strong understanding of the honorific system as demonstrated in a discourse completion task. However, Brown found that understanding of the system and desire to speak Korean authentically was not sufficient for the learners to actually use honorifics in native-like ways.

As documented in recordings of naturally occurring conversation outside the classroom, the students' status as foreigners significantly influenced both their reception by Korean interlocutors and their own stance toward honorifics. In many cases, the students were positioned as outsiders to whom strict rules for marking hierarchy within interactions did not apply. The students themselves were not always willing to adopt native-like patterns of use when these patterns clashed with their Western preference for egalitarian language use. Brown also pointed out the significance of individual reactions to imposed "foreigner" identities. "Richard," who was frequently positioned by female friends as a "cute"

younger brother, viewed his outsider identity as an advantage, allowing him to establish intimate relationships, using *pan-mal* outside the boundaries of the local norm. "Patrick," on the other hand, was determined to show that he could use Korean appropriately and that he deserved correct degrees of respect and intimacy, to the point that he would take his interlocutors to task for failing to observe the proper use of honorifics with him.

Thus the literature has demonstrated that the negotiation of difference in study abroad is constrained not only by students' own interpretive framing of their host culture in terms of their own national identity, but also by "foreigner" identities imposed on students within host communities. In this latter case, interlocutors can interpret students' foreigner status as exempting all parties from observance of local norms for politeness. In this situation, some students will insist that their hosts provide opportunities for the learning and use of these norms, and others will accept and perhaps even enjoy the exceptional status and freedom from constraint conveyed by their foreigner status.

Gender

Gender is among the most salient of identity categories in the study abroad literature. As noted in Block (2007b), this is largely due to the widespread belief, on the part of Americans, that sexual harassment is characteristic of foreign societies throughout the world. To take just one example, Polanyi (1995) analyzed narrative journals produced by male and female American learners of Russian. The research was prompted in part by the statistically robust findings of a parallel study (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1995) seeking to pinpoint factors predicting gains in scores on a standardized test of speaking (the ACTFL's Oral Proficiency Interview [OPI]). Among the findings of the quantitative study was a significant effect for gender, with men demonstrating a significant advantage. Focusing on gender-related incidents reported

in the students' journals, Polanyi found that men were frequently positioned as capable speakers when their Russian proficiency was only rudimentary and that they recounted, in glowing terms, numerous romantic adventures. In contrast, the women often found themselves fending off undesired sexual advances and had fewer opportunities to develop their speaking ability. According to Polanyi, the women in this study were at a double disadvantage. Having been subjected to humiliating sexual harassment during their sojourns in Russia and having relatively limited access to learning opportunities, they were then tested on their ability to perform speech acts, such as proposing a toast, that had at the time been a culturally unacceptable use of language for females.

Since the publication of Polanyi's (1995) research, American researchers have detected the perception of sexual harassment in Argentina (Isabelli-García, 2006), France (Kinginger, 2008), Spain (Talburt & Stewart, 1999), and Costa Rica (Twombly, 1995). These practices are also noticed by the American male students on study abroad with the women who are then authorized to celebrate their own heterosexual identities as defenders of women, enlightened by their origin in a country where gender equity is an avowed, if not yet realized, ideal (Kinginger, 2008). What is largely missing from all of this discussion of gender-related conflict is any exploration of the local meaning of the practices criticized. In Patron's (2007) study, the gender-related practices of Australians were also portrayed in unflattering terms and also had negative consequences for the students' self-concept, but for very different reasons. For "Arlette," for example, the absence of sexual innuendo and flirting in informal social settings "struck at the core of her identity as a woman" (p. 62):

> La drague, j'ai trouvé ça vraiment bizarre. Parce que c'est presque politiquement incorrect de draguer. Au bout d'un moment je me suis dit: "Bon, il doit y avoir

un problème avec ma personne. Voilà je dois pas être belle ou je dois avoir pris du poids, ou ya quelque chose parce que ya jamais personne qui me drague. Personne me fait des compliments" … les gens ne se regardent pas en fait … C'est désagréable parce qu'on se sent moins bien et en même temps on se sent plus en sécurité. (Patron, 2007, p. 62)

[Picking up, I found this very weird. Because it's almost politically incorrect to pick up people. After a while, I said to myself: "OK, there must be a problem with me. There, I must not be beautiful, or I must have put on weight, or there must be something because no one ever tries to pick me up. No one gives me compliments." … In fact, people don't look at each other. … It's really unpleasant because you don't feel good about yourself but at the same time you feel much safer.]

