Introduction

Spanish heritage speakers (SHS) who participate in study abroad (SA) in their family’s
country of origin or in another Spanish-speaking country not only have the opportunity to take
coursework in Spanish, but also to interact in Spanish on a daily basis outside of the classroom
for a variety of purposes such as buying a bus ticket, inviting someone to a party, watching
the nightly news, or asking for directions on the street. As a result of immersion in a society
in which Spanish is the primary language, SHS students can develop their communicative
competence as well as their metalinguistic and sociolinguistic awareness in Spanish and deepen
their cultural knowledge of the host country. SA can also have implications for SHS’ personal
relationships and identity development. For some, extended residence in the ancestral homeland
may strengthen ties with relatives who live in that country. For others, returning from SA with
increased Spanish proficiency may facilitate communication with family members at home.
While abroad, students may develop local social networks, forging meaningful and lasting rela-
tionships with members of the host country. Finally, a sojourn abroad can inspire students to
reconnect with their heritage and explore their own identities.

Despite the potential for these positive linguistic, cultural, and relational outcomes, research
has indicated that SHS who go abroad may also encounter obstacles to learning and social inter-
action. Students have reported facing negative attitudes based on their ethnicity, social class,
or use of a non-standard variety of Spanish by members of the host country (Moreno, 2009;
Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000). The identities that students claim for themselves and the extent
to which host country nationals recognize and validate those identities may alternatively enable
or impede students’ entry into local communities (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted).
Further, SA programs in Spanish-speaking countries are not always designed with the needs of
SHS in mind, resulting in missed opportunities to aid students in successfully negotiating iden-
tity issues and maximizing desired learning outcomes.

In order to design SA programs in Spanish-speaking countries that are inclusive of all stu-
dents, an understanding of SHS’ relevant experiences is critical. The following pages explore the
topic of SHS in SA, beginning with a discussion of the historical context for heritage seeking in
SA, followed by a review of existing research, a comparison with research on second language
(L2) learners, recommendations for SA programs, and directions for future research.
An overview of study abroad

Approximately 4.5 million college and university students around the world spend a portion of their student years studying in a different country (Institute of International Education, 2015). Some of those students choose to study in a country with which they have a familial affiliation, whether it be linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, or national. Examples include SA by Peruvian and Brazilian students of Japanese heritage in Japan (Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007), African Americans in Ghana (Landau & Moore, 2001), Jewish Americans in Israel (Parry, 2014), and Australians of Italian heritage in Italy (Baldassar, 2001). For SHS who opt for SA in their ancestral country of origin, multiple affiliations may include linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and national. For those who study in a non-ancestral Spanish-speaking country—either by choice or due to lack of programs in their ancestral country—the primary connection may be linguistic.

In the U.S., the number of students studying abroad has more than tripled since the late 1990s (and increased by 5% in 2013–2014, the highest rate of growth since before the 2008 economic downturn) yet still only about 10% of U.S. students study abroad before graduating from college (Institute of International Education, 2015). ‘Heritage seeking’ (choosing an SA site based on family background) in the U.S. can be traced back to the 17th century, with Americans of European heritage studying at universities in Western Europe (Szekely, 1998). Van Der Meid (2003) suggests that the continued numerical predominance of Europe as an SA location for Americans reflects this history. However, the share of U.S. students studying abroad in Europe has decreased since the late 2000s—from 60.9% in 2003–2004 to 54.5% in 2014–2015 (Institution of International Education, 2016)—a trend that has been attributed to various factors such as the growth of SA programs outside of Europe and an increase in the ethnic and racial diversity of U.S. SA students (Landau & Moore, 2001; Rubin, 2004; Van Der Meid, 2003). Regarding the latter, the number of U.S. SA students who self-identity as Latino/a, for example, increased from 5.6% in 2003–2004 to 8.8% in 2013–2014 (Institute of International Education, 2016). No statistics are available on how many of those Latino/a SA students were heritage seeking and, certainly, not all Latino/a SA students will elect a Spanish-speaking destination. Nevertheless, there is reason to predict that growth in the Latino/a SA population will be accompanied by a parallel increase in heritage seeking by SHS. Hence, SA programs in Spanish-speaking countries that have historically served primarily L2 learners of Spanish will need to consider how to best meet the needs of a growing SHS student population.

Research on heritage learners studying abroad

Most SA research to date has been on L2 students because they form the majority of the SA population. However, studies focused on heritage speakers in SA have also begun to appear, although their number remains small: Chinese (Le, 2004; Moreno, 2009; Tse, 1997; Van Der Meid, 2003), Hebrew (Donitsa-Schmidt & Vadish, 2005; Parry 2014), Japanese (Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007; Petrucci, 2007), Korean (Beausoleil, 2008), Portuguese (Rogers, 2002), Russian (Davidson & Lekic 2013), and Spanish (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted; McLaughlin, 2001; Moreno, 2009; Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000). Those studies that examine SHS will be reviewed in depth here.

