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Racialized Experiences of Language Identities: Spanish Heritage Learners Studying Spanish in a Non-Heritage Country

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The most recent *Open Doors* report by the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2020) indicates that the number of non-white U.S. study abroad students has been steadily growing over the past 10 years, and now it accounts for 31% of all students pursuing part of their education abroad. This study focuses on four Spanish heritage language learners (SHLLs) of Dominican, Mexican, Peruvian, and Colombian/Venezuelan descent with differing Spanish proficiency who enrolled in a short-term study abroad (SA) program for Spanish in Quito, Ecuador during May-June of 2017, 2018, or 2019. This SA program was sponsored by a four-year college in the southeastern U.S. This study included a closed-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, (classroom) observations, e-portfolios, journals, and e-mails. A poststructuralist lens and Norton's theory of investment were employed to explore the identities of these four undergraduates, their social networks, language, and culture learning opportunities, and how these experiences shaped their individual development. Considerations will be offered in terms of how a social justice-oriented curriculum can be a powerful approach to support the emergence of heritage language identities abroad in socially situated contexts. Civically oriented SA programs have the potential to help SHLLs construct global identities, increase communication skills, and gain global understanding, compassion, and tolerance for social change.

INTRODUCTION

The most recent *Open Doors* report by the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2020) indicates that the number of non-white U.S. study abroad students has been steadily growing over the past 10 years, and now it accounts for 31% of all students pursuing part of their education abroad. Hispanic students represent 10.9%, Asian and Native Hawaiian students 8.9%, African-Americans 6.4%, multiracial (4.7%), and American Indian or Alaskan (0.4%). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to explore the experiences of minority students and students of color studying abroad, their socialization process at the foreign site, their linguistic, cultural, and cognitive development, and their identity negotiation process.

This study focuses on four Spanish heritage language learners (SHLLs) of Dominican, Mexican, Peruvian, and Colombian/Venezuelan descent with differing Spanish proficiency who enrolled in a short-term study abroad (SA) program for Spanish in Quito, Ecuador during May-June of 2017, 2018, or 2019. This SA program was sponsored by a four-year college in the southeastern U.S. This study included a closed-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, (classroom) observations, e-portfolios, journals and e-mails. A poststructuralist lens and Norton's theory of investment were employed to explore the identities of these four undergraduates, their social networks, language and culture learning opportunities, and how

their SA experiences shaped their individual development. It will be argued that a social justice-oriented curriculum can support the emergence of heritage language identities abroad, and that civically-oriented SA programs have the potential to help SHLLs construct global identities, increase communication skills, and gain global understanding, compassion and tolerance for social change.

BACKGROUND

The existing literature on heritage language learners (HLLs) studying in (non)ancestral countries (Potowski & Muñoz-Basols, 2018; Quan et al., 2018; Trentman, 2015) reported positive and negative experiences with remarkable individual differences in terms of outcomes and feelings. Scant research is available on the experiences of SHLLs studying Spanish in their ancestral homelands (de Félix & Cavazos Peña, 1992; Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000; McLaughlin, 2001; Rubin, 2004; Petrucci, 2007; Moreno, 2009), much less in non-heritage countries (Moreno, 2009; Gorman, 2011; Quan et al., 2018; George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, 2019). Most studies focus on SHLLs of Mexican descent (de Félix & Cavazos Peña, 1992; McLaughlin, 2001; Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000).

Identity Negotiation in Ancestral Homeland

In the identity negotiation process of SHLLs sojourning in their heritage country, a key factor is how SHLLs perceive their identity and proficiency in Spanish, and how the host community values, challenges or rejects their subjectivity and positioning. In Petrucci's study (2007) SHLLs felt pressured to speak like monolinguals because they looked like in-group members, but felt guilty for not meeting the hosts' expectations. McLaughlin (2001) discussed similar findings. Additionally, one student in Puebla, Mexico faced disbelief for not looking like an in-group member yet speaking fluent Spanish, while four U.S. Chicana students felt undermined as their variety of Spanish was labeled as rural by some nationals. Also, Lidia, a Chicana bilingual teacher studying in Mexico in Riegelhaupt & Carrasco's (2010) study, was criticized by her middle-class Guanajuato host family for her non-standard use of Spanish expressions that differed from the local socio-cultural and linguistic norms. She was indexed as an uneducated teacher, which affected her confidence, acquisition and language performance. In Moreno's (2009) study, Louis sojourned in Guatemala where he took pride in his bicultural and hybrid identities. Pablo Diego also reaffirmed his Hispanic identity as a result of his sojourn in Mexico, but in Mexico he faced discrimination for his race, ethnicity and social class because someone with dark skin was not expected to be fluent in English, a skill associated with wealthy Mexicans. De Félix and Cavazos Peña (1992) reported that the Mexican American teachers returned with an empowered U.S. Latino identity and improved linguistic competence. SA in their ancestral homeland can bring SHLLs accrued awareness of their complex identities and proficiency in Spanish, as well as deeper understanding of the multiple (non)standard varieties of Spanish and how these varieties may be perceived in different parts of the Spanish-speaking world.

Identity Negotiation in Non-Ancestral Homeland

Existing research warns that SHLLs who study in their non-ancestral homeland also embark on a high-stakes journey. Gorman (2011) discussed how being ascribed an out-group status by nationals can be shocking for SHLLs and their identity perception. For instance, a Mexican American student was positioned as 'gringa' in Nicaragua and questioned how she was perceived in the Spanish-speaking world as opposed to the U.S. However, Katherine, perceived as American and not expected to speak fluent Spanish, paced her language learning agenda more loosely without feeling pressured (Moreno, 2009). Some studies show how resourceful learners are when they intentionally perform various identities to their advantage in pursuing their goals. Leigh, Jaime (Moreno, 2009) and Jessica (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, 2019) used their physical appearance to pass as Hispanic in Argentina – even though they did not exhibit native fluency and created different language and culture learning opportunities. Jessica maintained ancestral identity in Argentina. Charlotte felt a stronger connection to Hispanic culture when she noticed an improvement in her Spanish after returning from Argentina. In fact, three of the four U.S. heritage speakers of Spanish with Mexican descent who studied Spanish in Argentina and Spain (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, 2019) accommodated morphosyntactic, lexical, and phonological regional features that they learned abroad in Spanish. The highest degree of accommodation was reported among the students who were the most proficient in Spanish before departure. Jessica, Charlotte and Eva integrated into social networks abroad and acted as in-group members to gain acceptance. Eva became more integrated into the host community in Spain than in her ancestral community back home. In contrast, Tiffany struggled to understand Castilian Spanish, resisted identity alignment, and rejected employing local dialectal features stating that 'Spanish from Central Spain sounded the worst' (p. 270) while Mexican Spanish sounded the best. Juan (Quan et al., 2018) also rejected Argentinean Spanish during his sojourn and instead reaffirmed his Mexican-American way of speaking Spanish and his hybrid identity. Nicole in Guatemala and Maria in Spain took pride in their Central American heritage, strengthened their heritage language proficiency, and gained sociolinguistic awareness of the multiple varieties of Spanish. Maria (Quan, 2021) faced discrimination because her language use ('that was Mexican to say') was 'not proper Spanish' in Spain (p. 181.) She reaffirmed her identity as an American with Mexican heritage and as a Spanish and English user by fluidly and naturally employing both Spanish and English in her translanguaging practices abroad.

