13 Study Abroad Research: Findings, Implications, and Future Directions

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One of the most important variables that affects the nature and the extent to which learners acquire a second language (L2) is the context of learning, that is, whether the learning takes place within the society in which the L2 is productive or where the first language (L1) is productive. Second language acquisition (SLA) research takes place in three primary contexts, which differ in sociological and functional terms. The foreign-language (FL) classroom exists in the domestic setting of the L1, and learners tend to use the L2 within the classroom and as it relates to academic purposes. The intensive domestic immersion setting is different from the FL context in that students dedicate the majority (if not all) of their academic term to studying the L2, and this context often entails an increase in the functional purposes of the L2 when learners sign a “contract” not to use the L1. The study abroad (SA) context takes place in countries where the L2 enjoys an important sociological and functional status, entailing a combination of planned curriculum and a host family. This chapter provides an overview of the state of the art of SA research. This review uncovers a pattern not clearly articulated to date: specifically, the most salient domains of interest (e.g., cognitive, pragmatic, sociolinguistic factors) that arise out of the SA literature are quite different from the salient domains in other contexts of learning. Informed by this literature, I conclude with recommendations as to the ideal design of SA programs in a modern FL curriculum.

It is extremely challenging for researchers to isolate the effects of the learning context on acquisition because one must be aware that, within any of these situations, learners acquire the L2 in two sub-contexts: communicative contexts as well as learning contexts (Batstone, 2002). Communicative contexts require that the learner use the L2 to exchange information and engage in essential social and interpersonal functions. Learning contexts manage input and output so that learners will attend to form and take intentional steps toward improving their linguistic expertise. The influence of these covariates complicates the assessment of a learning context since the FL classroom heavily favors learning contexts, intensive domestic immersion settings attempt to provide both communicative and learning contexts, and SA presumably provides more opportunities for
processing and using the L2 in communicative contexts. SA learners must determine the relationship between the L1, the L2, and their identities as social individuals and language learners. For researchers, the complication then becomes which theoretical frameworks can capture the cognitive and social developments through which learners pass in the SA setting. As Collentine and Freed (2004) note, research in a SA context provides an important contextualization for understanding the interaction between cognitive, sociolinguistic, and socio-cultural factors in the construction of a comprehensive theory of SLA. This chapter attempts to delineate the contribution of SA research to SLA theory by exploring its (brief) history as a sub-discipline. The chapter also details the types of populations that researchers have studied, the efficacy of this learning context, how researchers operationalize “efficacy” (and the effects on the interpretation of results), the roles of input and interaction, the cognitive changes (e.g., phonological memory) that occur abroad, important issues identified in the research relating to learner identity, and the role of pedagogy in SA contexts on acquisition.

A Brief History of Study Abroad Research

SA research can be seen as having two periods. The first attempted to understand the overall efficacy of SA programs. These studies concentrated on measuring the gains learners make abroad largely from broad measurement instruments. This period extends from the 1960s to Barbara Freed’s publication of her seminal volume Second language acquisition in a study abroad context in 1995 (Freed, 1995b). Freed succeeds in framing SA research within the SLA theory-building enterprise, challenging researchers to view SA research as a means of studying the effects of “learning context” on acquisition.

The first period examined gains (or simply post-treatment abilities) with instruments that sought to assess learners’ overall L2 abilities. Carroll’s (1967) widely-cited study looked at the language skills of 2,782 college seniors on tests that measured linguistic skills in the L2 (i.e., their metalinguistic knowledge), finding that even a short duration abroad (touring or summer) predicted higher levels of proficiency. Willis et al. (1977) summarized a series of studies on British students, concluding that these studies lacked an overall systematic assessment of learners gains. Willis et al.’s (1977) own study on British students in France and Germany showed general support for residency abroad. The strongest gains were in listening and speaking and less in reading abilities. Dyson (1988) conducted another macro study on 229 British students in France, Germany, and Spain, showing that the learning context improved listening and speaking skills. Opper, Teichler, and Carlson (1990) conducted a large-scale study on the efficacy of SA on students in more than 80 programs in Britain, France, Germany, and Sweden. The study is limited in its validity because it relies on self-reported assessments of general language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) whereby the learners generally reported important gains. It provided nonetheless an important clue to a key factor that has been identified in the SA research: SA appeared to be particularly powerful for learners with lower levels of proficiency.
Perhaps the key observation to be gleaned from this study is the notion that there are threshold levels of development at which SA will be optimally beneficial (discussed further below). Another key study of this period that laid the foundation for current SA research was Möhle and Raupach (1983), who found SA not to have an important effect on improving morphosyntactic abilities but to have a positive effect on fluency, a factor in SLA research that has become an important focus of late since it helps us to understand the interaction between online processing mechanisms and linguistic competence such as working and phonological memory (see Segalowitz, 2003). The final noteworthy studies of this period are Brecht and Davidson (1991) and Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsburg (1995), who examined 668 American learners’ acquisition of Russian in a SA context. The data reinforced a growing hunch that individual differences (e.g., reading aptitude) are exceptionally evident in this learning context and that preprogram explicit grammar instruction predicts gains abroad.