As previously discussed, SHS may choose to study in either their family’s country of origin or another Spanish-speaking country, both of which can be considered heritage seeking.¹ However, since student motivations, identity work, and language learning can differ in these two contexts, each is examined separately in its own section. Both sections are divided into the following topics: motivation, identity, and HL development.
**Spanish heritage speakers studying abroad**

SHS who study in their family’s country of origin are likely to already have some degree of familiarity with the language and culture of that country, particularly if students made regular visits there during their childhood (Potowski, 2013). As a result, for these students, SA may be perceived as more of a “return home” (Petrucci, 2007, p. 276) than the “immersion in difference” (Szekely, 1998, p. 107) that characterizes the non-heritage SA experience.

**Motivation**

The personal connection to the SA destination can be observed in what students report motivates them to study in their family’s country of origin: learn more about their roots, explore their cultural identities, reconnect with family members, and improve their Spanish skills (Moreno, 2009; Rubin, 2004). For example, one Cuban American student described her motivation to study in Cuba:

> I saw it as an opportunity of a lifetime to go—not as a tourist—but to learn about Cuba more in depth. A lot of young Cuban Americans don’t know what Cuba today is like. Without going, we only know what others have told us, which is often biased. I always wondered what it meant to be Cuban and to learn about the land that had such an impact on my family.

_Rubin, 2004, p. 26_

This student describes a desire to gain deeper understanding of her ancestral homeland and to explore her cultural roots in that country. Similarly, for one U.S. student of Mexican descent in Moreno’s (2009) study, his main objectives for studying in Mexico were to learn more about Mexican culture, improve his Spanish skills, and have the chance to visit relatives.

While integrative motivation (i.e., an interest in learning the heritage language and culture in order to associate with people who speak that language) predominates in these examples, instrumental motivation (i.e., an interest in learning the heritage language for practical reasons, such as improving one’s job prospects) is also commonly reported for heritage seekers (Beausoleil, 2008; Moreno, 2009; Rubin, 2004). However, motivation is a dynamic construct that is shaped by the context and may shift over time based on situational factors (Pavlenko, 2002). Knowing what motivates SHS to study in their familial country of origin in the first place, as well as how motivation changes over time during SA, can help SA programs to offer learning experiences and opportunities for social interaction consistent with student motivation. Finally, in addition to integrative and instrumental motivation, an ancestral SA site may also be chosen for economic reasons such as the opportunity to save money by residing with relatives or to receive scholarships based on ancestry (Petrucci, 2007; Van Der Meid, 2003).

**Identity**

Once abroad in their familial country of origin, research suggests that a central aspect of the heritage SA experience concerns identity work, both in terms of the identities that SHS claim for themselves and the identities ascribed to them by members of that country. In the poststructuralist framework, identities are viewed “as socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language . . . identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past,
present and future” (Block, 2007, p. 27). As this definition suggests, an individual’s identity is not fixed, but rather shifts over time as one asserts new subject positions and negotiates positioning by others, in a process of identity co-construction between self and others (Leeman, 2012).

Moreno (2009) reports on the identity development of two SHS students from the U.S. who sojourned in their families’ countries of origin: Guatemala in the case of “Louis” and Mexico in the case of “Pablo Diego.” In the first case, Louis was a third-generation Guatemalan American who had spoken only a little Spanish at home while growing up. He chose to go to Guatemala to improve his Spanish, learn about his roots, and meet relatives still residing there. Despite his familial connection to Guatemala, before leaving for SA, Louis did not claim Guatemalan culture as his own. However, during his sojourn in that country he began to more greatly delve into his “latinicity” (Moreno, 2009, p. 118) and at times “while in Guatemala found himself wanting to feel completely Hispanic and not at all American” (p. 127). However, by the end of his time abroad, Louis had come to recognize that both Guatemalan and U.S. culture were important parts of his identity: “I was born [in the U.S.] and raised [in the U.S.] in two different cultures. And I definitely have to recognize both of them” (p. 127) and “I have gained a renewed appreciation for my American heritage while at the same time a fuller realization of my American roots. I do consider myself Hispanic, but I’m first and foremost an American” (p. 119). Not only did SA provide Louis the opportunity to explore his Guatemalan roots, being outside of his own country also made the U.S. aspects of his identity more salient to him. The experience of resolving one’s bicultural identities during SA was also reported in McLaughlin’s (2001) study of Mexican American students who, as the result of a sojourn in Mexico, felt that they were able to more harmoniously integrate their identities as Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans.

Pablo Diego also made changes in the identities that he claimed for himself during his time in Mexico. Pablo Diego grew up in the U.S., but he and his family maintained strong ties to their country of origin and to the Spanish language. Prior to studying at a university in Mexico, Pablo Diego preferred to call himself Hispanic and carefully distanced himself and his family from stereotypes about poor Mexicans. While studying abroad in Mexico, Pablo Diego had difficulties making friends and connecting with his Mexican peers and felt disappointed about aspects of life in Mexico that he perceived as disagreeable (e.g., lack of adherence to laws). Despite these difficulties, at the end of his sojourn abroad, Pablo Diego identified even more strongly with being Mexican than he had before going, saying “I think I finally accepted that I’m not really Mexican American, I’m Mexican . . . because of who I am, my background. I was born in Mexico, my family is from Mexico, I carry on these Mexican ideals” (Moreno, 2009, p. 137). Living in Mexico also gave Pablo Diego insights into why his parents thought the way that they did, helping him understand them better.