Theories of Language and Identity

Norton's notions of language, identity, and investment are significant in this study. Norton (2010) defined language 'not only as a linguistic system, but as a social practice in which experiences are organized and identities negotiated' (p. 351). Norton shares the poststructuralist idea that individuals' identities are multifaceted and continually evolving over space and time (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Individuals intentionally and agentively negotiate various identities in social interactions based on the parties involved, their perceptions, the situational contexts, and their goals. Learners' investment (Norton, 1995, 2000, 2016) refers to how they invest in their L2 learning, identities, and social world. Investment takes into consideration the learner's desires, choices, efforts and resources. Learners use language to negotiate information and a sense of self and how they view their social world at a specific point in time and space. Language constitutes and is constituted by the learners' social identity.

Learners also use language as they desire to become members of certain social groups and imagined communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). In these imagined communities, learners can practice their target language, feel a sense of belonging, and take on imagined identities while they (re-)envision how realities are and how they wish them to be, and transform life and the world (Norton, 2013). Central to Norton's definition of investment is also the concept of symbolic capital, inspired by Bourdieu (1986): Learners invest in a language to acquire new symbolic and material resources, knowledge, skills, and relations that will increase their existing cultural capital and social power, therefore opening up possibilities for imagined futures while transforming the newly acquired capital into something valuable. Learners' investment in the target language is subject to complex, fluid power dynamics and control patterns existing in various social fields, and learners gain, maintain, resist, or lose power as they lead increasingly mobile lives (Darvin and Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013; Norton, 1995). In these spaces, learners have agency; they can express their voices, affirm their identities, negotiate symbolic capital, reframe power relations, and challenge ideologies and dominant practices.

Busch's (2017) work connected the concept of lived experiences of language with linguistic repertoire, language ideologies, and identity. She traced 'how, by way of emotional and bodily experience, dramatic or recurring situations of interaction with others become part of the repertoire, in the form of explicit and implicit linguistic attitudes and habitualized patterns of language practices' (p. 350). The concept of lived experience of language sheds light on the bodily and emotional dimension of experience and speech. These thoughts are relevant for the understanding of the linguistic repertoire because language is fundamentally a bodily phenomenon, and language is about positioning oneself in relationship to the world. In analyzing the linguistic repertoire, Busch considered how speakers interact linguistically and socially; how they are constituted by historical/political discourses; and how powerful the bodily/emotional prerequisites are for speaking and experiencing language. This multidimensionality of the linguistic repertoire means that the options available to speakers is not limited by grammatical rules and knowledge of social conventions; it also encompasses strong sensorial, emotional/linguistic-ideological connotations. Kramsch (2009) also emphasized learners' symbolic competence in lieu of their grammatical competence. For Kramsch, multilinguals display symbolic competence in their process of making meaning of the world and constructing objective and subjective realities through language use. Multilinguals' experience of learning and using a language is highly subjective, visceral, and physical. It engages the whole person, body and senses. Kramsch's aesthetic dimension of embodied learning is linked to (childhood/adolescent) memories, dreams, and aspirations, and to the fantasies and pleasure that they can find in language. Finally, Martínez and Train (2020) use "language-ness" to describe Latinxs' experience in, through and about language, which for many of them is a fundamental human experience of translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014) where 'trans' implies crossing linguistic boundaries while interacting. For them, language-ness of experience is a complex tapestry of embodied subjectivities, positionalities and relationalities that are intricately woven into our human experiencing, languaging and translanguaging, as we live the world.

Multilingual Learners: A Focus on Social Justice

Researchers across fields including psychology, education and second language acquisition have adopted a social justice lens in their work. Vasquez (2012) called for 'a commitment [. . .] to decrease human suffering and to promote human values of equality and justice' (p. 337). Nieto

& Bode (2012) discussed 'a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity' (p. 12). Piller (2016) explored linguistic diversity and global injustice, the impact of English as a global language and of systemic inequities in language learning. Kubota (2016) called for increased attention to power systems that (re)produce racial, economic, and social inequalities related to plural and hybrid linguistic practices and that privilege or stigmatize individuals for their linguistic diversity, pluriculturalism and hybridity, or for their monolingualism and monoculturalism. Kubota urged us to resist neoliberal multiculturalism, which uncritically supports plurality, open societies, and individual freedom, while perpetuating color-blindness and diminishing undesirable diversity. Ortega (2019) proposed equitable multilingualism as inequity and social injustices are constantly inflicted upon multilinguals because of their differences in race, ethnicity, heritage, social class, gender, sexual and religious orientation; therefore, human diversity and capacity for language are devalued. Multilinguals, particularly those belonging to minoritized communities, are often misunderstood and devalued, and so are their multilingual competences and ways of speaking, which should be treated as a gift and an asset. Finally, Moya's work (2002) on racialized Latinx experiences and social justice illustrated that "To the extent that we wish to foster a just and democratic society, we must take seriously the situation of marginalized groups who are underserved or actively harmed by an educational system that devalues their cultures" (p. 174). It is fundamental to educate all parties involved in educational programs to interact in culturally sensitive ways with peoples of different cultural and linguistic traditions. When we focus our own and others' particularities, we can develop an effective understanding of our universal humanity, and produce profound social change.

More research on SHLLs in different learning contexts across Spanish-speaking countries is needed. A deeper understanding of the cultural manifestations and linguistic diversity of the Hispanic societies can potentially challenge and dissipate any negative connotations attributed to local dialects or practices of Spanish. This knowledge can have a significant social impact as SHLLs returning from SA may wish to improve their relationships with their Hispanic communities. They may feel an increased sense of pride and belonging, and consider the Spanish language as a critical asset in their life. There are three research questions guiding this study: 1) What identities did SHLLs negotiate abroad? 2) How did these positionings shape their language and culture learning experiences? 3) How did these experiences abroad impact their development as a language learner and as a person?

