

---

# Competing Identities, Shifting Investments, and L2 Speaking During Study Abroad

TRACY QUAN

University of Delaware

*E-mail: [tquan@udel.edu](mailto:tquan@udel.edu)*

---

Why learners return from study abroad (SA) with varying degrees of second language (L2) gains or differing attitudes towards the target language and culture remains an open question. This study employs theories of identity (Kinginger, 2013) and investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton Peirce, 1995) to examine the case of three learners of Spanish as they studied abroad in Spain. Interviews, journals, and language-use surveys were analyzed to understand how and why these learners' investment in Spanish and in language learning opportunities shifted throughout their program. Pre- and post-SA speaking abilities tests in Spanish were used to measure how participants' investments related to their L2 speaking development. The three case studies suggest that participants negotiate competing and fluctuating desires, identities, and investments that often lead to contradictory behaviors regarding their language learning and use while abroad. These opposing investments and identities stem from participants' expectations of an idealized SA experience and their belief in the capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that Spanish may offer them back home and abroad. This study further finds that participants' ongoing investment in learning and using Spanish relates to their L2 speaking gains post-SA.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Previous research indicates that language learners who participate in study abroad (SA) return with varying degrees of L2 gains and differing reactions to the target language (TL) and the host community (Kinginger, 2008, 2009). Some scholars posit external factors for such outcomes, such as quantity and quality of L2 use abroad (Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, & Martinsen, 2014), host families (Magnan & Back, 2007), in-country social networks (Isabelli-García, 2006), meaningful out-of-class contact with locals (Trentman, 2013a, 2013b), and length of stay (Llanes, 2011; Yang, 2016). Others posit internal factors, such as identity (Kinginger, 2013, 2015; Tullock, 2018) or motivation (Allen, 2010; Hernández, 2010). While post-structuralist notions of identity have influenced our understanding of how participants negotiate and interpret their SA experiences (e.g., Kinginger, 2008, 2009), there is still a need to explain why learners may become more or less committed to language learning practices, spaces, and opportunities while abroad. Some learners may be invested initially in the affordances offered by a particular context or individual(s) but may display contradictory behaviors depending on whether the target language and/or the SA experience aligns with their desired identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015, 2016). Drawing on the theoretical constructs of desired identities and investment, this paper explores *how* and *why* learners may exhibit paradoxical behaviors when presented with language learning opportunities and how these behaviors may influence their L2 speaking development measured via an oral abilities test: the Versant for Spanish.

This article presents case studies of three students—Katie, Laura, and Ryan (pseudonyms)—who were all part of a larger study. All three studied abroad between ten and sixteen weeks in Madrid, Spain in 2015, and each had different initial proficiencies in Spanish. They were chosen as focal participants because they all expressed learning Spanish as their primary reason for studying abroad. However, the three participants differed in what and with whom they invested their time and energy abroad, and their post-SA L2 speaking outcomes.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Identity in Study Abroad Research

Coleman (2013) writes that SA participants are “whole people [...] with complex and fluid identities and relationships which frame the way they live the study abroad experience” (p. 17). As such, understanding how learners construct their identities in an SA context has become a popular focus of study (Tulloch, 2018). According to Block (2007), identity is performed within the expectations and confines of the surrounding social context. He writes:

Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future. Individuals are shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on [...] There are unequal power relations to deal with, around the different capitals—economic, cultural and social—that both facilitate and constrain interactions with others in the different communities of practice with which individuals engage in their lifetimes. (p. 27)

In other words, identities are sometimes contradictory and in constant flux, constructed and negotiated in language use or discursive practices, and constrained by relations of power that influence how individuals use linguistic resources to index their desired selves (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). When dominant discourses contest, devalue, or impose particular identities, a negotiation of difference in and through language practices emerges as individuals try to remedy their self-chosen positioning and those enacted upon them (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

On the one hand, sojourners abroad may be subject to ascribed identities related to gender (Trentman, 2013a), linguistic heritage (Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000), social class (Kinginger, 2004), ‘foreignness’ (Iino, 2006), and race and ethnicity (Anya, 2017). On the other hand, language learners also have the agency to contest imposed subject positionings and to determine the L2 practices they wish to incorporate into their existing repertoire in order to claim and construct new and desired identities (Kinginger, 2013). Some learners withdraw from the host community (e.g., ‘Beatrice’ in Kinginger, 2008) or align themselves with discourses of national superiority (e.g., ‘Meryl’ in Jing-Schmidt, Chen, & Zhang, 2016). Others assume new identities deemed impossible for them in the US (e.g., ‘Rose’ in Anya, 2017) or return with reaffirmed ethnolinguistic identities (e.g., all three cases in Quan, Pozzi, Kehoe, & Menard-Warwick, 2018). As Jing-Schmidt et al. (2016) point out, how SA learners deal with identity affordances in the SA context impacts their engagement with the target community, which in turn influences how they position themselves vis-à-vis the TL and TL speakers, and their commitment, or investment, in L2 learning spaces and interactions they encounter abroad. Interestingly, however, post-program L2 oral proficiencies may not directly reflect participants’ identity negotiations. Despite identity differences, all four of Jing-Schmidt et al.’s

(2016) participants reached the “superior level” on their post-SA oral proficiency interviews (OPI), while in Isabelli-García (2006), the simulated OPI of her least motivated participant (‘Jennifer’) remained the same from pre- to post-SA.

## **Learner Investment**

The sociological concept of investment, originally proposed in Norton Peirce’s (1995) seminal piece and then revised by Darvin and Norton (2015), represents L2 learning as a set of dynamic and dialogic events that occur within sociocultural contexts. As Darvin and Norton (2015) state:

While constructs of motivation frequently view the individual as having a unitary and coherent identity with specific character traits, investment regards the learner as a social being with a complex identity that changes across time and space and is reproduced in social interaction. (p. 37)

SA participants’ willingness to capitalize on L2 learning moments and engage with TL speakers depends on how the spaces and practices align with their identities. Language learners position themselves and are positioned by others based on ideologies and the possession of various degrees and types of capital. Ideologies are “dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion, and the privileging and marginalization of ideas, people, and relations” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 8). This conception explains how ideologies are multiple and fluid, traversing across space and time, just as identities and capital do as well. According to Bourdieu (1986), capital can be economic, cultural, or social. Economic capital includes material wealth, while cultural capital is knowledge of cultural forms, educational experiences, and academic degrees. Social capital includes access to relationships or connections of power. Once groups or fields deem these forms of capital legitimate, they have value and become symbolic capital. This is oftentimes dependent on the dominant ideologies that determine what is and is not worthwhile, which differs across contexts. Learners may decide to negotiate, reject, or reaffirm differences between their claimed and ascribed identities, which in turn relates to their disposition and their investment towards language learning, L2 use, and study abroad (Kinginger, 2013).