As Moreno (2009) points out, Louis’ and Pablo Diego’s identity development as SHS SA students was quite different. While both reconnected with their heritage, Louis came to recognize the importance of both of his identities, but became particularly aware of his U.S. roots, whereas Pablo Diego foregrounded his Mexican roots and ultimately rejected feeling part of U.S. culture.

Given the co-constructed nature of identity, examining the ways in which SHS are positioned and the identities ascribed to them by members of the ancestral homeland is also important in understanding identity negotiation during SA. While L2 learners in SA are typically ascribed an outgroup identity (e.g., “foreigner”), SHS students’ status is more ambiguous. On the one hand, if SHS have a physical appearance similar to that of members of the host country, they may be able to “pass unobtrusively” in society without being labeled a foreigner (Petrucci, 2007, p. 288). However, SHS are not always immune from being perceived as foreigners.
McLaughlin (2001) reported on an SHS studying in Mexico who, because she was perceived as not looking Mexican, faced disbelief that she spoke Spanish so well.

On the other hand, being ascribed an ingroup identity does not always result in a positive experience for SHS. For example, one Guatemalan American SA student reported that her Spanish teacher did not comprehend that someone who looked Latina would need to study Spanish (Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007). Indeed, feeling pressure to be able to speak the heritage language like a monolingual speaker because of one’s outward appearance—that is, looking like a member of the host culture—is a commonly reported experience in the literature on heritage speakers in SA (Beausoleil, 2008; Moreno, 2009; Petrucci, 2007). Some students in Moreno’s study, for example, worried that if they did not speak like a native in their heritage language, they might be perceived as lacking intelligence. Mexican American students in McLaughlin’s (2001) study expressed feeling guilty that they could not speak Spanish as well as Mexican nationals and could not live up to perceived expectations for their Spanish abilities.

Being positioned as ingroup members of the host culture also means that SHS may face discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or social class. Pablo Diego reported that the wealthy Mexican peers that he met in his classes abroad perceived as incongruent that someone with relatively darker skin would be able to speak English better than them: Pablo Diego “looked like he should not know how to speak English” (Moreno, 2009, p. 136). Pablo Diego’s account has parallels with the experiences described by Mar-Molinero (this volume) focused on young Mexicans who return to Mexico after an extended period living in the U.S.: some returnees’ English proficiency was viewed negatively by Mexican classmates and teachers. With regard to use of Spanish, “Lidia,” a Mexican American graduate student who studied for a term in Mexico, was perceived by her Mexican host family to be “uneducated” and “lower class” due to a few non-standard forms used in her regional dialect of U.S. Spanish (Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000). For the middle class Mexican host family, phrases such as venir pa’ tras (‘return’) and forms such as haiga (‘have,’ ‘there is’; variant of haya), and mucho (‘many,’ ‘a lot,’ ‘much’; variant of mucho) indexed lower socioeconomic status. The discrimination was so harsh that Lidia’s host family informed the program coordinators that a “Mexican person (whether from Mexico or from the United States) who spoke Spanish in such a manner was not really welcome in their home” and they asked to be assigned a blond, blue-eyed homestay student instead (Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000, p. 408). Due to her host family’s negative attitudes toward her dialect of Spanish, Lidia began to lose confidence in her Spanish abilities.

In sum, while SA offers SHS opportunities for meaningful identity exploration and development, the cases cited here suggest that not all social interactions in the ancestral homeland result in positive experiences for students. SHS may also find that they do not fit into the ancestral culture as much as they anticipated due to their bilingual and bicultural identities (Moreno, 2009; Rubin, 2004).

Heritage language development

Currently, relatively little is known about Spanish heritage language acquisition during SA in the ancestral homeland. Self-reports from SHS indicate that students perceive that their Spanish abilities improve while abroad (Moreno, 2009). In Moreno’s study, Pablo Diego reported learning more slang and youngspeak than he had expected, although he had imagined learning a more formal register of Spanish while abroad. This observation is parallel to consistent findings in the L2 literature that students are often exposed to and acquire features of informal registers during SA (Fernández, 2014; Marriott, 1995).
Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2000) followed Lidia—the Mexican American student cited above—through an SA experience in Guanajuato, Mexico, analyzing the ways in which her Spanish shifted over time. As discussed previously, Lidia’s host family was critical of her variety of Spanish due to the presence of non-standard, stigmatized forms. Consequently, Lidia’s host mother corrected her use of those forms over and over, a practice that made Lidia uncomfortable as well as start to question her own Spanish abilities. Over time, however, Lidia both developed metalinguistic awareness about her dialect, adopted standard Mexican Spanish forms and usage, and largely eliminated stigmatized forms *haiga, muncho, pa’* (shortened form of *para*), and *mirar* for *ver* from her speech.2

Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2000) report that the negative attitudes toward Lidia’s variety of Spanish expressed by her Guanajuato host family early in her stay changed after the family participated in an orientation to sensitize them to language contact issues and to the history and characteristics of U.S. Spanish. While Lidia’s experience in Guanajuato had a rocky beginning, she was able to take away positive elements from the experience. Lidia reported that the standard Mexican Spanish forms that she learned during SA helped her in her job as an English-Spanish bilingual teacher in the U.S. Riegelhaupt and Carrasco explained that in Mexico, teachers are expected to speak not only the local dialect of parents and students, but also to use the standard variety in formal and professional settings. While the authors emphasize that SHS should be made aware that “their dialect is a perfectly viable one with a history of its own,” they can also benefit from becoming aware of different varieties of Spanish and, if they so desire, expand their own repertoire to include forms that are used in various registers and social settings (Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000, p. 419).

**SHS studying abroad in a non-ancestral Spanish-speaking country**

SHS may also choose to study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country other than their family’s country of origin. Despite a common language and some cultural similarities, SHS who study in a non-ancestral Spanish-speaking country are likely to experience considerable “immersion in difference” given the unique cultural characteristics and linguistic features that each Spanish-speaking region exhibits. Likewise, students’ motivations, identity work, and language development can differ in this context.

**Motivation**

In the existing literature, SHS who opt for another Spanish-speaking country tend not to be primarily interested in learning about their roots, but rather express different motivations. Moreno (2009) observed that many students were motivated to improve their Spanish proficiency for both integrative as well as instrumental reasons. Logistical considerations such as program duration, housing options, and course offerings may also induce students to choose one Spanish language program over the other, regardless of location (Moreno, 2009). In addition, SHS also indicated that, rather than going to their family’s country of origin—a place they already knew well—they were interested in traveling to a different country (Moreno, 2009). For example, one student of Mexican heritage wanted to experience somewhere “different” and chose Argentina because she had become interested in Argentine history (p. 109). Similarly, a Mexican American student in George and Hoffman-Gonzalez (submitted, p. 7) selected SA in Argentina “because she was extremely interested in the culture and the literature” from that country. Another Mexican American student explained her decision to study in the Dominican Republic rather than Mexico:
Since I was born, I think the first trip I made to Mexico I was not even a year old. That’s probably the only place I’ve really traveled a lot to . . . I don’t consider going to Mexico a big deal or abroad just because I’ve been raised with it from the very beginning and it’s so close to me . . . I chose [SA in] the Dominican Republic because it’s different and because I really really really want to take myself out of my element and out of my comfort zone and I really love Mexico . . . [but] there’s no point in me spending money on something I already know.

Moreno, 2009, p. 107

Given that this student had regularly visited Mexico during her childhood, she was interested in living in a country with which she was less familiar. Thus, previous travel to and familiarity with the ancestral homeland, as well as interest in other Spanish-speaking cultures, may lead SHS to seek out a non-ancestral country for SA.

Identity

As was the case for SHS who studied in their familial country of origin, research suggests that identity plays an important role in students’ SA experience in other Spanish-speaking countries. In particular, students’ own identity claims, as well as the way that they are positioned, can affect the amount of Spanish to which they are exposed, the social networks that they develop abroad, and the types of Spanish language features that they acquire (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted; Moreno, 2009).

In the first case, students’ heritage may facilitate access to social networks, either because of how students position themselves or how they are perceived. Moreno (2009, p. 139) reports on “Leigh,” a student with Mexican heritage who “used her physical appearance to her advantage by faking a South American identity so that she could get more access to the Spanish language while in Argentina” (unfortunately, the author did not provide additional details about how Leigh attained greater access to Spanish through her physical appearance). Similarly, George and Hoffman-Gonzalez (submitted, p. 11) report on “Jessica,” a Mexican American student studying abroad in Argentina, who developed an extensive social network, in part, due to her Mexican heritage:

Jessica reported that other students at her Argentine university thought of her as Mexican, not American, and they would go out of their way to introduce her to other Mexican students. She was able to integrate with these students rather easily owing both to her ethnic identity and to the fact that she was already a proficient Spanish speaker upon arrival.

“Jaime,” another Mexican American student who went to Spain, was also positioned by Spaniards as Mexican rather than American (Moreno, 2009). Despite the fact that these students did not claim a connection of nationality to the host country, students’ Latin American national identities became salient and positive during their time abroad.

The opposite pattern is also attested in the literature: some SHS students have reported being perceived as American rather than associated with their family’s country of origin. “Katherine,” a Mexican American student who participated in SA in Spain, was positioned not as Mexican, but as American. For this student, that perception was liberating, as she stated:
One thing I noticed was a lot of the burden of having to be able to speak Spanish because I’m Mexican American when I’m here [in the U.S.] was actually taken off of me when I was over there [in Spain]. Because people in Spain didn’t really see me as being Hispanic, they saw me as being American. So they didn’t really have any high expectations of me so I could just kind of do it at my own pace. Which is a lot harder to do here [in the U.S.].