METHODS

Participants and Program of Study

This ethnographic study adopts a case study approach to analyze April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben's (pseudonyms) experiences in Ecuador. They were chosen as the focal students for the present study because they were SHLLs. They were part of a larger group of 37 U.S. undergraduates, between ages 20-71, studying Spanish in Quito who enrolled in a short academic program during May-June of 2017, 2018, or 2019 sponsored by a four-year college in the southeastern U.S. that is ranked one of the most diverse public institutions in the region. Odalis went abroad in 2017, April in 2018, and Brenda and Ben in 2019. Each program consisted of a two-week pre-departure orientation on the home campus, a two-week sojourn in Quito and its surroundings, and one week of final examinations upon return. The author of this article was the faculty member leading the SA program and teaching the courses. The SA

students received home university credits for their classes abroad, and they were required to take two courses equivalent to six Spanish credits. April and Odalis took an independent-study course as part of the six credits. In Ecuador, cultural informants and guest speakers took a leading role during traditional contact hours as well as during site visits and extracurricular activities. April, Brenda and Ben volunteered at a senior center and/or daycare in Quito. Students lived with local families and came in contact with the local indigenous population during weekly activities. Weekend trips included visits to the cloud forest and the Otavalo indigenous market. Brenda and Ben also participated in a 5-day trip to the Galapagos islands.

April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben were first-generation college students, first-generation Americans, and first to study abroad. They self-identified as Hispanic heritage learners, and their family and community had always played a key role in their lives (see Tables 1, 2, 3 for demographic and language identity information).

Table 1

Pseudonym & SA participation year	DOB	Birthplace	Childhood home
April (2018)	1995	Flowery Branch (GA)	Lawrenceville (GA)
Odalis (2017)	1969	New York City (NY)	Las Vegas (NV)
Brenda (2019)	1995	Athens (GA)	Athens (GA)
Ben (2019)	2000	Lawrenceville (GA)	Lawrenceville (GA)

Table 2

Pseudonym	Heritage	Ancestry	Academic Level during SA	Major
April	Mexican	Both parents from Mexico	Junior	Psychology
Odalis	Dominican/ Ukrainian	Mother from the DR, father from the Ukraine	Junior, non-traditional	Psychology
Brenda	Peruvian	Father and paternal grandparents from Peru	Junior	Business management
Ben	Colombian/ Venezuelan	Father from Colombia/Venezuela, mother from Venezuela	Sophomore	Accounting

Table 3
Language identity

Pseudonym	Native fluency	Languages spoken at home	Languages learned at school (MS, HS, college)	Self-perceived proficiency in Spanish
April	Spanish, English	Spanish	English, Spanish, French	Superior
Odalis	English	English	Spanish	Intermediate/advanced
Brenda	English	English, Spanish	Spanish	Intermediate
Ben	English	English, Spanish	Spanish	Elementary

April

April grew up in Georgia to undocumented Mexican parents and considered herself Mexican: 'I have Mexican roots and I have Mexican culture' (Interview 2). Her father's family, unlike her mother's side, was in the U.S. Although she never travelled to Mexico, April kept in contact. April's first language was Spanish, having learned English in kindergarten. In high school, April took one year of Spanish and French. In college April pursued a Latin American studies certificate (LAS) and a global studies certification (GS), an enrichment opportunity offered to all students who wished to build their intercultural competence. An integral component for GS was to study abroad, which April, then a junior, did in 2018. April was also actively engaged on and off campus in Latin American student organizations, and in non-profit organizations for Latino advocacy and advancement. April was a psychology major. Before SA, she had taken two college Spanish classes, and enrolled in two SA courses that functioned as an independent study designed to explore the issue of access and equity in Latin America's education system. In April's self-assessment she stated: 'I consider myself an expert in Spanish because of my ability to actually read it and write it' (Interview 1). April also stated that: 'Studying Spanish would have given me a stronger advantage to help out my community' (Interview 1).

Odalis

Odalis was born in Queens, NY but lived in Connecticut until the age of nine when she moved to Las Vegas, NV. Her mother was Dominican and her father was Ukrainian. Odalis grew up with her mother's side of the family, hearing Spanish at home, though her first language was English. Odalis had travelled inside and outside of the U.S. with her husband on his work assignments and on vacation to several countries including Canada, Mexico, Italy and Chile (e-portfolio). She wanted to study Spanish because of her family heritage and for her career as a professional psychologist: 'With the demographics of the area where I choose to practice, knowing Spanish is going to be beneficial for me and I think also the cultural aspects even more so than the language' (Interview 2). She took Spanish at college as a non-traditional student. Odalis was in her junior year at college when she studied in Ecuador in 2017. Like April, Odalis pursued LAS and GS. Before Ecuador, Odalis had taken three Spanish classes, and enrolled in two SA courses that included an independent study project related to her psychology major. For this project, Odalis interviewed a psychologist in Quito specializing in marriage and family therapy, and discussed the culture of psychology in Ecuador and its effects, and the most prevalent issues that she helped her clients navigate (e-portfolio). Odalis assessed her Spanish proficiency as: 'When I'm in the U.S. I feel intermediate but when I travel to Latin America or a Spanish-speaking country I feel more proficient than that, I feel like an expert because I use it all the time' (Interview 1).

Brenda

Brenda was born and raised in Georgia. Her father was born in Lima, Peru where he lived until the age of 12 before he moved to the U.S. Brenda and her three sisters grew up with their paternal grandparents, who taught them Spanish: 'I have always lived with my grandparents […] they've raised me as a Hispanic person […] my grandparents only taught us basic Spanish […] they were struggling to learn English so we kind of counterbalanced learning Spanish and English together' (Interview). Brenda had visited her family in Lima twice as a child. After Ecuador, Brenda had planned to spend six weeks in Peru to visit family and process her Peruvian passport. Brenda's first language was English, and she wanted to improve

her Spanish: 'I've always had a love for Spanish just because my family is from Peru and I thought that by learning Spanish I will be able to learn how to better communicate with them' (Interview). Before Ecuador, Brenda had only taken one college course. Her self-perceived Spanish proficiency was intermediate: I understand the majority of what is being said in Spanish […] but I am not very confident in my speaking […] I feel more of an apprentice [of Spanish] when I'm in a Spanish-speaking country but when I'm here in the States I definitely feel more of an expert (Interview).