L2 users have the agency to choose and to evaluate what they want and wish to become, compelling them to invest in languages, practices, and interactions they believe will help them achieve their desired identities. These decisions may sometimes be contradictory and reflect competing desires and ideologies surrounding study abroad and language learning. In Anya’s (2017) study of L2 Portuguese learners in Brazil, Rose distances herself from the L2 classroom because her Portuguese instructor does not allow her to engage with the content and the language in her own way. Instead, Rose connects with the local Afro-Brazilian community at dance clubs and hair salons, and maintains a romantic relationship with a Brazilian where she believes her language learning is maximized. In Trentman (2013b), some students aim to be dedicated language learners but also choose to participate in parties with US peers where Arabic use and interaction with Egyptians is limited. Some SA participants choose to learn the TL and engage with the local community in alternative ways, while others view an SA context as an opportunity to learn a language while also enjoying the overall experience of being abroad.

Previous SA research (e.g., Jing-Schmidt et al., 2016; Kinginger, 2008) has used the concept

of identity and investment to explain L2 outcomes and participant experiences in SA contexts. This study supplements and expands that understanding by exploring how and why learners negotiate particular identities in certain instances, and how this impacts their engagement with the host community and, consequently, their L2 speaking abilities. Drawing on the cases of Katie, Laura, and Ryan, this paper examines the following research questions:

1. How and why do these learners' investment in Spanish and in language learning opportunities shift throughout their SA program?
2. How do these fluctuating investments relate to their post-SA L2 Spanish speaking abilities?

## METHODS

### Procedures

The qualitative data for this study include: (a) a pre-SA background questionnaire, (b) interviews, and (c) bi-weekly journals. The quantitative data includes: (a) bi-weekly language-use surveys and (b) pre- and post-SA Versant for Spanish tests. The Versant for Spanish is an automatically administered exam by Pearson that measures overall speaking and listening abilities. All Versant scores are out of 80. The interviews and bi-weekly journals were conducted in the participants' language of choice (English and/or Spanish) and asked students to reflect on challenges, language learning experiences and strategies, and interactions abroad (see Appendices A and B). Participants completed the bi-weekly journals online via a Google Document shared with the researcher. The bi-weekly language-use surveys asked students to note interactions during their SA program: duration, participant(s), language of interaction, and topic(s) (see Appendix C). These were Google Forms submitted to the researcher. All methods and procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board. See Table 1 for a summary of data collection procedures.

*Table 1. Data Collection Procedures*

Pre-SA	During SA	Post-SA
Versant for Spanish test	Bi-weekly journal entries (Spanish and/or English)	Versant for Spanish test
Interview (Spanish and/or English)	Bi-weekly language-use surveys (English)	Interview (Spanish and/or English)
Background questionnaire (English)	Mid-program interview (Spanish and/or English)	

### Participants

This study examines three US university students: Katie, Laura, and Ryan. During 2015, they all studied abroad on different programs in Madrid, Spain. See Table 2 for a summary of their backgrounds.

Table 2. Summary of Participants' Background and Study Abroad Program

Pseudonym	Gender	Major(s)	Program type	Duration
Katie	F	Plant Science & Spanish	Spanish literature and culture	10 weeks
Laura	F	International Relations (French & Korean minor)	Content courses in English and Spanish	16 weeks
Ryan	M	Computer Science	Spanish language and culture	16 weeks

### Researcher

I was an external researcher, not directly affiliated with the participants' SA programs. I recruited Katie because I was an instructor at her university at the time of the study. I recruited Laura because I had previously studied at her SA program site in Madrid and knew the SA director. Lastly, I recruited Ryan through an email that his university's SA office had sent on my behalf. I recognize that my role as a researcher and Spanish language instructor may have shaped participants' narration of events and the information they provided to me.

### Analyses

This study employs a case study approach, whereby I illustrate and provide an explanatory and descriptive understanding of what happens abroad socially, and how students may interpret and internalize their experiences (Hood, 2009). For each case, the participant's interviews and bi-weekly journals were analyzed alongside quantitative data. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) using the application *Dedoose*. In regard to the first question, I analyzed participants' use of evaluative language to describe their interactions with TL and non-TL speakers and their reactions to language learning spaces and opportunities during the SA program. I also identified instances of negotiation where students questioned, reaffirmed, or adapted identities that they desired and/or were ascribed to them. For the second research question, I related trigger moments—instances when participants' interpretation of an episode led them to act—to their self-reported out-of-class L2 use. I used their reported hours and engagement with TL speakers as indicators of their investment. Moreover, I analyzed how they interpreted the quantity and quality of their language use and their interactions with different interlocutors. Lastly, I compared each participant's pre- and post-Versant score as an indication of their L2 speaking development.

## CASE STUDIES

### Katie

Katie was a 19-year-old plant science and Spanish double major from a university in California. She participated in a literature and culture program directed by her US university, and she had

a total of nine hours per week of art, literature, and film courses in Spanish, and a culture course in English. According to the background questionnaire and pre-SA interview, Katie decided to study in Madrid because she believed Spanish would benefit her future work in agriculture. Prior to her experience abroad, she self-identified as a competent Spanish user and scored at the advanced low level (69) on the Versant (Table 3). Katie felt confident about her Spanish abilities and her likelihood to make L2 gains while abroad. In her pre-SA interview, she said, “I have a pretty strong background in Spanish and I do use it frequently so I feel like that should be good enough and I’ll improve while I’m there [in Spain].” Katie chose to study abroad in order to further her bilingual abilities because she believed that she still struggled with “being able to communicate [her] ideas and say what [she] mean[s] to say” in Spanish (pre-SA interview). She was confident her language skills would improve as a result of SA and that complete immersion would occur because she would be living with a host family and was planning “to just talk a lot while there” (pre-SA interview).