In the domain of pragmatics, gender-related conflicts have emerged in studies of Japanese as an L2. The Western women who participated in Siegal's (1996) study, for example, found some of the self-effacing and "humble" language use associated with femininity to be inconsistent with their self-images as competent professionals and refused to appropriate these practices. An interesting twist on this phenomenon appeared in a recent study of developing interactional competence in L2 Japanese. Masuda (2011) examined the development of ability to express alignment with interlocutors and to assess utterances using the rather ubiquitous discourse marker *ne*. Masuda recruited six English-speaking undergraduates with intermediate proficiency and paired them with Japanese counterparts to audiorecord conversations at the beginning and end of a six-week sojourn in Japan. The findings revealed that both male and female students with adequate initial interactive competence developed their ability to use *ne* in pragmatically appropriate ways. However, one male student did not use *ne* at all; based on his familiarity with Japanese popular music and anime, he perceived *ne* as marking a feminized identity that did not appeal to him. Thus, perceptions that elements of language are themselves gendered can limit the development of proficiency.

Linguistic Identity

As described in Block (2007b), following Leung, Harris, and Rampton (1997), linguistic identity can involve several dimensions, including expertise in language use, affiliation with users of the language, and language inheritance. The latter dimension, inheritance, figures in research on the experiences of heritage learners abroad. A heritage language learner is a student with some degree of communicative ability in the language and a familial or cultural affiliation to the language. Often, such learners are raised in a home where the heritage language is spoken, but schooling, and therefore literacy development, takes place in the majority, or official, language of the community.

In examining the experiences of heritage language learners abroad, Petrucci (2007) recounted how the descendants of immigrants to Peru from Okinawa were successfully integrated into the Okinawan communities hosting them. However, Petrucci also cited a study by Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2000) in which heritage learners were received with suspicion, at best. These authors recounted the plight of Lidia, a second-generation Chicana student from Arizona who participated in a five-week Spanish immersion program in Mexico. Lidia spoke Spanish fluently, but Lidia's host family clearly favored their other guest, a novice user of Spanish of European heritage. Specifically, the family condemned the variety of Spanish that Lidia spoke, reacted negatively to her presence in their home, and interpreted her as a less-than-ideal representative of the United States:

… the family felt that a "Mexican" person … who spoke Spanish in such a manner was not really welcome in their

home. Yet the Euro-American guest in the same home, although she committed far more errors, was accepted and welcomed with open arms. We recall the documented comment by one member of Lidia's family: "*Ay Dr. Carrasco! Mándenos la próxima vez una rubia, con ojos azules* (Oh, Dr. Carrasco. Next time send us a blond with blue eyes)." (Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000, p. 336, cited in Petrucci, 2007, p. 287)

Petrucci did not provide details about the specific features of Lidia's Spanish that drew criticism. However, the study did suggest that a return to the ancestral homeland does not necessarily guarantee that heritage learners will be received as welcome guests and persons of consequence in host family settings.

Age Status

One of the most widely circulated truisms in international education is the belief that living with a local host family offers a significant advantage for language learners. In research on the qualities of homestay settings for language learning, another identity category has emerged as salient: the age-related status of the participants and, more specifically, whether they are high school or university-level students. The majority of this research focused on the experiences of university students—most typically individuals or cohorts from researchers' own institutions—for whom, as yet, it had not been possible to prove the existence of a homestay advantage. In a robust quantitative study, Rivers (1998) found that living in a Russian home as opposed to a dormitory did not predict gains in speaking ability. Magnan and Back (2007) were unable to establish any correlation between living arrangements and the development of proficiency in French.