Ben

Ben grew up in Georgia. His father was born in Colombia but grew up in Venezuela before moving to the U.S. Ben's mother grew up in Venezuela and moved to the U.S. during her twenties. Ben and his sister grew up in a Spanish and English-speaking household, but they did not speak Spanish:

> I'm able to pick up on what she [Ben's mother] is saying but I'm unable to talk back in Spanish. She'll talk to me like to do things around the house in Spanish and I'll respond in English but I never got around learning Spanish (Interview).

He and his family visited their maternal relatives in Venezuela once when he was a child. Ben's connection with his paternal relatives in the U.S. was important, and he wanted to learn Spanish to speak to them:

> Both sides of my family speak fluent Spanish, most of them, some of them only speak Spanish so whenever we have a party, I'm the guy in the corner awkwardly sitting there because like 'I know what you guys are saying... I cannot talk to you' so it's an awkward feeling […] I want to learn Spanish so I can talk to my family more (Interview).

Ben, an accounting major, viewed Spanish as an asset to his future professional career: 'They can double your salary if you know another language and you can go to other countries and work there' (Interview 1). Ben studied Spanish in high school for three years and took two college Spanish courses before going to Ecuador in 2019 as a sophomore. Ben's self-assessment of his proficiency in Spanish before Ecuador was that of novice.

Data Collection and Analysis

The author collected all data for this study (see table 4). Interviews, questionnaires, journals, course materials, and e-mails were collected during 2019 and 2020 after the programs ended. A total of seven semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting 45 to 90 minutes each. Every participant was interviewed twice face-to-face and virtually, except for Brenda (the author lost contact with her after the first interview). During the first interview, participants were asked to share their experiences, and during the second interview, participants elaborated on their previous accounts and discussed their demographics and language identity (see Table 4). The author also collected the journals that the students wrote abroad in Spanish and English, which reflected new lexicon, linguistic and cultural differences, critical moments and interactions. April and Odalis shared with the author the e-portfolio that they created for their GS certification, and April included four essays she had written for her independent study course. Finally, the author conducted field notes and observations inside and outside the classroom, focusing on class dynamics and language use. The author also observed students during two weekend trips and daily activities such as cooking classes, visits to museums, and exhibits. The interviews were transcribed and all data was coded for themes related to heritage

identity, identity performances and development, social interaction, language and culture learning experiences.

Table 4
Data Collection

Pseudonym	**Journal**	**Interview 1**	**Interview 2 & questionnaire**	**Other texts (emails, e-portfolio, essays)**
April	June 2018	May 16, 2019	Jan. 27, 2020	Email, e-portfolio, four short essays on March 21, 2020
Odalis	July 2017	May 21, 2019	Feb. 5, 2020	Email, e-portfolio on Feb. 6, 2020
Brenda	Sept. 2019	Nov. 19, 2019	/	/
Ben	June 2019	Oct. 22, 2019	Feb. 18, 2020	Email on Feb. 21, 2020

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the students' experience in Ecuador was an 'immersion in difference' despite the significant degree of familiarity and comfort that they already shared with the Hispanic language and/or culture. For them, learning Spanish was a way to feel connected to their heritage language and culture, improve their skills and become more competent. Besides their integrative motivation to study Spanish, Odalis, and Ben voiced their instrumental motivation as they believed Spanish to be an asset in their professional life.

April's Identities in Ecuador

In Ecuador, April spent a lot of quality time with her host family and housemates. She embraced their routine and bonded with them. They cooked, baked, ate, went to church, played sports, cards and board games together. April positioned herself, and was positioned, as Mexican:

> They picked out my accent when I was speaking Spanish [...] I wanted to share that I am Mexican and that's what sparked their interest […] So they would always ask "you guys eat a lot of chili, right? A lot of hot sauce? And you guys have a lot of strong expressions?" […] they wanted to learn more about Mexicans (Interview 1).

Occasionally, April was perceived as Mexican American. She was asked to discuss U.S. politics and the Trump administration regarding undocumented immigrants and discrimination. During in-service encounters, April commented on the struggles her Mexican family faced in the U.S.:

> The taxi driver asked me […] how was life in the U.S. and I was just being honest. I said the life in the U.S. is very privileged. At the same time, it is a sacrifice so if you want to immigrate to the U.S., just understand that you are going to have to work two times harder to have the life you dream of having in America (Interview 1).

In Quito, April was granted access to a high school and a daycare, and as a student researcher and anthropologist, she interacted with students, teachers, and staff:

> I worked at that school just to listen, sit in the classroom or shadow the teacher […] and I got to interview the teachers. I even was invited to one of the meetings that the teachers would have at the end of the day and [...] I also got to understand the culture of the school (Interview 1).

Every day April took the bus to and from the high school and/or daycare, enacting the same ritual as locals, a routine that she enjoyed sharing with other commuters:

> I felt like an everyday commuter, I felt like I belonged there. I would see the same people every morning at the bus stop [...] It felt like we knew each other: "Good morning" "Good morning" "How are you?" "Okay" "Going to work?" "Yep" […] I felt like I already lived there (Interview 1).

At home April felt she was welcomed like a daughter, and April called her host mother 'mamá':

> Su forma de ser me recordaba mucho a mi mama […] En esos dos semanas que pase en Quito, me senti como una Ecuatoriana […] me senti que estaba en casa. (Journal) (my host mother reminded me of my own mother […] During the two weeks that I spent in Quito I felt like an Ecuadorian […] it felt like home).[1]

Besides feeling like a local, April positioned herself as a tourist in Quito: 'I felt like a tourist when I first got there walking everywhere, not knowing the city' (Interview 2). Her housemates, three students from France and Ecuador, would show her around and take her to hangout places. April also went out with her American cohort to explore the city: 'I was asking locals for directions or just asking for feedback on some restaurants that we would find on our phone' (Interview 1). April acted as tutor, translator and interpreter of the SA group. She was seen as the language expert when a fellow American was at a loss for words in Spanish: 'I liked to challenge them to speak to me in Spanish or I would tell them to go ask […] the lady standing at the light which way is the mall for example (Interview 2). April also translated the tour guide's explanations from Spanish to English during group excursions. Most importantly, April became a strong advocate for social justice after she witnessed extreme poverty and unequal access to education in Quito. One transformative experience that April recalled was when she paid for the bus fare for two students:

> I saw two [...] students walking and so I believe it was two siblings and when I asked them to get on the bus: "What are they doing in the rain?" They said that they couldn't. They didn't have enough for each passenger to get on the bus so I think... a bus ride is $0.25 and you know it's easy for one to have a quarter in your pocket here in the U.S., not so easy over there. And so that's what really impacted me and I paid for each other's trips to get on the bus so they wouldn't get wet or walk in the rain, and that was definitely one of the most meaningful experiences (Interview 1).