Katie imagined her host family would be a source of linguistic and cultural immersion in Spanish only, though this was not the case in her initial homestay. Instead, she lived with other US students and a *señora*, who treated their stay as an economic transaction. In reflecting on the *señora* from her initial host family, Katie commented:

She’s really old [...] and this is like her job and I live with three other American girls [...]. It’s not really the host family experience that I wanted and it’s just, to her, this is more of a job, so I didn’t know that it would be like that. (mid-SA interview)

Katie originally interpreted her homestay as un conducive to her learning because she was living with three other students from her SA program and her *señora* was not interested in getting to know them or teach them about Spanish culture and language. However, Katie’s subsequent descriptions questioned her negative reading of the situation. First, during our post-SA interview, she reported that one of her roommates at her initial homestay was a native Spanish-speaker from California with whom she would converse in Spanish. Second, her *señora* did interact with Katie in Spanish and depended heavily on her bilingual abilities to communicate with the other US students. Katie commented in her mid-SA interview:

[The *señora*] speaks no English. So I always speak to her in Spanish. And for the first like three weeks here I don’t know why, but I seem to be like the mediator between her and everyone else, like if she has something to say to everyone she’ll just say it to me so that was kind of annoying at first cause a lot of time, it had nothing to do with me but I was the one that had to deal with it. I guess she likes my Spanish because we communicate really well.

Regardless, halfway through her SA program, Katie asked her program director to move her to a new host family. While her roommates all had the option to move, Katie was the only one who decided to do so. For Katie, the new homestay was a turning point in her SA experience because she no longer lived with other US students and she was now part of a host family with two parents and three children who acted as Spanish cultural and linguistic guides. As she noted in her journal entries,

Instead of just one *señora* who functions as an innkeeper, I am now a part of a family [...] As I am the only native English speaker in this new household, I find myself speaking more

and more Spanish. More importantly, I am being further immersed into Spanish culture. For example, after dinner each child has their chore to do as a part of the clean-up and although I wasn't assigned one, I appointed myself to be in charge of refilling the water at the end of the night. As trivial as it may sound, it feels really good to have some sort of homely responsibility. (journal entry, weeks 5-6)

In her journal entry from weeks 9-10, Katie again mentioned her new host family: “[They] loved asking me what I did or did not already know about Spanish culture and whatever I didn't they would explain to me. [...] They also helped me mark my progress of Spanish.” Since Katie's second host family positioned her as a language learner and coincided with her expectations of what a host family should be and do, she invested in participating like a member of the family and even assigned herself a nightly task. This explains the increase in her self-reported out-of-class L2 use during weeks 5 and 6 (see Figure 1).

Katie also expressed the need to speak only Spanish while abroad but contradicted her own intentions throughout the program. Katie was critical of the excessive use of English among her SA classmates and program: “There's a lot of Americanization and I say that meaning the program that we're in. Everybody speaks English when we're together at school and that kind of sucks” (mid-SA program interview). However, while she was critical of the English use of her US peers, she also engaged in English in their presence, which led Spaniards to assume they were monolingual English speakers.

A few Spaniards (generally males) are interested in the English language and will drop into my English conversations to ask where we are from and why we are in Spain. They are generally shocked when we reply immediately in Spanish saying, *Somos de California y estamos aquí para estudiar español* [We are from California and we are here to study Spanish]. A simple sentence, but probably the one I have had the most practice with since I have been here. (journal entry, weeks 1-2)

In this description, Katie decisively re-positions herself (and her co-national peers) as a competent Spanish speaker and committed language learner.

During week three, Katie met a Venezuelan-Spaniard named Javier at a nightclub, whom she dated casually throughout her stay. Javier studied at a university in Madrid and introduced her to his Spanish friends. Katie used English and Spanish to communicate with Javier and according to her, they were “equally fluent in both languages [which] meant communication was a breeze” (journal entry, weeks 9-10). Katie also lunched with him and his friends at their dining hall and frequented bars and parties with them. She described their interactions as significant learning opportunities. For example, as she notes in her journal entry for weeks 5-6:

We were discussing the slang terms for a kid who doesn't look like his or her parent. When I said *lechero*, the milkman reference just didn't make sense to them. The more I explained the concept, my friends told me that here they say *butanero* instead, meaning the gas pump attendant.

Apart from learning the word *butanero* [propane gas tank deliveryman], she also gained knowledge of who and why the individual who delivers propane gas tanks to apartments was more culturally relevant. Since older apartments in Madrid tend to use propane gas, most

Spaniards interact with *el butanero* on a regular basis. Her interactions with Javier also led to rich learning moments, in which Katie reflected on Spanish cultural practices and perspectives.

One of my most recent cultural adjustments was accustoming myself to Spanish public displays of affection, which are completely normalized here and happen much more often than in the United States. Personally, I have experienced this type of interaction with a Spaniard and was able to draw some analytical conclusions [...] No matter the time of day (or night, for that matter) Spaniards always seemed to be expressing their love (lust?) by swapping saliva and avoiding personal space. [...] Spaniards do not beat around the bush, they get straight to it *sin vergüenza* [without shame]. (journal entry, weeks 7-8)

As shown in Figure 1, Katie steadily increased her Spanish use throughout her SA program, especially between weeks 3 and 8 when she met Javier and his friends and switched to her second host family. Between weeks 7-8, she participated in a group *intercambio* [language exchange] that her SA program organized. This was a single occurrence that Katie described as a language learning experience that finally made her feel like she had fulfilled an SA expectation: “After the experience I feel like I finally accomplished what I came to Spain to do: engage with locals while improving my use of the Spanish language” (journal entry, weeks 7-8). Despite her relationship with Javier and her social network with his friends, she interpreted this isolated *intercambio* experience as the defining SA experience. Then, starting week 9, her self-reported contact hours decreased because she reduced the number of hours she typically spent interacting with her second host family in order to prepare for final exams and for her departure (post-SA interview). Katie’s Versant level remained at the advanced low level, and her scores showed minimal changes from pre-SA (69) to post-SA (70) (see Table 3).