The qualitative literature has shown that homestay experiences for older students are quite variable (Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005; Wilkinson, 1998). For example, in addition

to the negative outcome documented for Beatrice, the case studies in Kinginger (2008) included both successful and less engaging homestay experiences. For Bill, who arrived in Dijon with the lowest documented language proficiency in the group, the host family proved crucial to the overall success of his sojourn. Bill was regularly invited to extended family dinners during which much of the focus was on him, his activities and impressions. The family patiently assisted his performance as he gradually developed both speaking ability and considerable language awareness. By contrast, "Ailis" was housed with a single woman whose time was consumed by a stressful job and who preferred to dine, every night, in front of the television set. Finding little companionship and few learning opportunities in the home, Ailis quickly joined a group of compatriots for a modern-day Grand Tour of Europe, collecting Hard Rock Café T-shirts but no language proficiency. Based on the measures taken in the study, Ailis seemed to have forgotten some of what she knew of French before her stay in France.

Although the literature has been somewhat sparse, studies have suggested that there may be important differences between studying abroad as a legal adult over the age of 18 in comparison with parallel experiences of high school students. Spenader (2011) presented case studies of four U.S.-based precollegiate students involved in a year-long study sojourn in Sweden. Although none of these participants had prior knowledge of the language, by the end of the year, three of them had reached the Superior level on the ACTFL OPI. Spenader attributed this remarkable achievement to support from host families and institutions, and to personality traits such as assertiveness and sense of humor. Perrefort (2008) compared the representations of sojourns abroad by high school exchange students (ages 15–17) and German university students studying in France through the Erasmus program. As noted above, the Erasmus students represented themselves as marginal "spectators" (p. 77). By contrast, in the high school

students' comments, language-related episodes were highly salient and reflected their daily interactions with host community members of all generations. These students typically overcame feelings of linguistic insecurity through extensive local engagement and in so doing became more autonomous and motivated language learners. Tan and Kinginger (2013) provided evidence from student narratives that U.S.-based high school students of Chinese are typically received in the mode described by Iino (2006) as "two-way enrichment." The students in question were participants in a summer intensive program with short homestays in Beijing and Chengdu. Like the high school students described by Perrefort (2008), these students enjoyed extensive opportunities to interact in a range of everyday communicative settings and to build lasting relationships that further supported their learning of Chinese in later years.

A recent study by Iwasaki (2013) suggested that age can also influence the learning of pragmatics. Iwasaki examined the learning of hedges in Japanese by five male Anglophone learners before and after a sojourn in Japan. Hedges are vague expressions such as "like," "just," or "sort of" used in conversation to socially package messages, establish rapport, and create a buffer zone where interactants' emotional reactions may be carefully monitored. Iwasaki tallied the hedges used in the participants' pre- and post-sojourn OPIs and also had young first language speakers of Japanese evaluate samples from these data for the sociability of the speaker. Her findings showed that while all the learners significantly increased their use of hedges, the participants who were given high ratings for sociability used the hedging forms associated with a youthful identity: *nanka* ("somehow, well, like"), *toka* ("or something"), and a recent innovation, the prenominal *mitaina* ("like") as a sentence-final particle. This use reflected the more "sociable" students' history of considerable interaction with youthful age peers as well as their desire

to emulate the practices of their Japanese companions.

Age clearly plays an important overall role in the process of language learning. In the study abroad literature, the role of age has surfaced in studies of the qualities of homestay sojourns, where the experiences of older, legally adult students can be very different from those of participants interpreted by all parties as "children." Iwasaki's (2013) study also offered a glimpse of the influence that age-related identity can exert in the shaping of students' communicative repertoires.