Another experience that fueled her advocacy for Latinx was the sight of children working or begging in the street:

> Seeing a six-seven-year-old at the stoplight cleaning your windshield or offering to sell you a juice or a candy or just do tricks for you for a quarter or any kind of money that you had… I thought that was very challenging because when I saw those kids I automatically pictured my nieces (Interview 1).

April connected the challenges that Ecuadorians faced with the struggles her family in the U.S. and Mexico endured, and the struggles affecting Spanish-speaking societies worldwide:

> After studying abroad […] I have changed. I am […] more aware, I am more educated […] I got more involved in organizations like the Latin American Organizations - I continue to help out whatever I can, and GALEO [Georgia Association of Latino Elected Officials] […] I've become way more passionate and connected with my community (Interview 2).

Upon returning to the U.S. April joined ALPFA (Association of Latino Professionals for America), she presented her research in Ecuador at a symposium on her home campus, and eventually she landed a job at a non-profit organization for Latino advocacy:

> I want to give back to the community here [in the U.S.] and over there in Ecuador […] I really do hope that in the future I can actually have my own non-profit and I want to extend more school counseling in the schools, raise some kind of fund or foundation to help kids over there [in Ecuador/Latin America] have access to education (Interview 1).

April showed metalinguistic awareness and appreciation for the indexical properties and varieties of Spanish, and she accommodated to local speech to make communication with Ecuadorians more effective:

> The third night there I was going to go take a shower. So we say "me voy a bañar, okay"? [I am going to take a shower/bath] over there they actually use the proper Spanish, the origin so el castellano [Castilian Spanish] is what they call it. And they called it "la ducha" (Interview 1).

April's words demonstrate her critical understanding of how language use, and her Mexican way to say things, is imbued with ideological meaning ('proper Spanish'). April exerted agency in her linguistic choices and cultural practices in Ecuador, and she gained status as a result of that: 'I started to use their terminology […] And at dinner we were talking like normal, like Ecuadorians […] And my host mom goes "You should just live here from now on, you are pretty much already a full Ecuadorian" (Interview 2). In her journal, April evidenced her comfort and affinity with the local community and culture by expanding her linguistic repertoire and embracing Ecuadorian vocabulary like *guagua* (Quichua[2] for child), *qué bestia*! or *qué animal*! (incredible!): 'The "qué bestia" expression really stuck. And so, whenever I am driving in that crazy traffic jam, right, I let it out: "qué bestia este animal" (Interview 1).

In Ecuador April indexed her hybrid identity in multiple situational contexts while interacting with occasional interlocutors. April's Mexican-ess prevailed within her host family, and it manifested through her sense of pride for her Mexican roots, and her bond to the Hispanic community: 'Over the years, yes, I have just considered myself more Mexican than American because […] that is my background [...] I am actually happy and more pride full' (Interview 1).

Odalis' Identities in Ecuador

Odalis felt American in Ecuador, and she was ascribed an American identity in many service encounters: 'I felt very American there, like almost as a tourist in Ecuador and I felt […] the people around me were really going out of their way to take care of me' (Interview 2). Odalis was also ascribed an American student identity in Quito, and the staff at the host institution in Quito graciously corrected her grammar and vocabulary in Spanish. Odalis was conscious of her status as learner of Spanish and she embraced her learner identity with much cultural and linguistic humility, never assuming that she would know or understand: 'I am a student of Spanish because I'm always learning and I still ask people you know how to say things correctly' (Interview 1). Odalis also felt like she was a student anthropologist when she interviewed the psychologist in Quito as part of her SA course: 'I was very nervous about conducting the interview in Spanish […] and she was speaking slowly very deliberately and making sure that I understood her' (Interview 2). The structured learning components reinforced her identity as a student of Spanish:

> Having that classroom time was important. There were things that I was specifically learning that I wouldn't be learning if I was there as a tourist and then spending the time with Dr. L. [the psychologist] and having […] a focused conversation about her

> work […] This was very focused, very intentional and those types of things would not happen otherwise unless I was to study abroad.

Odalis admitted that during the interview with the marriage and family therapist, she felt like she was positioned by the psychologist as a professional in the field, and it was very emotional for her: 'She treated me as a professional and I saw myself that way, […] somebody that could have an impact and somebody that would have a broader knowledge to bring to the table' (Interview 1).

At times the local people in Ecuador ascribed Odalis a Latina identity because of her physical appearance and her comfort with speaking Spanish: 'People would recognize that I look Latina so that was an opportunity for me to clarify: "Yes, my mother is Dominican" and I explained my heritage and I think they were a little bit fascinated by that' (Interview 2). Odalis disclosed her heritage and her Dominican-ess with her host mother in Quito. Odalis felt welcomed and she enjoyed sharing meals and conversing in Spanish with her hosts around the dinner table. She felt like a family member: 'It kind of reminded me of my mom and my aunts and so we really spent a lot of time talking about our life' (Interview 2). Odalis shared the host family experience with four female students from her SA group and since she was older she positioned herself as a big sister watching over her companions: 'I was kind of the mama head there to some of the younger girls' (Interview 1). Odalis bonded with her housemates and SA group, and constructed her identity as a Spanish and English user among her American cohort: 'We spoke a lot of Spanglish' (Interview 1). Here, Odalis' linguistic practices indexed her fluid subjectivities and positioned her as a multilingual subject and an American with Hispanic heritage. Finally, Odalis negotiated her identity as a tireless explorer and initiated many activities abroad in an effort to connect with diverse people and discover new places: 'From my mother I gained a strong sense of adventure […] that may be partly because of the way she came to America […] I'm not afraid to try things' (Interview 1).

Odalis was agentive in constructing different identities in Ecuador by creating opportunities for herself to improve her Spanish: 'The best accomplishment was, I think, my proficiency in Spanish increased' (Interview 1). Odalis also recognized that her SA courses helped her develop a multicultural perspective and deepen her sociolinguistic awareness in psychology creating a unique lesson that could benefit the Hispanic community back home:

> She [the therapist] talked to me about the way that in her culture she needs to address couples that may be different from the way we do in the U.S. There it is kind of a male-dominated culture, she said, and she has to be aware and cognizant that she is not showing preferential treatment to the woman [...] yet being very respectful to the man […] because it's very easy in that culture for the man in the couple to dominate the conversation and she kind of has to even the playing field […] that really made me think about you know when I practice [...] we have a very high Latino population here (Interview 1).