Freed (1995a) is the first effort to synthesize SA research. She identifies a number of issues that researchers in her volume and others have addressed since its publication. She notes a growing suspicion that the linguistic benefits of the SA context were not the same as those of the traditional classroom (Regan, 1995), and there were surprisingly few empirical studies that actually compared these two learning contexts. She also recognizes the hypothesis that there might be a proficiency threshold at which learners most benefit from SA (Brecht & Davidson, 1991; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1995; Regan, 1995). Additionally, there was almost no research that examined SA gains within current theoretical frameworks that dealt with how new linguistic information becomes internalized in the learner’s competence (e.g., interactionist, input-oriented, and socio-cultural models). Freed (1995b) presents studies addressing two issues in her volume, providing important SA-AH (at home) studies comparing orders of acquisition abroad to orders documented in FL contexts (Guntermann, 1995; LaFford, 1995). Freed (1995a) also provides studies on the acquisition of pragmatic competence within a sociolinguistic framework (Regan, 1995; Siegal, 1995).

Since Freed (1995b), noteworthy collections of SA experiments have been published. And, while these collections have concentrated on Americans going abroad (Collentine & Freed, 2004; DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Gore, 2005; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005), Murphy-Lejeune (2002) examines SA in the European context. What follows delineates the key topics that SA research is currently addressing. The research addresses a variety of issues that relate to the internal cognitive mechanisms affecting acquisition and the external sociolinguistic mechanisms, as well as the socio-cultural issues of SLA in a SA context of learning.

**Populations of Study and the Threshold Hypothesis**

Kinginger (2007), as well as Coleman (1997), characterizes the existing body of SA research as falling into two categories, with each focusing on different populations and distinct levels of development. Research on American, university-level learners tends to examine acquisition at the beginning stages of
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es the existing body of focusing on different search on American, the beginning stages of development, with study participants sampled from first- and second-year language programs. While there is a good amount of research on learners at the beginning levels of development, Lafford and Collentine (2006) report that SA research on American students of Spanish has sampled participants whose preprogram proficiency ranged from the novice to the advanced high levels. It is true that there exists little information about American learners’ success in advanced-level, direct-enrollment programs (i.e., where students sit in classes with otherwise proficient/native speakers of the L2). American, university-level L2 programs – and so SA curricula – concentrate on fostering acquisition at the financially lucrative early stages of acquisition (where FL enrollments in general are highest). Kinginger (2007) asserts that SA research such as Murphy-Lejeune (2002) has focused on European learners at more advanced levels, stemming from the European Commission’s inter-university programs, such as the ERASMUS program, which allows students to complete part of their university studies in another EU country and university (41 percent of such students study language or philology; http://www.erasmus.ac.uk/statistics/contents_04_05.htm).

There is a growing interest in SA SLA issues along the Pacific Rim, and these learners – Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese university-level adults slightly beyond the initial stages of development – tend to target English as their L2, either in North America or the South Pacific (Churchill, 2006; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). If current estimates that 80 percent of foreign students in the world are from Asian countries are correct (Albach & Bassett, 2004), these populations will become an increasingly important source of data.

There are important pockets of SA contexts and learner profiles that have yet to be studied. Students are attending so-called language camps with increasing frequency. Korean.net, for instance, reports that nearly 40,000 Korean students enrolled in domestic EFL immersion programs in 2005. The New York Times recently reported that nearly 75 percent of American summer camps have foreign nationals attending their activities, and many camps provide some EFL instruction (Bick, 2007). To this researcher’s knowledge, there is no existing literature either documenting these experiences or providing data on their value, although the usual unsubstantiated and anecdotal claims of efficacy are not hard to uncover.