Ethnicity

The role of race or ethnicity has been very infrequently visited in the literature on language learning in study abroad. When the topic has surfaced, it has usually been framed as a source of difficulty for the participants. Talburt and Stewart (1999), for example, recounted the plight of "Mishiela," the lone African American participant in a cohort of Americans in Spain. Mishiela's experience was strongly influenced by her hypervisibility and the extent to which she was subjected to a humiliating emphasis on race and sexuality, including many unwanted sexual advances, in her interactions with Spaniards. In recounting the experiences of a cohort of British students in Senegal, Coleman (2013) similarly noted that the white females in the group learned to cope with sexual approaches and spontaneous offers of marriage: "[s]ome took to wearing wedding rings and referring to non-existent husbands" (p. 34).

A very different picture emerged from Anya's (2011) case studies of four African American learners of Portuguese during their sojourn in Salvador, Brazil. In this case the students were, often for the first time, living in a place where they were part of the racial majority. This status had direct consequences for their enhanced sense of safety and belonging in public because they did not stand out as foreigners, calling attention to themselves and becoming targets of harassment. More significant,

however, these students' learning of Brazilian Portuguese took place on a backdrop of shared sociohistory. "Nina," for example,

> did not need to learn from scratch how it was and what it meant to be a black member of the African Diaspora in a society within the Americas fundamentally shaped by a history of human enslavement and racial hierarchy. She had only to decipher the sociocultural codes, cultural significance, and linguistic practices associated with blackness in Brazil—a process akin to working toward native-like pronunciation and pragmatic competence in a language one already speaks fluently. (p. 59)

For Nina, this deciphering of sociocultural codes led through some degree of conflict as she encountered both the myth of Brazil as a race-free democracy in which only class-based inequalities exist, and episodes she interpreted as overtly racist. However, her positive ethno-racialized identification with Afro-Brazilian people and culture led to significant investment in learning the language in the classroom and in a variety of other contexts.

Discussion

As demonstrated in this article, identity and related conflict can have significant consequences for both the overall quality of language learning experiences abroad and for the development of a specific domain of communicative competence, namely pragmatics. Although American students are especially prone to rejecting local worldviews or practices based on discourses of national superiority, they are not alone in this tendency. "Foreigner" identities ascribed to language learners by their hosts can limit students' access to high levels of language proficiency. Gender-related conflict has been reported in numerous studies seeking the perspectives of American women abroad but was also noted in Patron's (2007) research with French students; in this case, practices that may in part be very

similar are interpreted in radically different ways. The very sparse research on the role of linguistic heritage suggests that these learners' experiences can be just as variable in quality as those of other groups. There is some evidence that the age status of participants influences the ways in which they interpret their experience as well as the extent to which their host families act *in loco parentis* and oversee learners' opportunities to become engaged in local communicative settings. Finally, current research suggests that ethno-racialized identities can exert both negative and positive influences on students' disposition toward language learning abroad.

Implications for Language Education in the Classroom and in Study Abroad

The research outlined in this article has clear implications for classroom teaching, assessment, and the design of study abroad programs. Most obviously, language educators should recognize that study abroad is not a magical formula making possible an effortless process of "easy learning" (DeKeyser, 2010, p. 89). Nor does it provide a rationale for curricular neglect of students' language-related needs (Polio & Zyzik, 2009). What language students learn during study abroad depends upon the kinds of access to learning opportunities that they are able to negotiate, how they evaluate the performance of identity in the contexts they frequent, and which elements of language they choose to attend to and/or incorporate into their own communicative repertoires.

The ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning provide guidance for language educators contemplating their students' present or future experiences abroad, especially in their emphasis on communication (Standard 1), cultural practices (Standard 2.1), linguistic and cultural comparisons (Standard 4), and communication across communities and time (Standard 5). Meanwhile, several authors have suggested strategies to prepare students for effective sojourns abroad and to support them as language learners while

abroad as they attempt to communicate, understand local sociocultural practices, and make useful comparisons. For example, Jackson (2008) described a program in which students are provided pre-sojourn training in ethnographic techniques of analytic participant-observation, and Kinginger (2010b) proposed a number of language-based projects designed to facilitate students' interactions with their local hosts. In discussing study abroad in relation to the Communities Standard, Allen and Dupuy (2012) outlined a number of related suggestions, from the use of telecollaborative courses and other social networking resources to link students with peers abroad before and after they go to explicit links between classroom and community in the study abroad curriculum.