## Laura

Laura was a 19-year-old international relations major from a university in New York. She was required to study abroad for her major and participated on a sixteen-week program directed by her university. She took three courses: one in Spanish about commerce, one in English about Spain in the European Union (EU), and one in English on climate change. According to our pre-SA interview and her background questionnaire, Laura chose to study in Madrid because the experience would align with her desired future career in international relations or human rights. At home, she was a member of her university’s model United Nations organization. Apart from learning Spanish, she was minoring in French and Korean and was a Mandarin heritage speaker. Even though she did not mention German in her background questionnaire, Laura described in her journal how she was able to converse in basic German during a visit to Vienna. Laura scored at the intermediate high level (54) on the Versant pre-SA (Table 3).

During our initial interview and throughout her SA program, Laura positioned herself as a global citizen who was studying abroad in order to interact with new people. As she remarked in her pre-SA interview: “I’m really interested in languages, traveling, international relations, those kinds of things. [...] The appeal of visiting a foreign country is being able to communicate with the people, build relationships with them.” Laura was very committed to improving her Spanish. While each participant had the freedom to use whichever languages to write their journals, Laura wrote all her entries in Spanish. She also emphasized “talk[ing] only in Spanish with [her] host family” (pre-SA interview), but stressed the importance of

relationships and meeting people as part of an SA experience, regardless of who she met and what languages those individuals may speak.

I want to make Spanish friends, make American friends. Like I don't know, for me, part of traveling, a huge component of it is just making friends, even if it's with American people, even if I'm speaking English I think it's important to make friends everywhere you go. (pre-SA interview)

However, she did not report becoming friends with many of her SA peers: “[Me] molesta el ambiente de este campus, donde a muchos estudiantes no les importan los estudios, sino el alcohol y los viajes superficiales” [The campus environment bothers me, a lot of students don't care about their studies, only about alcohol and superficial trips] (journal entry, weeks 7-8). According to Laura, many of her US classmates' attitudes did not align with her interests and her desired identities as a multilingual and culturally competent global citizen. Moreover, she had the expectation that the majority, if not all, SA students would have similar goals like hers to learn about a new country, meet people, and learn the language. Some of her SA peers seemed to be doing just that, since Laura reported “they've [SA peers] already talked about all these different people they've met because they go out to bars and clubs and stuff like that so they've been able to meet people” (mid-program interview). However, Laura judged her SA peers' actions and intentions as inappropriate or misaligned with her own expectations.

During the semester, Laura lived with a host mother, brother, and a roommate, who was from her SA program and had no prior Spanish experience. Due to her roommate's limited proficiency, there was a lot of English despite Laura speaking primarily in Spanish with her host family. Laura described her hosts positively and considered them to be like “a second family” (post-SA interview). In particular, Laura developed a close relationship with her host brother, Pedro. They went to a concert together in Madrid, traveled to Alcalá de Henares (a city approximately 35 kilometers northeast of Madrid), and to Lisbon, Portugal for a weekend. She occasionally went out with him to meet friends and often engaged in conversations with him and her host mom about the EU and other political topics.

Between weeks three and twelve, Laura interned at a non-profit for humanitarian aid, which increased her self-reported out-of-class Spanish use significantly. Her responsibilities included translating educational and marketing materials and participating in training and professional events in Spanish. Prior to starting, Laura “was not looking forward to [the internship] because it sound[ed] like it was going to be boring and hard” (mid-semester interview). However, during our mid-program interview, I asked Laura what she was enjoying most about her SA experience and she responded, “I think the internship is a big one [...] every time I go to my internship it's like all my worries are gone. I feel happy and productive [...] it's my happy place.” Nevertheless, Laura believed her internship only improved her writing and reading skills in Spanish—not speaking skills—because she reported having limited interactions with her Spanish co-workers, since her work did not require much contact with others. She also noted that she felt shy around them and did not interact with them very much:

Being more social at work cause the thing is they're- my coworkers- are all friends with each other and they talk to each other pretty often and they'll try to include me, but I get so intimidated and shy that I'm just like oh *bien. ¿Qué tal tu fin de?* [Well. How was your weekend?]. And just not really talk to them that much. (mid-program interview)

Even though Laura interpreted her encounters with her co-workers positively and they were willing to engage with her, her introversion inhibited her from partaking in conversations and developing deeper relationships with them. This contrasted with how she described her interactions with her host mother and brother: “At dinner with my host brother we’ll be like shouting about the EU at the dinner table” (mid-program interview). Laura’s shyness also did not impede her ability to make some Spanish friends through her SA program’s organized *intercambio* events. While she primarily interacted with these *intercambio* partners during the organized activities, Laura occasionally had social events outside of the program with them. For example, she invited two *intercambio* partners to her birthday dinner.

I actually feel pretty close to these Spanish girls which is great because I wasn’t expecting to make Spanish friends here so it’s nice. I get to practice Spanish and it is fun talking to them so I definitely really love the *intercambio* program. (mid-program interview)

Nonetheless, Laura described difficulties balancing her interests in building relationships, practicing Spanish, and fulfilling her academic responsibilities while abroad: “I feel kind of empty cause I’ve spent my entire time in Spain behind books and doing homework instead of actually getting out and being friends with people and stuff like that” (post-SA interview). Her L2 use with TL speakers dipped during weeks nine and ten when she had midterm exams and then again at the end of her program in preparation for finals. Regardless of her relationship with her host family and Spanish *intercambio* partners, Laura seemed dissatisfied with her overall SA experience. When I asked her about how she felt about her experience studying abroad in Madrid, she stated the following:

I was expecting to get some kind of big, life lesson out of this, or some big epiphany cause that’s usually what happens at the end of every trip I’ve had in my life so far, but this is the first time, and this is like the longest trip I’ve taken, I’ve been doing so much here, but I just don’t have that warm, fuzzy, ‘Oh my gosh like, I just did something really good’ kind of feeling. I don’t know if I’ll get it later, but I just feel like normally after trips abroad I’m like ‘wow,’ like something about that really stuck with me, but I’m not feeling that much, which, I don’t know if it’s regret, but it’s just something that kind of is bothering me that I’m not feeling something profound about it. (post-SA interview)

Laura’s recorded L2 use was primarily with her host family, *intercambio* interactions, and her internship, which explains why her out-of-class L2 use decreased significantly when the internship ended during week twelve. During weeks thirteen through sixteen, there was a decrease in her L2 use because she concentrated on her final exams and papers (see Figure 1). Despite her competing desires, Laura sustained her investment in trying to improve her Spanish abilities. The improvement gained by her high self-reported out-of-class Spanish use was reflected in her Versant score: she moved from an intermediate high level (54) pre-SA to an advanced low level (67) post-SA (see Table 3).