Learners of all levels of development (who are largely self-selecting) have been studied in the SA literature. However, Lafford and Collentine (2006) discuss the growing consensus amongst researchers that there is a threshold which learners must reach to benefit fully from the SA context of learning. And, while the general notion of a threshold level is important for program designers to keep in mind, from a linguistic competence perspective it is probably too broad in scope. There are most likely specific domains that require a particular developmental threshold for overall gains to occur. Golonka (2006) – refining the Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1995) analysis – presents evidence suggesting that preprogram linguistic (grammar, vocabulary, accuracy) and metalinguistic (self-corrected errors and sentence repair) levels predicted which SA learners of Russian would attain the Advanced level on the ACTFL proficiency scale. Segalowitz and Freed (2004) found that, amongst Spanish L2 learners, an initial threshold level of basic word recognition and lexical access processing abilities may be necessary for oral
proficiency and fluency to develop abroad significantly. Lafford (2004) surmises that advanced learners bring more formulaic expressions to SA communicative contexts and can therefore spend more attention resources on form, whereas novices must attend primarily to meaning. Finally, Segalowitz and Freed (2004) report that the most important gains that SA learners of Spanish make abroad are in the domain of fluency (as measured by temporal/hesitation phenomena), and O'Brien et al. (2007) report that these fluency gains abroad are a function of students' potential for phonological memory storage, which varies from adult to adult. While this last factor is not controllable from a preprogram perspective, it argues that a student's cognitive and linguistic abilities will mediate developmental gains in the program.

The Issue of Study Abroad Efficacy

Many researchers and educators have surmised that the SA context is the *sine qua non* for achieving global L2 competence (Rivers, 1998). Freed (1995a) acknowledged that, while some empirical studies conducted up until 1995 provided evidence that SA facilitates acquisition (e.g., DeKeyser, 1991; Teichler & Steube, 1991), a sizable amount of evidence challenged researchers to consider whether the study abroad context might impede acquisition at the beginning stages (e.g., Freed, 1990; Spada, 1985, 1986), which, again, points to a threshold effect. Cohen and Shively (2007) summarize the research to date, asserting: "An intriguing finding in the study abroad research literature that prompted the current study was that study-abroad students do not necessarily achieve greater language gains than their peers who stay home and study the target language" (p. 189). Clearly, overall efficacy is difficult to assess in the absence of data stemming from large-scale studies such as those reported by Brecht and Davidson (1991) and Segalowitz et al. (2005). Yet, SA studies tend to be longitudinal in nature, as opposed to much SLA research that examines short-term effects. These studies support Carroll's (1967) initial assertion about the advantages of SA, but they require a great deal of qualification: whereas SA affects gains in certain language-specific domains, it does not affect development in all aspects of a learner's competence. Interestingly, linguistic aspects that do indeed seem to benefit from SA, such as fluency and discursive abilities, are often not those in which AH FL program directors hope to see improvements, such as those grammatical aspects around which the AH, focus-on-forms syllabus is designed. The following two sections summarize what we know to date about the important cognitive and linguistic aspects of L2 development with which SA interacts.

Important Cognitive Constructs in the Study Abroad Literature

One consistent theme in the SA literature is individual differences and individual variation (variation is addressed in the next section). An area of SLA research
Important Linguistic Constructs in the Study Abroad Literature

As mentioned above, there has been a growing concern about the overall lack of efficacy of SA on acquisition (cf. Cohen & Shively, 2007). In the following I show that, while it is not accurate to claim a superiority for SA on fostering acquisition, it is likewise erroneous to conclude that important, positive changes

Segalowitz and Freed (2004) are interested in the cognitive processing abilities that underlie “expert abilities.” They present data indicating that cognitive abilities interact with development abroad in complex ways. They found lexical access to be related to overall proficiency gains amongst SA learners of Spanish, such that learners who access lexical items faster show greater gains. They also present data suggesting that learners exhibiting greater attention control at the completion of their SA program spoke less fluently. Segalowitz and Freed (2004) speculate that the increased attention control in the SA context may reflect increased monitoring of output. O’Brien oversees two studies examining the interaction of phonological memory and SA gains in learners of Spanish, both of which indicate that phonological memory assists not only children (in vocabulary gains) but also adults in an L2 context. O’Brien et al. (2006) showed that phonological memory abilities have a positive effect on one’s abilities to produce multi-propositional utterances at the early stages of Spanish learners’ development (i.e., narrative abilities) in addition to a positive effect on the acquisition of particular grammatical function at later stages. O’Brien et al. (2007) add to our understanding of the cognitive mechanisms underlying the general fluency gains associated with SA experiences, showing that phonological memory also predicts fluency gains. Finally, Tokowicz, Michael, and Kroll (2004) examine working memory capacity and single-word translation errors, presenting data that suggest that SA learners engage in more approximate than precise translations but that this tendency is limited to those with higher working memory capacities.