While both general advice and specific strategies to engage learners in host communities are certainly useful, the current review of the literature suggests that this engagement can be daunting in ways that are infrequently examined and that generally attract little pedagogical focus. When students encounter challenges not only to their language skills but also to their sense of self, that is, their identity, simply enjoining them to become more engaged or less judgmental may not be sufficient. Rather, students can benefit from explicit instruction on the pragmatic aspects of language and the relationship between these aspects and the presentation of self.

Van Compernolle (2012, in press) illustrates how a "sociolinguistically responsive pedagogy" (van Compernolle, 2010) aims to acquaint students with the notion that stylistic variation (in this case, the French variable use of *tu* versus *vous, nous* versus *on*, and the presence or absence of *ne*) serves as a resource for the construction of social meaning and identity. Pedagogical approaches to these important forms have traditionally relied on informal rules of thumb or have assumed that the forms are only learnable through repeated exposure in naturalistic contexts. Inspired by Vygotsky's (1986) understanding of scientific, as op-posed to everyday, concepts as the focus of teaching, van Compernolle organized a course of instruction beginning not with the forms but with the *concepts* that they index: self-presentation, social distance, and power. As a consequence of this instruction, which included both overt instruction and opportunities for assisted performance (van Compernolle & Kinginger, 2013), the students developed their sociolinguistic agency:

> Sociolinguistic agency … consists of an understanding of how the use of one linguistic variant or another simultaneously reflects and creates the context in which it is used, is a performance of one's social identity at the time of utterance, and affects one's environment and interlocutor(s). (van Compernolle & Williams, 2012, p. 237)

The notion of sociolinguistic agency is significant not only for pedagogy but also for assessment. Knowing, for example, that students may perform in a native-like way without appreciating the local meaning of their utterances, as illustrated in Shively (2011), or that they may avoid certain forms for more-or-less well-informed personal reasons, as demonstrated by Masuda (2011), then it is quite clear that assessments based on performance alone are not sufficient. Assessing student knowledge of L2 pragmatics should take into account not only what students can do, but also what motives and meanings are assigned to this performance, and the degree to which these reflect a sophisticated interpretation of their use in the local contexts the students have experienced.

Implications for Research

The research on identity and language learning abroad is extensive, such that this article can only claim to represent a selected sample of investigations. However, there are several major limitations and gaps in the research base. Most obvious is the continued overemphasis on American students, though some important

correctives have appeared since Block's (2007b) contribution in the form of studies about different populations. Less obvious but just as regrettable has been the tendency of researchers to limit the scope of their studies to the perspectives of students, leaving the host communities' point of view out of the picture. Novice participants in any community are by definition unaware of the local meanings of social phenomena, including language use. When researchers report only what students have to say, the result is a body of literature about what is perceived to be wrong with the rest of the world.

Apart from these, another problem in the literature has been the inattention to social class, race, and sexuality. As Block has recently claimed (2012), social class can be interpreted as *the* key variable influencing language learning, yet it is virtually absent from applied linguistics research. Historically, study abroad has clearly been a class-inflected activity, involving class-related aspirations, and a population overwhelmingly of middle-class origin (e.g., Levenstein, 2004). Study abroad is also a commodity marketed specifically in response to those aspirations, whether or not they involve learning, and should be studied as such. In reviewing the literature, it appears that the only research in which social class background plays a role has been Anya's (2011) consideration of the interaction of race and relatively privileged social class for African American learners of Portuguese, and Kinginger (2004), a case study of an American working-class woman's quest for an enhanced, French-mediated identity.[3] As for the influence of race on study abroad, again there have been few studies, namely Anya (2011) and Talburt and Stewart (1999). The role of sexuality has recently attracted some attention, specifically in Takahashi's (2013) ethnographic study of Japanese women's pursuit of desire (*akogare*) for English through intimate relationships with English-speaking men in Australia. There is also Anya's (2011) case study of "Didier's" struggle to understand the ambiguous performance of gender among Afro-Brazilian men on a backdrop of rigid heteronormativity in his African American cohort. Otherwise, the research has revealed very little, although in Coleman's study on the experiences of British students in Senegal, participants were asked about their intimate relationships. Twenty-one of the 45 participants formed a new intimate relationship during their sojourn abroad, and of these, 10 involved Senegalese partners. In Coleman's words, "if seen less as an indexical characteristic and more as a language learning strategy, sex perhaps deserves more attention in study abroad research" (Coleman, 2013, p. 35).