## Ryan

At the time of study, Ryan was a 21-year-old computer science major from a university in California. He participated in a sixteen-week language and culture program administered by his university. During his SA program, he took an elementary Spanish language class that met

for four hours per week, and three other courses in English that focused on immigration, political ecology, and post-colonialism. All of the coursework took place at an SA center in Madrid that also housed other programs from various US universities. Ryan scored at the novice high level (26) on his pre-SA Versant (Table 3).

During the pre-SA interview, Ryan positioned himself according to his heritage and language learner identities. Ryan chose to study Spanish in Madrid because both his mother and his grandmother spoke Spanish, while he had grown up speaking English only in the US. His grandmother is of Spanish descent and was born and raised in the Philippines, while his mother was born and raised in the US. Since Ryan had never visited Spain or Europe before, Ryan's mother encouraged him to go to Madrid to connect with his heritage. In addition, Ryan believed that Spanish would be useful to know since he lives in California where there is a large Spanish-speaking population. Apart from his language classes, he described the following strategies he would employ to improve his Spanish while abroad: "talk at least an hour or two of Spanish a day" with his host family, "engage with people," and use Duolingo and other Internet resources to learn new words (pre-SA interview).

During the first few weeks, Ryan was enthusiastic about speaking Spanish with TL speakers. He stated, "During my first week, I remember talking Spanish with some Spanish girls at tapas [...] I bought a gym membership and met more Spaniards briefly while working out" (journal entry, weeks 1-2), and "I try to speak only Spanish to the waiters and bartenders when I go out" (journal entry, weeks 3-4). However, his eagerness to interact in Spanish steadily declined after the first few weeks due to language obstacles and what he perceived to be programmatic hindrances. First, his homestay was primarily in English because he lived with four other American exchange students. One of Ryan's host brothers was also proficient in English and enjoyed spending time with them. Ryan and his housemates would go out with him to bars and clubs, however, he reported that these interactions were 70% in English and 30% in Spanish because his host brother wanted to practice his English and because the students' overall Spanish proficiency levels were too low (post-program interview). Second, Ryan described having superficial interactions with TL speakers due to his low Spanish proficiency and his shyness: "Despite meeting a number of Spaniards, I have found it difficult to maintain relationships with any of them. I believe this is mainly because I am shy and I don't know enough Spanish to have a legitimate conversation" (journal entry, weeks 1-2). According to Ryan's accounts, he expressed a desire to be positioned as a competent Spanish language learner. However, he believed TL speakers repeatedly spoke to him in English given his limited Spanish abilities, which he described as "frustrating" and "annoying" (journal entries, weeks 1-2 and 3-4).

Towards the beginning of the semester, Ryan's mother connected him with a computer science professor at a university in Madrid, who invited him to participate in a programming project with other Spanish university students. During our mid-program interview, Ryan had gone to meet the professor and the other students a few times. Nonetheless, he stopped participating mid-way through the semester because he believed his SA classes demanded too much time and he was preparing for online interviews for jobs in the US. Ryan also commented that the commute to the university took approximately 30 minutes one-way on the metro, which he felt was too much time given his mandatory SA coursework. Moreover, according to Ryan, his interactions and communications with the other programmers were in English because it was difficult to speak about abstract ideas in Spanish and because English is the *lingua franca* in technology (mid-program interview). Around weeks seven and eight, Ryan's investment in finding a summer programming job back in the US and doing well in his

SA classes became his priority. In regard to why he did not complete the programming project, Ryan replied:

I kind of underestimated the amount of work the classes here were going to give me [...] it didn't like really work out just because it was kind of more important for me to get a job for when I go back. (post-SA interview)

Starting week eleven, Ryan spent most of his time with his US peers. On the one hand, interacting with his SA peers facilitated his L2 learning since Ryan would spend time with several experienced bilinguals from his program: "I hung out with some Spanish speakers from the program and that definitely helped [...] I learned how to roll my R's and stuff with them" (post-SA interview). On the other hand, his interactions with his other SA peers were in English and perpetuated a disinterest in using Spanish. While he recognized the ineffectiveness of speaking in English all of the time, he was also relieved by the opportunity to revert to English. Ryan expressed how tiring it was to speak and think in Spanish constantly and his lack of interest to do so as he concentrated more on his future professional and academic goals as the semester progressed. He wrote:

Although I'm in Spain, I feel overall there's a lack of motivation to speak Spanish amongst my peers and myself. For me, I am pretty tired and I have a lot of class work so speaking Spanish is almost a burden right now. Because of this, my peers and I have 95% of the time spoken English with each other. Only in Spanish class or randomly to a waiter, do I hear my peers speak Spanish. For me, I speak Spanish to my homestay parents and a little to their son. However, I haven't been striking up any thorough conversations with them mainly because I am tired of constantly thinking. (journal entry, weeks 13-14)

During our post-SA interview, Ryan did not mention his heritage as a potential reason to keep learning Spanish after his SA program. Instead, he felt "Spanish will play more of a role romantically than it will professionally" (post-SA interview). Spanish had little symbolic capital for Ryan by the end of his SA experience since he believed Spanish would not play any role in his career and only potentially for romantic reasons.

Ryan's low number of self-reported out-of-class Spanish use reflects his waning investment in speaking Spanish as the semester progressed. Consequently, Ryan's Versant level remained at novice high, and his scores showed minimal changes from pre-SA (26) to post-SA (31) (see Table 3).