Moreno, 2009, p. 116

As the student describes, she felt relief at not being held to monolingual norms for proficiency in Spanish and to be able to learn the language at her own pace. However, being perceived as American abroad may not be a positive experience for all students, as noted by Gorman (2011):

The very first day that I was in Nicaragua, surprisingly I was called a “gringa.” Never in my life had I ever been called that, so needless to say it was a little bit of a shock. It got me to thinking about my identity. I may be a Mexicana/Hispanic in New Mexico, but in other Spanish-speaking countries I am not seen as such.

Rubin (2004), too, described the challenge for heritage speakers of being perceived as “foreign” at home in the U.S., but positioned as “American” abroad.

Shifts in identity during SA can occur with this group of students as well. As one U.S. student of Mexican heritage in George and Hoffman-Gonzalez’s (submitted, p. 16) study, “Eva,” made friends with local Spaniards and became more integrated into the local community, her “Mexican identity became less important as she felt more distanced from her Mexican relatives and closer to her new friends in Spain.” One way in which Eva began to display this shift in her identity was through use of phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical features prevalent in the local Spanish dialect, such as the the consonant [θ], the second person pronoun vosotros (‘you guys’), and the expression vale (‘OK’). In contrast, another Mexican-heritage student in the same program in Spain, “Tiffany,” maintained her Mexican identity throughout the semester and rejected taking on an identity aligned with Peninsular Spanish culture, which she displayed discursively through her resistance to using regional features of Peninsular Spanish.

Two Mexican American students also claimed new identities after SA in Argentina (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted). “Jessica,” who had a strong identity as Mexican before studying abroad, maintained her Mexican identity, but was proud of having lived abroad and presented herself as a more “cultured” and “worldly” Mexican due to that experience (p. 17). “Charlotte,” in contrast, had only felt a limited connection to her Mexican heritage before SA, but after living in Argentina and noticing improvements in her Spanish, Charlotte began to identify more strongly as Latina. As these cases suggest, there is no single path or outcome in terms of SHS’ identity negotiation during study abroad.

Heritage language development

As the previous section indicates, the identities that students claim for themselves can shape the adoption or rejection of regional features of Spanish, highlighting the intersection of identity and language. The extent to which SHS perceive themselves as part of the local community, align themselves with that community, and desire to accommodate to local speech community norms can influence the degree to which they incorporate distinctive regional characteristics into their Spanish.
Even before going abroad, SHS demonstrate sensitivity to the indexical properties of language. One concern expressed by some SHS is the desire to maintain the Spanish dialect of their family’s country of origin to avoid causing rifts with friends and family back home. SHS have mentioned not wanting to be teased about their Spanish by friends and family, but also to avoid miscommunication and appearing as if they are distancing themselves discursively from their heritage community (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted; Moreno, 2009). For instance, one student (Katherine) commented on her language-learning goals for studying in Spain, saying:

I guess I just want to, I don’t know, I want to learn a little bit more Spanish. But I want to learn it and not lose the accent that I have. I don’t want to gain their accent too much because my parents will make fun of me mostly.

George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted, p. 95; my emphasis

Concerns about miscommunication back home were manifest in Jessica’s case: after returning from Argentina, her Mexican American grandparents had difficulty understanding her Spanish at times. Moreover, Jessica acquired the use of vos (’you’) after her time in Argentina, but using this pronoun with her Mexican American acquaintances back home was apparently interpreted as an attempt to index a perceived prestige variety of Spanish:

Shortly after SA, [Jessica] discussed how she would use vos even though it was not common in her U.S. Spanish-speaking community. She stated that ‘you know, they’ll ask me how I am, ¿cómo estás? . . . muy bien, ¿y vos? (’how are you . . . very well and you?’). It just, it’s just . . . is something that comes out. When you say that to someone who’s Mexican, and they don’t use the vos form . . . they look at me like, wow, you’re really full of it.

George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted, p. 10; my emphasis

Despite difficulties in communication, teasing, and negative reactions to her use of Argentine Spanish features, George and Hoffman-Gonzalez report that Jessica felt pride in her ability to use more than one dialect, a characteristic that indexed her desired identity of being “worldly” as a result of SA.

As described earlier, individual students carve out identities for themselves and position themselves differently, in part, through their choices about language use. Adopting features of the local variety of Spanish is one way that SHS can display their identification with that speech community. In George and Hoffman-Gonzalez’s (submitted) study, for example, three of the four Mexican American students increased their use of regionally distinct phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical features during SA in Argentina or Spain. Both Jessica and Charlotte, after SA in Argentina, increased their use of the sound [∫], the pronoun vos, and regional lexical items such as frutilla (’strawberry’). Likewise, one student in Spain, Eva, incorporated the phoneme [θ] and the pronoun vosotros (’you guys’) into her speech during her time abroad. The phenomenon of heritage speakers acquiring Spanish features that differ from the variety that they acquired at home is arguably related to literature on second dialect acquisition (Siegel, 2010), and future research into this phenomenon would undoubtedly benefit from insights and methods in that field.