Odalis also discussed the multi-generational and multi-cultural lens that a professional needs to adopt in marriage and family counseling when working with Latinx:

> Usually the home is comprised of several generations and everyone affects everyone else and that's part of systemic thinking in marriage and family therapy but usually in the West […] we're more independent than individuals […] in the Latin American culture (Interview 2).

Odalis legitimized the importance of her research and structured critical reflection, and how it shaped her:

> I learned so much about what her practice [the therapist's] and how she relates to her client […] I learned some things about cultural differences but I learned more about just professionalism in this profession as a whole and that really marked me. (Interview 1).

In her e-portfolio Odalis articulated her idea of serving and connecting with diverse people: 'As our individual worlds become more multicultural, I expect that the knowledge I have gained in these areas [[LAS and GS]] will be an asset to the clients I serve by providing an avenue to deeper connection' (e-portfolio). In the context of her graduate program, Odalis considered community engagement opportunities across borders to assist societies in need: 'The person that heads the trauma department is Latina and she actually has put together these teams that have gone to Puerto Rico for disaster relief […] I can easily see how these things could fit well' (Interview 2). Odalis further reflected on her work and education, and its societal impact: 'What I see myself doing is probably being available to agencies that might need me for helping people that travel to refugee camps in different parts of the world and help trauma victims' (Interview 2). Odalis was sympathetic toward helping military families and victims of child abuse, elder abuse, or domestic violence, and its impact to produce positive social change:

> I do have a heart for military families and I know they, the military, really need help in counseling their families, […] protecting children and protecting women, and really providing a safe place for families to heal from a lot of injustice that can be inflicted upon them (Interview 2).

Brenda's Identities in Ecuador

Due to her upbringing, Brenda felt both American and Hispanic:

> When I'm in America I believe that I am Hispanic completely just because of the way that I was raised through Hispanic culture […] when I'm in Peru or any other Spanish-speaking country I just feel so American because they're more cultured than me (Interview).

She claimed a Peruvian identity within her SA group. When Brenda was with her student compatriots, she made a conscious effort to embrace Ecuadorian expressions and compared them to her Peruvian culture, which helped her develop metalinguistic awareness of the Spanish varieties:

> We all went to the restaurant and I ordered *seco de chivo* but in Peru we just call it *seco verde* and so I had to say it differently […] it'ss the exact same thing just with a different name […] I had to remember like I'm not here or I'm not at home. I have to say it in Ecuadorian terms (Interview).

During a field trip, Brenda purchased *cuyes*[3] and ate it on the bus with her travel companions. Cuyes reminded her of her childhood when she travelled to Lima:

> I remember going down to the market and picking out which cuyes we wanted to eat and the chickens they sell and all of the grains and beans and accessories [...] and the ice cream cart guy that would come on his bicycle (Interview).

In the classroom, Brenda exerted agency in her linguistic choices and sought support from the instructor when she preferred the lexicon that she felt comfortable with: 'Can I use *chancho* (word for pig) instead of *cerdo* (other word for pig)? Because that is how I say it' (Interview). She relearned expressions that reminded her of her childhood like *achachay* (Quichua for 'it is very cold): 'I learned that term as a child because we use it in Peru […] My grandparents always said that' (Interview). Brenda asked the SA staff from Quito about differences between the Ecuadorian and Peruvian culture:

There is a fruit that Peru has which is called *lúcuma*. It only grows in Peru from what I've read. I was asking C. [director of the Quito program] if they have that because typically they make ice creams [...] and I really enjoy that (Interview).

Along with her Peruvian identity, Brenda positioned herself as a student and tutor of Spanish with her classmates, and affirmed her status as a language and culture expert:

'They [Brenda's classmates] were learning basic Spanish and it was something that I already knew [...] I could help them with their homework [...] so they placed me with some kids that are in higher-level Spanish […] it challenged me to actually learn new vocabulary, new conjugations' (Interview).

Brenda's journal listed several Ecuadorian expressions that she embraced like *canguil* (Ecuadorian for popcorn), tamarillo (tree tomato), *guagua* and *arraray* (Quichua for 'child/baby' and 'it is hot'), *chévere* (cool, nice), *chiro* (without money), *biela* (beer), and *chuta* (it sucks).

Brenda became friendly with her host family's maid, and she saw in her a valuable cultural informant who provided an insider look into the local culture: 'I saw her more often than my actual host family so she actually was the one who taught me some of the dishes that they cook' (Interview). Brenda spent quality time with her host mother when they went to the nail salon, and she experienced Quito with a local person. When Brenda explored the city and its landmarks with her U.S. compatriots, they were ascribed a tourist identity and they asked for directions, bargained prices at the market, or ordered food at restaurants: 'They knew we were all American […] they knew we were tourists' (Interview). In her journal, Brenda stated how frustrating it was to be taken advantage of by taxi drivers who attempted to overcharge them despite the meter display. They were often asked to comment on the Trump administration.

In Quito, Brenda negotiated a strong identity of compassionate caregiver. She was not new to caregiving, because of her history working with elderly people in private home health. Brenda befriended the 71-year old student in the program who was hospitalized due to altitude sickness in Quito. She voiced her concern for his well-being:

I'm always watching out for older people cuz that's just my personality and I want to make sure that he was okay so going to the hospital and seeing him and making sure that he was okay meant a lot to me (Interview).

Together with other SA participants, Brenda volunteered at a senior center and daycare in Quito as part of a community engagement project. Brenda provided assistance to elderly people and toddlers in need, and both experiences were touching:

I got to relate how I work […] with these seniors versus the seniors that I work with here [the U.S.] and I have pictures of their homemade wheelchairs and how they don't have everything that we have here [...] it was very eye-opening for me and it meant a lot to me […] We alleviated a lot of their stress […] we made their day (Interview).

At the daycare, located in an impoverished part of Quito, Brenda witnessed poverty, lack of basic resources, child malnourishment, and safety-related challenges:

The daycare that we went to […] was pretty sad […] they put vitamin packets in their food just because they're so malnourished [...] These little kids cannot climb up these monkey bars that are 6 feet tall and so for us to have been there to help them play […] and interact with them, I think it helped them be a little happier [...] That made me want to help S. [one SA participant] with how she wanted to contribute to a scholarship or money to donate to these facilities (Interview).

Brenda recalled a group visit to the Guayasamín museum in Quito as another impactful experience that made her reflect on the suffering of poor people, indigenous populations, and victims of discrimination and social injustice. Brenda commented on the symbolism of the

hands in many Guayasamín's paintings and sculptures portraying indigenous families, and on the critical role of hands in caregiving:

> Listening to the little documentary that they have for him at the beginning and listening to the reasonings behind all of his paintings and all his artwork… I guess that meant more to me because all of his paintings are based on hands and portraying like the hands and the emotions of indigenous families that are from all around the world (Interview).