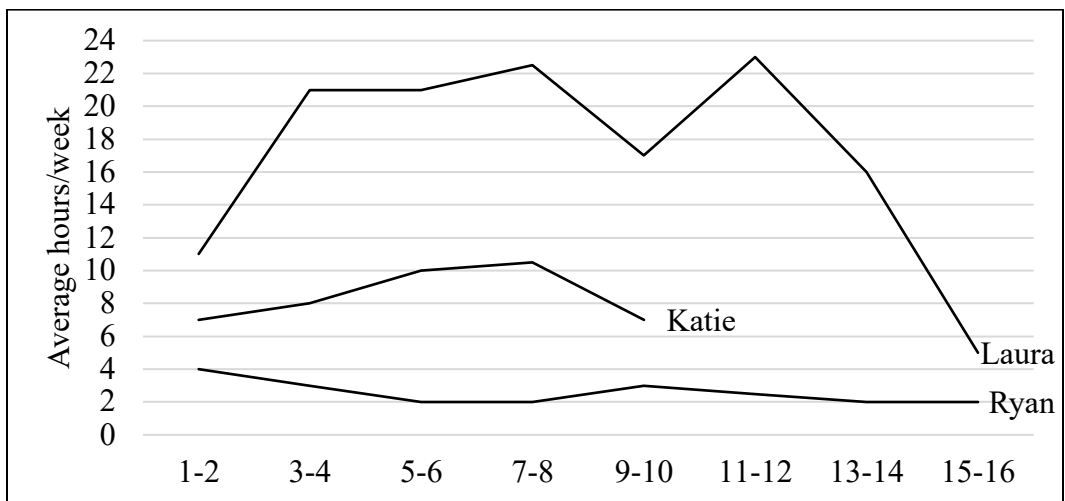


Figure 1. Self-Reported Out-of-Class Spanish Use for all Three Cases

Table 3. Pre- and Post-Study Abroad (SA) Language Outcomes for All Three Cases

	Pre-SA Versant Score (out of 80)	Corresponding OPI Level	Post-SA Versant Score (out of 80)	Corresponding OPI Level
Katie	69	Advanced Low	70	Advanced Low
Laura	54	Intermediate High	67	Advanced Low
Ryan	26	Novice High	31	Novice High

## DISCUSSION

In regard to the first research question, all three cases demonstrate competing desires, identities, and investments that stem from participants’ expectations of what the SA experience would and should be like. In addition, the three participants’ reactions and decisions varied depending on how interlocutors positioned them. Katie, Laura, and Ryan exhibited contradictory behaviors that influenced their out-of-class Spanish use and their interpretations of the SA experience. However, rather than attributing their actions to lack of motivation (e.g., Hernández, 2010; Isabelli-García, 2006), these case studies appear to demonstrate how learners deliberately exerted particular identities in order to rationalize their interpretations and reactions to various aspects of their SA experience. According to Surtees (2016), SA participants’ assumptions regarding what type of language to learn and from whom stems from ideological biases in the study of language itself, whereby monolingual immersion and interaction with ‘native speakers’ are privileged as effective means of L2 and cultural learning.

Katie alternated between positioning herself as a competent English/Spanish bilingual user and a language learner who needed guidance and Spanish-only immersion. She expected these desired identities to be more or less salient depending on the context. For instance, despite her *señora* positioning her as a competent bilingual and bicultural speaker, Katie expected her homestay to position her primarily as a language learner because she anticipated learning about Spanish language and culture through this component of her SA program. As such, she was not invested in her initial homestay because of this misalignment. She also expected Spanish interlocutors in everyday interactions to treat her as a language learner, even though she would

be speaking English publicly with her US peers. For Katie, she wanted Spanish-only interaction with Spaniards. As Surtees (2016) notes, SA students may believe that monolingual immersion is the best way to learn because of previous L2 classroom practices, and, therefore, they will neglect spaces or individuals who do not fulfill that expectation. Nonetheless, she deemed speaking in English to Javier, the Venezuelan-Spaniard she befriended, acceptable, perhaps because they were employing both languages and utilizing their bilingual abilities. Therefore, she invested in Javier and in her second host family, and varied her investments with her US peers, sometimes criticizing their use of English, but also enjoying the camaraderie they shared as SA sojourners. This investment is demonstrated in her increased out-of-class Spanish use between weeks five and eight when she switched to her new host family and met Javier.

Meanwhile, Laura shifted between positioning herself as a global citizen and good student. First, she wanted to make friends, but she decided not to engage with her SA peers because she believed they did not share her language and cultural learning goals. Instead, she befriended some of her *intercambio* partners and invested in these opportunities to practice her Spanish. Second, while she attended her internship regularly, she was too timid to engage with her co-workers and expressed frustration in not interacting more with them. In contrast, she was not shy with her host family, which she described as meeting her expectation of a rich cultural and language learning experience. Yet, her good-student identity also encouraged her to stay in her room and study rather than spend time with her host family and to explore the city of Madrid. Laura reported anticipating a “profound” realization or an “epiphany” from her SA experience and was disappointed when she did not have that. She engaged in activities that SA research has suggested were effective for learning—for example, an internship, language partners, and living with a host family (Marijuan & Sanz, 2018)—, and if we consider her post-SA L2 speaking outcomes, they were. However, Laura’s dissatisfaction also reflects a desire to fulfill an ‘ideal SA experience’ that may be unrealistic and suggests that her interpretations of her sojourn abroad were conceived of through an ideological lens.

Lastly, in the case of Ryan, he initially positioned himself as a heritage and committed language learner, but due to the difficulties of interacting in Spanish with TL speakers and feeling incompetent in his abilities, he became less invested in pursuing opportunities to speak in Spanish and minimally interacted in Spanish outside of the classroom throughout the semester. Ryan’s primary access to TL speakers was his homestay, yet that space was English dominant since he lived with other Americans and because of his host brother’s high English proficiency. While Ryan had the opportunity to access TL speakers at a local university in Madrid with his social capital—his mother’s connection—and his cultural capital as a programmer, he prioritized job interviews in California and his SA classes rather than investing in potential TL relationships. As a native English-speaking programmer, Ryan’s symbolic capital was high in both US and international contexts. Moreover, since Ryan’s capital more easily aligned with his desire to be a successful computer programmer, and because Spaniards were consistently defaulting to English to communicate with him, he eventually deemed Spanish unnecessary for his professional endeavors. Consequently, halfway through his SA program, he retracted to a “grand tour” approach (Gore, 2005), which consisted of focusing his efforts on partying and touring Spain with his US peers. These SA experiences seemed to reinforce, for Ryan, English monolingualism as sufficient linguistic capital to become a successful programmer in the global context and Spanish as a language that would only be useful for romance.