In terms of the research on pragmatics, the understanding that human agency, thus personal choices, are involved casts a shadow on the interpretation of studies examining only the differences between learners' performance and that of native speakers. If researchers do not probe the learners' reasoning and intentions in choosing particular forms, there is simply no way to discover whether the forms are dispreferred or simply unknown to them.

It follows that future research should attempt to address these gaps, representing the experiences of a broader range of students, questioning students' motives for particular language-related choices, and attending to aspects of identity that are of clear relevance but have remained unexamined. Research on the qualities of study abroad experiences should at the very least be interpreted with sensitivity to host communities and would be very much enhanced if research designs became collaborative across the contexts under study.

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not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Notes

1. As Dewaele (2012) observed, the how-are-you routine has been the subject of previous research on cross-cultural encounters:

   Un locuteur, natif ou non-natif, peut se sentir momentanément incapable d'identifier un script si l'ouverture n'est pas prototypique dans la L1 ou si l'identification est erronée à cause d'une similarité apparente avec l'ouverture dans une autre langue connue par le locuteur. Béal … présente un exemple d'une telle situation: le « How are you? » (Comment allez-vous?) prononcé par des marchands australiens n'est pas véritablement une requête d'information, comme elle pourrait l'être en français, mais simplement une salutation. Une Française remarqua: «J'avais remarqué chez les commerçants, on vous demande comment ça va, ils s'en foutent!» (Dewaele, 2012, p. 201)

   [A native or nonnative speaker may feel momentarily incapable of identifying a script if the opening is not prototypical in the L1 or if identification is erroneous because of a surface-level similarity to an opening in another language known to the speaker. Béal … presents an example of such a situation: the "How are you?" pronounced by Australian merchants is not really a request for information, as it could be in French. A French woman noted: "I had noticed that, in stores they ask you how you are but they don't give a d—-!"]

2. Some evidence to the contrary was presented in Dewaele's (2012) data from "Anne-Marie," a British woman who had spent three years in Japan:

   Anne-Marie (*L1 anglais, L2 japonais, dominante en anglais*): As I lived in Japan for three years I feel that I have adopted a lot of Japanese characteristics. In fact I sometimes feel that I fit more comfort-

ably into Japanese society than British. … Collectivist cultures tend to place more emphasis on encouraging harmony within a group and favour indirect verbal communication to direct. While in Japan I got used to the concept of indirect verbal communication, which was fine while I lived in Japan, but caused problems when I returned to work in the UK. … The first was when I first joined the company (in Newcastle) and many colleagues would say "Wow, you can speak Japanese. That's fantastic. You must be really clever!" To which I would say, "No, actually I'm not very good at all. In fact I have a lot to learn and should have studied harder." In Japan this would be considered normal, but in England it resulted in people thinking that I could not speak Japanese very well. I have tried to be excessively humble when talking about my Japanese ability, but feel that it is too ingrained in my way of thinking now. (pp. 210–211)

3. Social class also emerged as relevant to the case of "Benjamin" in Kinginger and Farrell (2004). An American student of French, Benjamin was housed in Paris at the home of a baron and baroness, spending weekends at the family château and participating in dinner table conversations about philosophical topics. Benjamin developed considerable awareness of the pragmatics of address forms (*tu* versus *vous*) and, presumably having observed similar practices in the homestay, chose *vous* in deliberate violation of convention in order to index his conservative values and higher class affiliation.

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