In addition to explanations based on identity, George and Hoffman-Gonzalez (submitted) also point out that SHS may shift their Spanish to accommodate to local speech norms and make communication more effective. Eva commented that her initial use of [s] instead
of [θ] in words such as diez (‘ten’; [dies] or [dieθ]) resulted in difficulties making herself understood to Spaniards. The authors report that Eva initially resisted employing Peninsular Spanish features, such as [θ], but began to do so as a means to make communication with locals more effective. Later, however, as she made friends with Spaniards and developed a local social network, it appears that Eva shifted in the identity that she wanted to project, and she incorporated regional linguistic features such as [θ] as a display of her affiliation with the local community. This example indicates that the development of features from a non-heritage variety of Spanish may be linked not only to identity but also to the exigencies of day-to-day communication.

Connections between HL and L2 study abroad findings

As noted earlier, the research literature on language learning in SA has historically focused on L2 learners. Findings from this body of work indicate, for example, that students who spend a semester or academic year abroad can make considerable gains in their L2 proficiency and communicative competence including fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics (Barron, 2003; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Coleman, 1996; Díaz-Campos, 2004; Isabelli, 2004; Regan, Howard, & Lemée, 2009; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Serrano, Llanes, & Tragant, 2011). However, research also suggests that individual learning outcomes in SA vary substantially and can be linked to a variety of factors including motivation, gender, age, dispositions, initial L2 proficiency, intercultural competence, length of stay, housing, program type, quantity and quality of social interaction, and social networks (Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Hernández, 2010; Isabelli-García, 2004; Llanes & Muñoz, 2012; Martinsen & Alvord, 2012; Martinsen et al., 2010; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2015; Vande Berg et al., 2009). Kinginger (2009) provides a comprehensive review of two decades of research on L2 learning in SA.

The results from these HL studies point to several parallels between L2 and heritage students in SA: the impact of language contact and social networks on language learning and the importance of individual variation. In L2 research, quantity and quality of contact with the target language (TL) and density of social networks including speakers of the TL have been linked to L2 development during SA (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Isabelli-García, 2004). Several studies on heritage SA students suggest these factors apply similarly. Davidson and Lekic (2013) found that both L2 and heritage students of Russian made considerable linguistic gains after a year in Russia, but those who gained the most in both groups reported a greater amount of out-of-class contact with Russian. In George and Hoffman-Gonzalez’s (submitted) study, adoption of regional Spanish dialect features was associated with heritage students who developed dense social networks with members of the host country. Similar to L2 learners, however, heritage students are not immune from difficulties in building social networks with members of the host country and, instead, spending time with foreign student peers and speaking English (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Moreno, 2009; Parry, 2014). Finally, research on both L2 and heritage students indicates that individual experiences and learning outcomes vary considerably in SA (Davidson & Lekic, 2013).

Existing research also highlights important differences between L2 and heritage students that can be traced to the latter’s bilingual and bicultural background. These include motivations for going abroad, pre-study-abroad abilities, language development during SA, positioning by members of the host culture, and identity development and negotiation while abroad. Unlike L2 learners, heritage students often identify a family connection such as exploring cultural roots and reconnecting with family, as a motivation for choosing a heritage SA destination.
(Beausoleil, 2008; Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007; Petrucci, 2007; Rubin, 2004; Szekely, 1998; Van Der Meid, 2003). With regard to pre-study-abroad skills, heritage students who were raised bilingually are more likely to go abroad with greater language proficiency and cultural knowledge as well as to be more accustomed to using the TL in naturalistic settings than L2 learners (Davidson & Lekic, 2013; George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted; Parry, 2014; Petrucci, 2007). These competences may give heritage students an advantage over L2 learners in building social networks with TL speakers (George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted) and may allow them to make greater linguistic gains during SA than L2 students (Davidson & Lekic, 2013).

In terms of positioning by members of the host country, while L2 learners are generally perceived as cultural outsiders, heritage students may be positioned as ingroup members if they have an ancestral connection to the country (Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007; Petrucci, 2007; Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000; Van Der Meid, 2003). Ingroup membership potentially confers advantages to heritage students such as greater access to social networks with members of the host country (Van Der Meid, 2003) and the ability to “blend into the crowd” in that society and not call attention to their foreignness, opportunities that L2 students may not have (Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007, p. 262; also George & Hoffman-Gonzalez, submitted; Moreno, 2009; Petrucci, 2007). On the other hand, if heritage students are perceived as ingroup members, they may face different standards of linguistic and cultural competency than L2 learners. Heritage students may be held to monolingual norms and experience linguistic discrimination due to perceived inadequacy in their heritage language proficiency or use of a non-standard or contact variety of the language (Petrucci, 2007; Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000).