Regarding the second question, the three students’ Versant score gains did not directly align with their self-reported out-of-class Spanish use. Katie gradually increased her interaction with

Spanish-speakers and remained invested in improving her Spanish throughout her SA program. While her post-SA Versant level remained at advanced low, this may be attributed to her ten-week program, which may not be enough to increase a learner's proficiency level significantly, or the claim that the more advanced the learner, the more effort is needed to reach the following threshold (Davidson, 2015). In addition, compared to Laura, Katie averaged a much lower amount of out-of-class Spanish use. While Katie may appear to be more gregarious, confident, and determined, Laura's experiences with her host brother, the unexpected friendships with *intercambio* partners, and her internship led her to report a very high average number of hours and suggests that her interactions were as enriching as Katie's, if not more so, given that she substantially improved her Spanish speaking abilities. Nonetheless, Laura did start at a lower level pre-SA than Katie, which may also explain why Laura showed more improvement. Lastly, Ryan's low and steady out-of-class Spanish use reflects his waning investment in Spanish during his SA experience. Subsequently, his post-SA Versant level remained at novice high despite having lots of room to grow since he started at a lower level. In contrast to Katie and Laura, who expressed an ongoing investment to learn and speak Spanish post-SA, Ryan expressed no such interest. According to these case studies, an SA experience may lead some learners, like Katie and Laura, to make an ongoing investment in Spanish, which may have a lasting impact on their trajectories with language learning and use. Meanwhile, for others, like Ryan, being abroad may have limited influence on their identity development and on their perceptions of the utility of language learning for their future selves.

## SUMMARY

This study confirms that investment in L2 learning during study abroad is related to learner identities and influences post-SA speaking outcomes. These case studies further our understanding of theories on identity and investment because they demonstrate how SA participants negotiate competing and fluctuating desires and identities that lead to contradictory behaviors or decisions about their language learning and use. These opposing investments and identities stem from learner expectations of the capital that Spanish offers them locally and globally, and of what an SA experience should be like, with differential emphasis on, for instance, monolingual immersion, host families who will embrace the host student and act as cultural and linguistic resources, and immediate friendships with locals. In some cases, these expectations are met (e.g., Katie's experience with her second host family or Laura's relationship to her host brother), or learners are able to reconceptualize their expectations to make a situation work in their favor (e.g., Laura's approach to her internship). Other times, there is a disconnect between students' expectations and the actual SA experience, leading students to invest in other aspects of the experience they believe better align with their desired selves and will provide greater capital for the future (e.g., Ryan's case). Learners' decisions while abroad influence language learning opportunities, interactions with TL interlocutors, and subsequently their L2 speaking development. The findings from this study suggest that learners may behave in paradoxical ways due to the competition between misaligned expectations, actual experiences, investments, and desired identities during a sojourn abroad. As such, SA offices, language instructors, and departments may want to be mindful of how study abroad is framed and what ideologies are being reinforced about what students should expect to learn and how they should engage with the host community. Future research may want to critically examine the sources that propagate dominant discourses surrounding SA, as proposed by Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, and Klute (2012).

There are a few limitations to this study. First, participants had varying pre-SA levels and embarked on different types of study abroad programs. As such, a comparison across cases is difficult. Second, only data from the SA participants were collected. Future research may want to incorporate the perspectives of locals who interacted with students (e.g., host families, co-workers, friends, etc.) in order to better understand the impact of those with whom SA learners engage since students' investment depends partly on how hosts position them and envision both their own and students' roles in an SA context. Continual efforts to research and understand how students' identities develop and influence L2 gains will greatly contribute to promoting the kind of SA curricula that will foster immediate and long-term language learning and use.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, H. W. (2010). Language-learning motivation during short-term study abroad: An activity theory perspective. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 27–49.
- Anya, U. (2017). *Racialized identities in second language learning: Speaking blackness in Brazil*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Baker-Smemoe, W., Dewey, D., Bown, J., & Martinsen, R. (2014). Variables affecting L2 gains during study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 47, 464–486.
- Block, D. (2007). *Second language identities*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J.F. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Coleman, J. A. (2013). Researching whole people and whole lives. In C. Kinginger (Ed.), *Social and cultural aspects of language learning in study abroad* (pp. 17–44). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36–56.
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2016). Investment and language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *Langage et Société*, 157(3), 19–38.
- Davidson, D. (2015). The development of L2 proficiency and literacy within the context of the federally supported overseas language training programs for Americans. In T. Brown & J. Brown (Eds.), *To advanced proficiency and beyond* (pp. 117–150). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Gore, J. (2005). *Dominant beliefs and alternative voices: Discourse, belief, and gender in American study abroad*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hernández, T. A. (2010). The relationship among motivation, interaction, and the development of second language oral proficiency in a study-abroad context. *Modern Language Journal*, 94(4), 600–617.
- Hood, M. (2009). Case study. In J. Heigham & R.A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction* (pp. 66–90). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Iino, M. (2006). Norms of interaction in a Japanese homestay setting: Toward two-way flow of linguistic and cultural resources. In M. A. DuFon & E. Churchill (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 151–173). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Isabelli-García, C. (2006) Study abroad social networks, motivation and attitudes: implications for second language acquisition. In M. A. DuFon & E. Churchill (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 231–258). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Jing-Schmidt, Z., Chen, J. Y., & Zhang, Z. (2016). Identity development in the homeland: A Chinese heritage perspective. *Modern Language Journal*, 100(4), 797–812.
- Kinginger, C. (2004). Alice doesn't live here anymore: Foreign language learning and identity reconstruction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 219–242). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kinginger, C. (2008). Language learning in study abroad: Case studies of Americans in France. *Modern Language Journal*, 92, 1–131.
- Kinginger, C. (2009). *Language learning and study abroad: A critical reading of research*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- Kinginger, C. (2013). Identity and language learning in study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(3), 339–358.
- Kinginger, C. (2015). Student mobility and identity-related language learning. *Intercultural Education*, 26(1), 6–15.
- Llanes, A. (2011). The many faces of study abroad: An update on the research on L2 gains emerged during a