This literature suggests that learners’ predisposed cognitive abilities determine how much one can produce (and how fast) as a result of SA, and may impact the ways that learners approach attention-demanding processes (such as translations and story-telling). It also indicates that researchers ought to consider carefully how they interpret observable behaviors, such as fluency. The Segalowitz and Freed (2004) study provides some evidence that where there is a lack of fluency, there may be more monitoring occurring (due to greater attention control), which is not an unreasonable conclusion, since Golonka (2006) shows a strong relationship between metalinguistic abilities and overall proficiency gains.

Important Linguistic Constructs in the Study Abroad Literature

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(toward native-speaker norms) do not occur as a result of the SA context of learning. The developmental growth one finds in this learning context appears not to be what one finds in the AH setting (although the field admittedly has a dearth of comparative AH-SA studies) nor what learners and their AH teachers expect (e.g., dramatically improved grammatical and phonological accuracy). The linguistic-specific growth that occurs is in the domain of global discursive abilities, the expansion of knowledge of verb paradigms, and in the domain of pragmatics. A review of this research reveals much about the communicative needs and demands placed on learners in the SA context.

One of the consistent conclusions that researchers have drawn from the SA literature has been that the development of grammatical abilities does not seem to outpace that of the AH context. DeKeyser (1990, 1991) found that residence abroad had little impact on the development of overall grammatical abilities and that SA learners were equal to or inferior to their AH counterparts in their use of grammar. Collentine (2004) gauged SA learners’ acquisition of a variety of morphosyntactic features, showing that they do not make as much progress as AH learners on precisely those grammatical aspects that many FL teachers emphasize, namely, verbs and subordinate conjunctions.

These studies, in sum, indicate that the appreciable development of morphosyntax and general grammatical abilities is not to be expected, at least within the timeframe of a semester to a year abroad. Indeed, two of these studies (Collentine, 2004; DeKeyser, 1990) suggest that the AH experience affords certain advantages as regards overall grammatical development for intermediate learners. A notable exception is Isabelli and Nishida (2005), who reveal that SA has an advantage with respect to subjunctive development when learners are at more advanced stages, thus supporting the threshold hypothesis.

A further complication to this scenario arises out a comparison of Golonka (2006), who found preprogram metalinguistic knowledge to predict proficiency gains, and Izumi and Iwasaki (2004). The latter examined the effects of amount of SA experience on a grammaticality judgment test by Japanese-speaking English FL learners, where the participants were asked to give reasons for their evaluations. The purely classroom EFL learners used intuitive, analyzed, and metalinguistic knowledge more or less equally, while the learners who experienced living abroad for several years used intuitive knowledge and very little metalinguistic knowledge. It may be that preprogram metalinguistic knowledge is an important prerequisite, but that not all learners depend on that knowledge in communicative situations to process grammar. It may also be that, as the Segalowitz and Freed (2004) data suggest, some processes become more automatized abroad, so that metalinguistic awareness is converted into implicit grammatical knowledge. Clearly, more research is needed in this area.

Research is starting to suggest that the organizing principles around which SA learners develop their grammatical abilities stem from the discursive demands they face in communicative contexts. This ought not to be surprising, given what we have known for a while about uninstructed SLA. The Second Language Acquisition by Adult Immigrants study was conducted from 1981 to 1988 in five
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European countries by the Max Planck Institut für Psycholinguistik, mostly on
L2 learners of German (Perdue & Klein, 1992), showing that L2 grammaticaliza-
tion arises out of functional pressures to achieve discursive coherence. Collentine
(2004) used corpus-based techniques (see Biber, 1988) to compare the develop-
ment of narrative abilities, as well as growth in the semantic density, of AH
and SA learners of Spanish, revealing that the SA context afforded a significant
advantage. Similarly, Cheng and Mojica-Diaz (2006) compared SA learners
of Spanish on their subjunctive abilities (using a native-speaker baseline),
finding no significant improvement after a two-month period, although they
report some learners started producing more tightly structured argumentation
over time.