Regarding the identities heritage students claim for themselves, those may or may not be recognized or validated by local people (Beausoleil, 2008; McLaughlin, 2001; Parry, 2014; Petrucci, 2007; Rubin, 2004). A process of identity negotiation and construction involving their bilingual and bicultural heritage is commonly reported in the literature on heritage SA students. Some heritage students realize that they do not fit into the ancestral culture as much as anticipated and experience tensions regarding their cultural identities (Moreno, 2009; Rubin, 2004). For example, Moreno described the experience of Pablo Diego, the Mexican American student mentioned earlier who identified strongly as Mexican but, during his stay in Monterrey, Mexico, had a hard time fitting in and making friends with local people:

I think I felt a little left out because I was born here [in the U.S.], I mean I wasn’t born in the U.S. but I was raised in the U.S. and just the American culture. And you know, it’s part of me. And I guess a lot of people [in Monterrey] felt like who is this kid? Who is he trying to be? I mean, I looked so Mexican. I looked more Mexican than the kids that go there, all white kids . . . Especially in my school because it’s like a rich, preppy school so most of the kids who go there are white Mexicans, so they were like, who’s this kid?

Moreno, 2009, p. 136

The outcome of identity negotiation is different for each heritage student, but as a result of SA, some come to identify more strongly with the culture of the society that they grew up in rather than that of their ancestral culture (Beausoleil, 2008; Moreno, 2009). The quote cited above from Louis, the Guatemalan American student in Moreno’s study, suggested that he realized through SA that being American was a core aspect of his identity. Yet others develop a stronger sense of their ancestral cultural identity (Miyahira & Petrucci, 2007; Moreno, 2009) or achieve integration of their various national, ethnic, or cultural identities (Beausoleil, 2008; McLaughlin, 2001).
Summary and conclusions

SHS have a variety of motivations for going abroad and choosing their destination, including reconnecting with cultural roots, improving Spanish abilities, and traveling to a new place. The experiences of SHS also suggest that, as it is for L2 students, identity negotiation is a central feature of SA. In terms of language learning, SHS can develop metalinguistic and sociolinguistic awareness, as well as have the opportunity try out new registers and local ways of speaking. However, each student’s SA experience varies considerably, not only due to the location, the program, and the individual people with whom they come in contact but also how each student negotiates the experience and the meanings he or she attributes to it. Furthermore, SHS are not a homogenous group in terms of background, linguistic proficiency, or identity constructs. Beaudrie and Fairclough (2012) point to five dimensions of the diversity of heritage speakers: historical (generation of immigration), linguistic (age, order of bilingual acquisition), educational (language of schooling), affective (motivations, attitudes), and cultural (ethnolinguistic identity, family practices). These and other factors shape both the learning and personal outcomes of SA.

Recommendations for practice

Findings from the studies presented here offer insights into how SA programs that have historically not focused on the unique needs of SHS can make their existing programs more inclusive for SHS. This section discusses practical programmatic strategies that can be implemented before, during, and after a sojourn abroad.

Pre-departure

Before SHS go abroad, they can benefit from advice to help them choose a program aligned with their interests and goals. As the research shows, some SHS desire to reconnect with their roots, whereas others are interested in traveling to a place with which they are unfamiliar, an aspect that will influence the selection of destination. Similarly, if a student desires to strengthen his or her Spanish through using the language with people in the community setting abroad, programs that offer internships and service learning opportunities can be suggested. If the student’s Spanish proficiency is high, direct enrollment in a foreign university can be presented as an option. The student may also consider SA programs designed specifically for SHS or those in which differentiated instruction for L2 learners and SHS is integrated into the program systematically (Davidson & Lekic, 2013). Of course, academic, economic, security, and practical concerns must also be taken into account. In addition, if SHS have not thought deeply about their goals and preferences, SA advisors can raise students’ awareness about issues such as coursework targeted to SHS needs and opportunities for community involvement.

Beyond advising, SHS can benefit from an awareness-raising pre-departure orientation designed specifically with their needs in mind in which students are provided with information about what to expect as SHS while abroad, as well as strategies to help them pursue their learning and interpersonal goals. More specifically, SA administrators could invite heritage students who have studied abroad previously to talk about their SA experience. Language experts might discuss basic sociolinguistic concepts such as register, dialects, languages in contact, and standard and non-standard forms (see Beaudrie, Ducar, & Potowski, 2014). Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2000, p. 419) argue that students should be made aware that language ideologies privilege some ways of speaking over others, while emphasizing that students’ own Spanish varieties are “perfectly viable.”
Once SHS embark for their term abroad, SA programs can employ a variety of strategies to ensure SHS needs are met. First, onsite SA program staff and instructors need to be trained to work with SHS. The best practices offered for heritage language instructors in Beaudrie, Ducar and Potowski (2014) can be applied to the SA context. For example, staff and instructors should be aware of issues such as sociolinguistic variation, differences between L2 and heritage language learning, diversity of SHS profiles, and the complex link between language and identity. Training for staff should also highlight pedagogical strategies to differentiate instruction for SHS and L2 learners (Beaudrie et al., 2014). If a sufficient number of SHS study at one site, the program could provide the option of course sections specifically for SHS, staffed by instructors trained to work with this group.