- study abroad experience. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 8(3), 189–215.
- Magnan, S., & Back, M. (2007). Social interaction and linguistic gain during study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 40(1), 43–61.
- Marijuan, S., & Sanz, C. (2018). Expanding boundaries: Current and new directions in study abroad research and practice. *Foreign Language Annals*, 51(1), 1–20.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9–31.
- Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). Introduction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual settings* (pp. 1–33). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Quan, T., Pozzi, R., Kehoe, S., & Menard-Warwick, J. (2018). Spanish heritage language learners in study abroad across three national contexts. In C. Sanz & A. Morales-Front (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of study abroad research and practice* (pp. 437–451). New York: Routledge.
- Riegelhaupt, F., & Carrasco, R. (2000). Mexico host family reactions to a bilingual Chicana teacher in Mexico: A case study of language and culture clash. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 24(4), 405–421.
- Surtees, V. (2016). Beliefs about language learning in study abroad: Advocating for a language ideology approach. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 27, 85–103.
- Trentman, E. (2013a). Arabic and English during study abroad in Cairo, Egypt: Issues of access and use. *Modern Language Journal*, 97(2), 457–473.
- Trentman, E. (2013b). Imagined communities and language learning during study abroad: Arabic learners in Egypt. *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(4), 545–564.
- Tulloch, B. (2018). Identity and Study Abroad. In C. Sanz & A. Morales-Front (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of study abroad research and practice* (pp. 262–274). New York: Routledge.
- Twombly, S. B., Salisbury, M. H., Tumanut, S. D., & Klute, P. (2012). Study abroad in a new global century: Renewing the promise, refining the purpose. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 38(4), 1–152.
- Yang, J. S. (2016). The effectiveness of study-abroad on second language learning: A meta-analysis. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 72(1), 66–94.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

#### *Pre-SA Interview Questions*

- 1) Why do you want to study Spanish?
- 2) Why did you decide to study abroad in Spain?
- 3) What expectations do you have about your experience? Where did you get those expectations?
- 4) What will be your living arrangements abroad?
- 5) What kinds of classes will you be taking?
- 6) How have you been preparing for your departure?
- 7) What are you nervous or anxious about? Why?

#### *Mid-SA Interview Questions*

- 1) Tell me how your experience abroad has been thus far.
- 2) Describe your living situation.
- 3) Describe your daily schedule, including classes and activities.
- 4) What or who has been most helpful in regard to your Spanish learning?
- 5) What or who has been least helpful in regard to your Spanish learning?
- 6) Has your abroad experience met your expectations thus far? How and why?
- 7) What has surprised you most?
- 8) What are some of the challenges you are facing? How do you plan to overcome them?

- 9) What are your goals for the remainder of your program? Why?

*Post-SA Interview Questions*

- 1) Describe your feelings about your study abroad program.
- 2) Has your study abroad experience met your expectations? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 3) (If applicable) What role did your host family play in your Spanish language learning? And your cultural learning? What role did your housemates play?
- 4) What role did your classes play? And your study abroad peers?
- 5) Was there anyone or anything else that played a role in your Spanish language or cultural learning?
- 6) What are some important things that you have learned from your study abroad experience?
- 7) Is there anything you wish you had done differently or would have changed about your experience? Is there anything that you regret?
- 8) What did you enjoy most about studying abroad? Why?
- 9) What was most challenging or frustrating about your experience? Were you able to overcome it? How?
- 10) What role do you think Spanish will have in your (academic, professional, personal) life when you return home? Are you planning to continue learning Spanish? Please explain.

## **Appendix B: Bi-weekly Journal Prompt**

Instructions: Please write a journal entry (in Spanish and/or English) of about 300–350 words at least every two weeks during your time abroad. Please write on the following questions with as much detail as possible. This journal is meant to help me understand your daily experiences in Spain and to help you reflect on your experience.

- Describe and explain a recent language or cultural learning experience that you have had since your last entry. What did you learn? What surprised you? Why?
- What is your perception of your Spanish language progression thus far? Why?
- Describe and explain:
  - your interactions and your relationships with Spanish speakers.
  - your interactions and your relationships with other individuals abroad.
  - any challenges or frustrations since your last entry.
  - any noteworthy episodes that you have experienced.

## **Appendix C: Bi-weekly Language Contact Survey**

Instructions: Please complete as thoroughly as possible. You may respond in English or Spanish.

- Date completing this survey
- How many hours/week did you speak to your host family or housemates in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you participate in an ‘intercambio’ or language exchange?
- List any other Spanish-speaking person (excluding your host family, housemates,

or ‘intercambio’) with whom you have maintained a conversation in Spanish. (1. Number of minutes or hours per week. 2. Write the topic(s) discussed and your relationship to this person. 3. Where were they from?)

- How many hours/week do you speak in Spanish with your study abroad classmates or US friends?
- List each non-native person with whom you have maintained a conversation in Spanish. (1. Number of minutes or hours per week. 2. Identify their level of Spanish (beginner, intermediate, advanced, native). 3. Write the topic(s) discussed and your relationship to this person. 4. Describe your relationship to this person.)
- List each person with whom you have maintained a conversation in another language aside from Spanish or English. (1. Number of minutes or hours per week. 2. Write the topic(s) discussed. 3. Describe your relationship to this person.)
- How many hours/week did you attend classes in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you watch TV, movies, etc. in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you listen to music, the radio, etc. in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you do an internship primarily in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you volunteer primarily in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you participate in a club, team, or other organization that was conducted primarily in Spanish?
- How many hours/week did you participate in a club, team, or other organization that was conducted primarily in English?
- How many hours/week did you read in Spanish?
- Please list any other activities that you did in Spanish that were not listed above. Please include how many hours/week.