Fine-grained analyses of SA learners’ grammatical performance over time sug-
gest another plausible explanation for why researchers in the past have not found
an appreciable quantifiable advantage for SA context in grammatical develop-
ment: the SA context fosters grammatical variation. Regan (1995) examined SA
learners of French and their use of the ne negation particle, showing that AH
learners tended to adopt a single, standardized construct for negation whereas
their SA counterparts varied between the inclusion and omission of the ne
particle as a function of sociolinguistic factors. Howard (2002, 2006), who has
examined SA Irish learners of French, has presented convincing evidence that SA
learners spend much time varying within and accommodating the individual
elements of a paradigm (e.g., present-tense French inflections). His data also
suggest that L2 phonological development interacts with the increased inflec-
tional variability (or perhaps inflectional confusion) in the SA context, which is
not surprising given that inflectional morphology tends to comprise short phon-
emic segments (and suffers neutralization in modern French; cf., Howard, Lemée,
& Regan, 2006).

Some researchers suspect that one of the reasons for a weak SA grammar effect
is that learners have much less access to the L2 than one might suspect, especially
as it relates to its pragmatic features. Native speakers find it difficult to abandon
certain mentor–apprentice modes of interaction with learners (Pellegrino-Aveni,
2005; Wilkinson, 2002). Barron (2003), examining Irish SA learners of German,
argues that learners form social networks with other speakers of their L1, limit-
ing their access to native speakers. Others suggest that learners are not adequately
aware of the rules of pragmatics within the target culture (Wilkinson, 2002).
Cohen and Shively (2007) present data from a controlled experiment suggesting
that preprogram efforts to raise French and Spanish learners’ awareness of speech
acts had only a marginal effect on their ability to mitigate the intensity of requests
and no significant effect on their ability to recognize the appropriateness of other
acts, such as apologies.

Some recent research on SA pragmatics reinforces O’Brien et al.’s (2006) posi-
tion that SA has differential effects on learners depending on their preprogram
level of development.3 Shardakova (2005) reports that SA learners of Russian
with low preprogram proficiency adopt culturally appropriate apologies, while
more advanced candidates develop their own strategies, which are not consistent
with cultural prescriptions, reflecting the extent to which linguistic behaviors in a SA environment can be a function of identity as much as input and types of interaction (see below for more on the notion of identity). This pattern of tension between pragmatic appropriateness and rejection of target cultural (linguistic) practices in terms of routines and speech acts is a recurring theme in the SA literature (DuFon & Churchill, 2006). This may account for the general consensus amongst researchers of SA pragmatics that, while SA learners outpace their AH counterparts in pragmatic development, they may spend years attaining native-speaker behaviors, if they so choose. All told, pragmatic competence seems to develop quite slowly in the SA context (Hoffman-Hicks, 1999; Rodriguez, 2001). Protracted pragmatic development is not surprising since learning new scripts/discourse grammar (i.e., in the case of speech acts) and illocutive meanings alongside locutive ones (i.e., double meanings for certain phrases and constructs, such interrogatives that represent imperatives) represents a considerable task.

This review indicates that grammatical and pragmatic development abroad becomes complicated by the sociocognitive and socio-cultural pressures that learners face in the SA context, a situation that sends many more messages to learners than does the AH context as to the complete repertoire of skills and behaviors one needs to be communicatively functional. Communicative demands at the discursive, as opposed to the sentential, level may well force the learner to make adjustments to his or her preprogram, personal or internal syllabus (Lafford, 2004). If linguistic variation is more prevalent in the SA context than the AH context, SA learners may need to incorporate non-standard forms into their development competence. This greater variability in the SA input may force the SA learner to accommodate the L2 forms with which AH learners may only need to (re)familiarize themselves at test time. Finally, pragmatic development seems to be slow in the SA context, yet important gains are made in the SA context. However, issues of (self-) identity may well interact with the extent to which pragmatic norms become adopted by the learner.