Another role for onsite SA administrators can be to assist students in identifying ways that they can interact with local people. Living with a host family, long considered the *sin qua non* of social interaction in SA, can offer students language and culture learning opportunities (Magnan & Back, 2007). However, SA programs should thoroughly screen host families to avoid placing students in a discriminatory situation (e.g., the racism described by Riegelhaupt and Carrasco). As Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2000) advocate, onsite program coordinators would also be well advised to offer training for families who host SHS to raise awareness about sociolinguistic and heritage language issues in order to inoculate against the types of linguistic discrimination suffered by Mexican American students in Guanajuato, as highlighted earlier. In addition to living with a host family or in a residence hall with local students, examples of contexts for social interaction include language partners, internships, volunteering, clubs, cultural events, and excursions. While SA programs already offer many of these opportunities, a needs assessment of SHS participants could reveal new avenues to develop community involvement and build or strengthen social networks, as well as obstacles to such engagement.

SHS can also benefit from having structured opportunities to reflect on their experiences. One approach is the language-learners-as-ethnographers model, which trains students to carry out ethnographic research projects as a means to gain both emic and etic insights into the language and culture of the host country (Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001; for student materials, Dowell & Mirksy, 2002 and Paige et al., 2006). Data collected during such a project could be carried forward into a senior paper or capstone project back home.

**Re-entry**

After returning from SA, SHS can be asked to share the knowledge and experience that they have gained from their time abroad with peers at their home institution. Apart from mentoring future heritage SA students, another example is to ask returned SHS to share with a Spanish linguistics class what they learned about the dialect or culture of the region in which they studied. SHS can also be encouraged to take advantage of social media to keep in touch with the friends that they made during their time abroad. Moreno (2009, pp. 150–151) further suggests that, “re-entry support should involve opportunity for reflection, assessment of growth in language proficiency and whether expectations were met, [and] goals for future language learning.” In sum, SA program administrators can play an important role in helping SHS choose the right SA program, send them abroad with sociolinguistic tools of analysis, and help students reflect on and share their valuable experiences with others once they return home.
Future directions

While the existing research on SHS in SA provides important insights into the motivations, identity construction, and language learning of this group, there are still many gaps in the field. Researchers should continue to expand these areas of investigation and, in particular, examine further how the quality and quantity of social interaction and the density of social networks including Spanish speakers impact SHS motivation, identity, and language development.

As one potential starting point for future studies on SHS, following Lynch (2003), researchers should consider the research questions, methods, and theoretical frameworks that have been applied to investigate second language acquisition and L2 learning abroad. In this vein, future research on SHS in SA can also quantitatively and qualitatively examine development in vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation, increases in global proficiency, and development of pragmatic, sociolinguistic, symbolic, and intercultural competencies, as well as the extent to which such language developments are consequential for SHS self-confidence, professional and academic goals, personal relationships, and ability or willingness to communicate in Spanish.

Given the considerable individual variation that is observed in terms of SA students’ experiences and learning outcomes while abroad, research on SHS should take into account factors such as program format and coursework, living situation, program duration, student goals, as well as the five dimensions of heritage speaker diversity described earlier. Quantitative research on SA populations can include heritage language status as a factor, and further comparisons can be made between L2 and heritage students.

In addition to assessing the learning that occurs during SA immediately after the sojourn, research can also consider the lasting effects of learning during SA on SHS, for example, by collecting data months after SHS return home (e.g., delayed post-test). Finally, as more SA programs take measures to address the specific needs of SHS, the effectiveness of those programs should be assessed so that other SA administrators can incorporate strategies that work well into their own programs.

Notes

1 There may be more complex cases of heritage seeking than the categories “ancestral homeland” and “non-ancestral Spanish-speaking country” suggest. For instance, a Mexican American SHS may choose to study in Spain because his or her great-grandparents migrated from Spain to Mexico in the early twentieth century. In that case, both Mexico and Spain could be considered “ancestral homelands.” However, a distinction to account for multiple ancestries is not made here because the issue has not, thus far, been described in the literature.

2 As Martínez (2003, p. 10) has argued, simply acquiring standard forms without metalinguistic awareness about the social meanings indexed by such forms is of limited pedagogical value:

   If our students walk into the class saying haiga and walk out saying haya, there has been, in my estimation, no value added. However, if they walk in saying haiga and walk out saying either haya or haiga and having the ability to defend their use of haiga if and when they see fit, then there has been value added.

Leeman (this volume) takes a similar stance in her discussion of SHS education.

3 While this student’s choice not to study in Mexico because it was familiar to her is perfectly legitimate, she may not have been aware of the internal diversity of Mexico. Had she decided to study in a region of Mexico different from that of her family, she may have gained an appreciation for cultural differences within her ancestral homeland.
Spanish heritage speakers studying abroad

Further reading


This edited volume focuses on various aspects of L2 learning in SA including topics such as interaction between students and host families at the dinner table, learning to use terms of address, and development of social networks.


Although twenty years old, this volume is a seminal work in the field and a compilation of empirical studies on L2 learning in study abroad.


This volume provides a comprehensive and insightful discussion of key issues related to L2 learning in SA, summarizing over two decades of research findings.

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Spanish heritage speakers studying abroad


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