Brenda connected the suffering portrayed in this artwork with the struggles that her Peruvian family was confronted with as immigrants in the U.S.: 'For my family it was so hard to get where they are and to help us and to provide the life that we have' (Interview). Brenda explained how she identified herself as a provider for her family: 'They've [Brenda's family] always wanted the best for my sisters and I. All my sisters and I are trying to do the best that we can so that we can take care of them and provide for them because they're older' (Interview). After Ecuador, Brenda flew to Lima, Peru to visit her family. In Lima, she obtained her Peruvian passport, visited her grandfather's box company and the places where her father grew up and that she had seen as a child. Her journey in Latin America was transformative: 'I came back as a whole another person. I got to really reset and think about my career choices and who I am and what I want to be' (Interview). Brenda changed her major from cellular biology to business management, a discipline that her grandfather always wished to study as owner of a factory, and a career that could benefit her family: 'It was something [a business degree] my grandpa has always dreamed of [...] here in the U.S. and […] he's really not pursued ever because of him supporting my siblings' (Interview). Brenda also changed her job to gain professional experience while also getting an education in business. Brenda acknowledged that she owed everything to her family, and through her, her family members could live their dreams:

> I went from cosmetology working in a salon to going into sales just that I can get my foot in the door to understand more of the business aspect of what I'm going to start learning at school […] I only am in school I guess really for my grandparents and for my dad because it is something that they couldn't do while they were here (Interview).

The multiple identities that Brenda negotiated in Ecuador helped her practice and improve her Spanish and gain confidence in her abilities:

> I'm not afraid to speak in Spanish as much as I used to be because I was always like 'Oh man, what if my pronunciation is wrong and they're going to laugh at me.' Like now I don't really worry, I just go for it […] after I left Ecuador I felt way more confident to go to Peru and be able to travel through the airport by myself (Interview).

Her competence developed and facilitated communication with her family. Improving her Spanish allowed Brenda to feel a renewed connection with her heritage roots:

> It [Spanish] brings you closer to your family back home […] I use it more now with my grandparents because I think that I understand Spanish a lot more […] because of all the interactions that I had to have in Ecuador (Interview).

Back in the U.S. Brenda practiced her Spanish with a new set of Spanish-speaking friends with whom she had interests and values in common, like family: 'The majority of my friends here now are more Spanish speaking or of Hispanic descent. I just feel like personally I can relate to those people more' (Interview).

Ben's Identities in Ecuador

Ben felt both American, because he was born and raised in the U.S., and Latino, because of his family heritage and upbringing: 'I live in both worlds' (Interview 2). He negotiated an

American identity while in contact with locals: 'We were Americans coming to this country [Ecuador] to study abroad' (Interview 1). One situation that positioned Ben and his compatriots as American was when they paid a small amount in restaurants, stores and markets using a $20 bill, and local merchants occasionally did not have change. Ben positioned himself as tourist when exploring Quito with his group during field trips and guided tours: 'I wish I had brought my passport with me [to have it stamped] to the places we visited like Middle of the World, Pichincha[4] and the Charles Darwin Station at the Galapagos' (Interview 1). Ben practiced Spanish with the local program staff and in the classroom where he learned and used idiomatic expressions such as *ir al grano* (to get to the point), *estar en las nubes* (to be daydreaming), *valer un ojo de la cara* (to be worth a fortune), and terms used in Ecuador and deriving from Quichua like *achachay, arraray, warmi* (woman). As part of his course assignments, Ben recorded videos of himself interacting with locals in situations such as bargaining a price at the market, getting a taxi, asking for directions, and ordering food. Ben engaged in daily conversations with the vendors in the small restaurant next to the host school. He did not get involved much with his host family, and he admitted that he was a quiet guy: 'My personality doesn't go well with staying with other people for long periods of time' (Interview 1).

Ben enjoyed experiencing Ecuador with his SA group and by himself. He liked to go eat out on his own and engage in small conversations in his favorite restaurants and stores, feeling like a local while getting to know people and places: 'Small talk is the best way to practice Spanish and it's also a way to see how they [locals] live, how they spend their time, and see how the city is' (Interview 1). Ben felt comfortable among locals and attempted to gain social acceptance while interacting with them. He gained confidence in his bargaining abilities at local markets, and liked the challenge of bringing the price down: 'I loved bartering for stuff […] negotiating for a better price and getting a good deal' (Interview 2). He recalled when he bought a hammock for $3 that originally cost $20. Ben's familiarity with the Hispanic culture contributed to feeling comfortable in Ecuador. His aunt living in the U.S. was from Ecuador, as were some family friends, and they talked to him about Quito before the trip: 'It wasn't that much of a cultural whiplash for me […] People and voices there were like an unrelated version of my mother's' (Interview 1).

Ben volunteered at the senior center in Quito: 'I like helping people […] I helped set up things so that they could be more comfortable' (Interview 2). Ben also played dominos with the seniors. He recalled one elder man getting frustrated: 'I should have let him win but that would be disrespectful to go easy on him […] him getting frustrated at losing made him act and speak like someone half his age' (Journal). Ben explained that he was an occasional volunteer at another senior facility close to. For him it was an important service to the community.

In Ecuador, Ben constructed identities that allowed him to use Spanish and reach his goal of strengthening his proficiency to be able to speak better with his family: 'I was able to hold my own conversation with some of the people at the restaurant […] I got a lot better at Spanish' (Interview 1).

Language Identities, Racialized Experiences, and Social Justice

The theory and research discussed above will be operationalized (1) to analyze the identities that SHLLs negotiated abroad, (2) to determine how these positionings shaped their L2 learning journey, and (3) to discuss how these experiences impacted their development as language learners and individuals.

Through the lens of Norton's investment theory and imagined communities, the findings in this study reveal how April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben co-constructed and negotiated multiple racialized identities—including, but not limited to, the ethno-cultural and ethnolinguistic identities defined by their heritage—while learning and using Spanish in various encounters in Ecuador. They exerted agency to determine how to speak. The investment in their language and cultural practices contributed to their L2 development and their metalinguistic awareness of different Spanish varieties; it also increased their value and status in their current and imagined communities. April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben connected with their heritage and the Hispanic culture and society at large. They identified multicultural spaces and social justice issues that touched them, inspired their social engagement, fueled their passion for equity, and gave them more leverage to empower the Latinx community and other societies, across borders. These SHLLs entered new spaces equipped with existing capital as shown by their familiarity with the Hispanic culture, background, language skills, assistance to people in need and interaction with diverse social groups. In these spaces they acquired new knowledge and material and symbolic resources - academic credits, friendships, durable contacts, personal histories. They employed the capital that they initially had as affordances, and they added accrued value to their existing capital to be used in new contexts and communities, and potentially to transform lives.