The (Assumed) Roles of Input and Interaction

One of the most undisputed assumptions about the SA context is that learners receive vast amounts of input and have numerous opportunities for communicative interaction. There is a tendency in the field to attribute gains that learners make to the enormous amount of available input. However, there has been no attempt independently to document in a fully quantified manner the types of input and interaction that learners have abroad. The assumptions that exist in the literature may be too strong. Pellegrino-Aveni (2005) documents from a qualitative perspective the types of interactions SA learners of Russian have, arguing that self-preservation (e.g., face-saving) needs effectively impede learners' contact with native speakers. There have been attempts to document the types of input and interaction learners have in a SA context, such as the Language Contact Profile (LCP) employed by Segalowitz and Freed (2004). This sort of
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context is that learners tunities for communi gains that learners er, there has been no manner the types of ations that exist in the imaments from a qualitussian have, arguing impede learners' to document the types such as the Language 1 (2004). This sort of assessment tool is helpful, in that it has built-in redundancies, so as to triangulate the reported contact for any given subject. However, it is a self-report, and its validity is limited in the same way all self-reports are (such as in clinical research), where data sets represent self-perceptions and require objective, third-party validation, such as by host families and professors abroad.

The lack of primary data on the amount of input learners receive abroad is, in fact, symptomatic of a larger problem in SA research and in the enterprise as a whole. Large-scale studies of how much input and interaction learners have in AH contexts really do not exist either. Yet, the field of SLA knows a good deal about the effects of input and interaction on acquisition because we have almost three decades of controlled treatment data (Mackey & Goo, 2007; Norris & Ortega, 2001). No concerted research agenda exists either in theory or practice to control the amounts and types of input and interaction learners receive in the SA context. Taking this observation a step further, we are confronted with the conclusion that we do not know how input differs in the SA context, comprehensible or otherwise. Barron (2003), for instance, notes that learners often misinterpret important aural cues and draw erroneous conclusions about the L2, since negative evidence is not available. Additionally, Magnan and Back (2007), using a modified version of the LCP, present data suggesting that the living situation and access to authentic aural media do not predict oral proficiency gains abroad. The field of L1 acquisition has developed a number of tools for documenting what learners are exposed to in naturalistic settings, and SA researchers could use these methods and instruments as a starting point.

McGeeking (2006), studying SA students of Japanese, is one of the few studies to document how learners negotiate for meaning in the home-stay environment, reporting that numerous opportunities exist (see also Dings & Jobe, 2003, as well as Smartt & Scudder, 2004). Yet the opportunities to negotiate appear to be mitigated in the SA context by personal and interpersonal factors. Wilkinson (2002) reports that home-stay families find it difficult to use naturalistic language with their SA learners of French, preferring to use teacher-talk, denying the learners opportunities for authentic input via interaction. Churchill (2006) documents that SA learners of English from Japan vary in the amount of authentic input they have depending on length of stay, which in turn is a function of the extent to which the learners are fully integrated into the target learning community, which is difficult in five-week programs.

What is unclear is whether there are more reports that have made it to press in the SA literature than in the AH literature about the interpersonal mitigating factors that impede opportunities for negotiating for meaning. Much research purporting to comment on negotiation opportunities is conducted within a sociocultural framework (cf. Kinginger, 2007; DuFon & Churchill, 2006), and so the epistemology is not the same as that from which SLA has traditionally examined interaction (i.e., from a largely cognitive perspective; McGeeking (2006) is a notable exception). Until these two epistemologies can achieve a common terminological interface, our understanding of negotiation in SA contexts relative to the existing SLA literature will remain weak.
Identity

Researchers approaching the SA context from a socio-cultural perspective have focused on the individual histories of students and the tension that exists between maintaining individuality, issues of self esteem, worldviews (e.g., social hierarchies), and the need to advance their own development through native-speaker interactions (Wilkinson, 1998). Churchill (2006) documents how the manner in which learners are received (or not) affects the amount of interaction they have. Kinginger (in press) provides an exhaustive summary of the socio-cultural literature relating to SA. She concludes that the most important theme is that, in those moments when learners' personal sense of identity with the target culture (or with the representatives that they know, such as the home-stay family) is distant, or when learners sense that they have too many obstacles to attaining higher levels of proficiency (either through negative interactions or from a sense of linguistic inadequacy), SA learners abandon their role as "language learners," thus impeding the development process.

Programmatic Considerations

There are a number of programmatic implications to be gleaned from the research presented to date. From an administrative perspective, it is difficult for a home institution to have a strong effect on a host institution's syllabi and methodological approaches. SA instructors are often employees of other institutions and adjunct faculty who have less of a stake in the long-term needs of the learner or program. Programs such as the University of Delaware's, where there is a tight integration between the home and abroad curricula and a faculty development program, can serve as models for ensuring greater quality control over pedagogy (cf. Chieffo & Zipser, 2001). The last ten years have seen a noticeable interest in, and research on, the role of tasks and authentic interactions within an L2 curriculum. For instance, Doughty and Long (2003) suggest that Task-Based Language Teaching provides one such curricular framework that, based on SLA research, details the types of interactions in which learners can engage according to developmental level. An exploration of the plausibility and the outcomes of this sort of language program within a SA curriculum might at least provide a principled starting point from which to study the "missing SA methodology" (Lafford & Collentine, 2006).

It is unclear what the ideal duration of a SA program might be, although a consideration of this question raises intriguing questions for SLA researchers. Programs tend to range from about five weeks to a year in length. Expectations about (1) how much development occurs and, more importantly, (2) which aspects of a learner's competence develop must be measured against the observations made above that exponential growth will not occur within such a time frame. In the absence of a solid base of SA-AH comparative studies, it is possible
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gleaned from the ctive, it is difficult institution’s syllabi employees of other he long-term needs ’Delaware’s, where ricula and a faculty ter quality control have seen a notice­thentic interactions (2003) suggest that ar framework that, which learners can the plausibility and curriculum might at ty the “missing SA might be, although a or SLA researchers. nght, Expectations ortantly, (2) which against the observa­within such a time studies, it is possible (naively) to look at SA research solely as a set of longitudinal SLA investigations. This would lead SLA researchers to the conclusion that L2 acquisition is a protracted process. If the field were to imagine (again, naively) that AH research represents the possible effects of pedagogical interventions in a laboratory setting, SA research indicates that sociopragmatic variables and the inherent linguistic variation existing outside this laboratory will essentially increase the “content” that learners must acquire. The SA learner is confronted with functional demands that invite us to view the AH student as one who learns the language for so-called special purposes. As Freed (1995b) notes, it is no longer tenable to consider a student who enrolls in a SA program as a FL learner, since the SA converts him/her into the learner of a L2. Thus, the end goal of the SA student (whether or not the learner completely abandons his/her role as a language learner; cf. Kinginger, in press) is often different from the AH learner’s, and the amount of time needed to complete the L2 agenda becomes longer than that needed for the FL agenda.

If there is a consensus, it is that a student may begin a SA program too early in his/her development. The research considered above indicates that a certain level of metalinguistic knowledge (we do not know yet how much) is a prerequisite for developing the L2 abroad (Brecht & Davidson, 1991; Magnan & Back, 2007). At the very least, SA outcomes are sensitive to learners’ preprogram competence levels (Golonka, 2006; O’Brien et al., 2006). At this point, it is possible to suggest: (1) the amount and type of preprogram preparation should be studied in greater depth; (2) these preprogram considerations should inform the types of L2 knowledge and levels of development in programs.

The research does not control for the effects of the homestay with host families. A review of the literature indicates that most students stay with a host family. Lazar (2004), however, reports that the actual amount of time that learners spend with their host families varies both in quantity and quality, and these interactions have an appreciable effect on acquisition in general. Lafford (2004) found a significant negative correlation between the amount of time spent talking with host families and the use of communication strategies to bridge communication gaps. The literature reported here indicates that issues of (1) identity and (2) the host family’s perceived role as a mentor may determine how much one learns (Wilkinson, 2002).

Concluding Remarks

Most research conducted to date on SA has concentrated on the American university experience, as seen by the above literature review. As Kinginger (2007) notes, other parts of the world such as Europe have a different relationship with the SA experience, depending on their proximity to other languages and the value they place on bilingualism. Perhaps because the field of SLA is still in the early stages of building a theory of acquisition, it may not be surprising that very little research exists on the effects of SA on learners such as those in the ERASMUS
programs that explicitly purport to promote learners' proficiency. We need to learn much more about the effects of SA on advanced learners, especially given that we suspect there is a developmental threshold at which it starts to be generally effective. Researchers also need to consider the effects of particular teaching strategies and syllabus design on learner development. The knowledge base reviewed above indicates that this area of SA research is still in its descriptive phase. There are good models of curricular design whose impact we should start to investigate.

NOTES

1 See Freed (1995a) for an extensive, historical overview of the research on SA up to 1995.
3 See DuFon and Churchill (2006) for an extensive overview of the research to date on pragmatic research in the SA context.

REFERENCES

We need to learn ecially given that we're generally effective teaching strategies base reviewed above. There are start to investigate.


logical memory predicts 57-213.