April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben demonstrated symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2009) by using varietal features of Ecuadorian Spanish as a symbol of their involvement and investment in the local community and their translingual disposition to effectively interact with diverse social groups (Canagarajah, 2013). They recognized Ecuadorian lexicon and expressions as a source of local pride. They showed adaptability to the Ecuadorian life and culture and appreciation for the sociolinguistic heterogeneity of the Spanish language. They viewed Spanish as an asset in their personal, social, academic, and professional lives that came from their multilingual and multicultural background. These SHLLs also displayed symbolic competence by generating realities for themselves through language use abroad. For example, Ben, a person of few words, spoke Spanish to bargain lower prices at the market and with taxi drivers, and through Spanish he built rapport with habitual shop/restaurant keepers showing interest in their lives, culture and food. Odalis, who was planning for a career as a marriage and family therapist, recognized the significance of Spanish in her work and in shaping her identity as a psychologist. April, cognizant of her privilege as a U.S.-based intern and volunteer at the high school and daycare, used Spanish to position herself as a sensitive and responsible learner in interaction with children, teachers and staff, and she became more concerned about issues affecting minoritized communities and educational inequities. Finally, Brenda demonstrated symbolic competence by employing her complex semiotic repertoire – Spanish, the pictures that she took at the senior center and daycare, and the artwork and documentary she saw at the museum in Quito, to reflect on her travel experience and convey her linguistic, cultural and emotional life histories and desire to provide for her grandparents – a financial plan that contrasts with mainstream U.S. discourses of caregiving and filial responsibilities.

April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben's language, race, nationality, and their multilingual and multicultural upbringing, profoundly influenced their identities, beliefs, and how others perceived them, their social worlds and experiences (Moya, 2002). These SHLLs' racialized stories mirror some of the accounts discussed in the literature above (De Félix & Cavazos Peña, 1992; George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, 2019; Moreno, 2009; Quan, 2021; Quan et al., 2018) and illustrate the importance of developing and validating learners' linguistic practices, multilingual and multicultural identities, metalinguistic awareness, and symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2009). Multilinguals often feel insecure about their Spanish competence, and ignore

their full repertoire and capacity for language, which instead should be recognized and valued (Busch, 2017; Ortega, 2020).

Drawing on the notion of racialized, lived experiences of language, and adding a multidimensionality to the concept of linguistic repertoire (Busch, 2017), April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben, by engaging locally in Ecuador, lived language ideologies, emotional and bodily dimensions, experiences, situations and social interactions that became part of their repertoire, in the form of linguistic attitudes and patterns of language practices. Certain gestures, images, and emotions remained engraved in their linguistic body memory. Examples of this include: 1. The powerful symbolism of the helping/suffering hands in the Guayasamín museum for Brenda; 2. The physicality of the work performed at the daycare and senior center to assist marginalized populations; 3. The traction that the domino games had on Ben and the senior members; and 4. Odalis' emotional session with the therapist regarding multigenerational and male-dominance issues. Another example is April's experience on the bus when she paid the fare for two poor students. April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben integrated the physical, subjective experience of learning Spanish into their daily vocabulary and interactions (Kramsch, 2009), and they activated personal memories, pleasures, and comfort related to their childhood and family cultures, like the memories that *cuyes* and the word *achachay* evoked in Brenda; the Ecuadorian voices and faces that reminded Ben of his mother's; or April and Odalis' dinnertime conversations with their host families. These instances emphasize how language, like gestures and emotions, is first and foremost about projecting oneself toward the other. These students' sense of the present and future was rooted in an ethical appeal and commitment of responsibility and reciprocity toward their family and community: 'Why can't we give back, you know? It's our turn', using the words of Cindy García (Martínez and Train, 2020, p. 2). April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben connected this appeal to their education, community engagement, and multilingual and multicultural experiences that shaped the who, what, how and why of their being and becoming, their learning and knowing, their doing and valuing.

CONCLUSIONS

April, Odalis, Brenda and Ben reported that their experience in Ecuador was successful, despite the short duration of this program. They invested in their multiple identities and in Spanish to gain cultural and language awareness and skills, status, and social relationships. They employed Spanish to connect with diverse people. They negotiated information and a sense of self and how they saw their social world, and they used it to potentially benefit other communities for positive social change.

In this study, the independent study project and/or volunteer and community engagement work, and the accompanying guided critical reflection, played a role in the emergence of the SHLLs' heritage identities. These projects exposed learners to relatable topics like social justice, equity, and equality issues affecting Hispanic societies locally and internationally, broadened their perspectives, and encouraged them to engage socially to produce positive change. Structured critical reflection (Pasterick, 2019) and journaling encouraged learners to connect their learning to other educational and personal experiences and broader sociocultural contexts, deepen their analytical skills, and capitalize on their development as language and culture learners. Students connected experiential learning to learning in the classroom via texts, discussions, and coursework. The reflection component emphasized the importance of avoiding stereotypes and defective perspectives, and navigating multiple spaces with an open mind.

Civically oriented SA programs promoting civic engagement and social justice should place equitable multilingualism and an exploration of human capacity for language (Ortega, 2019) among their top aspirations and disciplinary goals. Another priority is renewed attention to power differentials that inflict harm to individuals for their plurilingual and pluricultural diversity (Kubota, 2016). Pre-departure, on-site, and post-travel workshops can facilitate discussions about the challenges that host communities are confronted with, including language-related discrimination and microaggressions, poverty issues, health threats, unequal access to education, and environment degradation. Research and service learning projects in collaboration with peers from the host society can foster cross-cultural understanding and emphasize critical contributions of diverse people.

Increasing the number of SHLLs participating in global-citizenship-oriented SA programs inspired by a civil service-infused curriculum has strong implications. SHLLs can increase their communication skills, construct their multilingual and multicultural identities, and promote global understanding, compassion and tolerance. They can return from abroad with a global learning skill set to face inequities and inequalities, social misconceptions, power differentials, discrimination and racism, and monolingualism. They can advocate for, and empower, vulnerable communities with the hope for societal change. The need for educated individuals to work together across borders to find global solutions is critical.

NOTES

[1] The translations from Spanish to English are the author's.
[2] Indigenous language.
[3] *Cuyes* are guinea pigs that constitute a local delicacy in Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia.
[4] Volcano located in Quito, Ecuador.

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