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**The Study Abroad Experiences of Heritage Language Learners:  
Discourses of Identity**

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**The Study Abroad Experiences of Heritage Language Learners:  
Discourses of Identity**

**by**

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May, 2009**

## **Dedication**

To Camilo

## Acknowledgements

Thank you, mom and dad, for your love and encouragement. Thanks for pushing so hard for academic excellence and setting high expectations for me. Thanks for paying for Rice! And thanks for moving us to the border, a decision that has had a profound effect on my life and interests.

Thank you, Camilo, for financing much of my graduate education without a single complaint, for having confidence in me, and for being my best friend. Thanks also for being on duty with the baby as I finished up the dissertation.

Thank you, Lucia, for learning to nap on your own and for going to bed early enough for me to get work done during your first year of life. You're such a precious baby.

Thank you, Erin and Jorunn, for your friendship and for being supportive sisters.

Thank you, Laura and Albert. Thank you for being great roommates to both of us. Laura, thanks for teaching me how to study and write papers through example. Albert, thank you for giving me the idea for this research in the first place and for hanging out with me in Austin.

Thank you, Zsuzsi, for being so flexible in working with me long-distance. I am impressed by your accomplishments and appreciate your support, guidance, and friendship.

Thank you, Dr. Horwitz, Dr. Klahr, Dr. Salaberry, and Dr. Koike, for being on my committee and for the advice you gave. I also want to thank Drs. Pomerantz, Pica, and Hornberger at Penn and Dr. Schwarzer for teaching me so much about research.

Thank you to those who helped me edit: mom, Erin, Maggie, Camilo, Laura, Simone, Zsuzsi, and Deb.

I appreciate my co-workers in the Meridian School District for cheering me on. You are wonderful women and my Idaho moms.

Thank you, Lea, Renee, Maggie, mom, and members of my small groups at Cole Community and First Baptist churches, for your prayers.

Thank you to my roommates over the years. You have all been a joy to live with and have helped me have higher expectations of what I can accomplish. Thanks Laura, Pam, Clara, Geneva, Lea, Linda, Lindsay, Suru, Sarah, Sabrina, and Rebekah. Also, to

Camilo's roommates, with whom I spent quite a bit of time, Paul, David, Scott, and Albert.

Finally, thank you to all of my participants, for sharing your thoughts, fears, and joys with me.

# **The Study Abroad Experiences of Heritage Language Learners: Discourses of Identity**

Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

Kirstin Heather Moreno, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

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This study highlights the complexities associated with learning a heritage language (HL) abroad, specifically with regard to identity, expectations, and beliefs about language and language learning, by examining the ways that HL learners talk about themselves. These are important topics to study because perceptions of language learning have been shown to influence language acquisition in the study abroad context (Wilkinson, 1998). In addition, study abroad programs are becoming more popular and so are attempts to design language courses to meet the unique needs of HL learners.

The study explores the experiences of 17 HL learners who chose to study abroad in 2007 or 2008 to improve their HL proficiency. These HL learners had at least a basic ability to comprehend and communicate in the language that their parents or grandparents speak natively, and were themselves dominant in English. The participants included 5 males and 12 females who went abroad to 14 different countries to study Spanish (7), Hebrew (1), Tigrinya (1), French (1), German (1), Korean (1), Cantonese (1), or Mandarin (4). Data collected include 17 hours of interviews both before and after the

sojourns, 34 email reflections written while abroad, blog entries, and a focus group. Data were analyzed using discursive psychology, which views discourse as being variable, co-constructed, purposeful, and context-dependent. By analyzing the data to find the interpretive repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and subject positions used (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Edley, 2001), a deeper understanding of studying abroad as a HL learner was attained.

Findings include that the participants lack interpretive repertoires to discuss their HL and being a HL learner, used their HL as a resource to access other learning opportunities while abroad, encountered difficulties fully immersing themselves in the HL while abroad, received insufficient pre-departure support from the study abroad offices, and had backgrounds and HL learning experiences that varied considerably. The study's findings have implications for what topics to cover in classes and study abroad advising sessions that may help HL learners make decisions about where to study abroad, as well as help students process the experiences they have learning their HL and studying abroad.

## Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Re-Conceptualizing Study Abroad .....	1
Context for the Study .....	2
The choice to study a heritage language .....	3
Choosing a study abroad destination .....	4
Tensions and possibilities for heritage language learners abroad.....	4
The Study.....	6
Research questions.....	6
Rationale for study.....	7
Overview of dissertation.....	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	9
Heritage Language.....	9
Heritage language learners: A definition .....	9
Unique needs of heritage language learners .....	12
Study Abroad .....	15
Study abroad: History .....	15
Study abroad and language learning.....	16
Study abroad and minorities .....	19
Gender and sexual orientation .....	20
African Americans.....	20
Asian and Hispanic heritage language learners .....	22
Study abroad and heritage language learners: Conclusion .....	24
Beliefs About Language Learning.....	25
Ethnic Identity Development .....	27
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	30
Introduction.....	30
Research Questions.....	30
Participants.....	31

Definition of heritage language learners.....	31
Access to participants .....	32
Participant selection.....	34
The Researcher.....	37
Methodology .....	39
Rationale for using qualitative methodology.....	39
Rationale for discursive psychology as the approach to analysis.....	41
Data Collection .....	45
Individual interviews .....	47
Blog entries and/or mass emails .....	50
Written reflections by email.....	51
Focus group.....	52
Data Analysis .....	54
Transcription.....	54
Analysis.....	55
Trustworthiness.....	57
Research Summary .....	59
Preliminary study .....	59
Language learning ideologies .....	59
Language learner identities .....	60
Conclusion .....	62
Chapter Four: Descriptions of the Participants.....	63
The Participants .....	65
Louis .....	65
April .....	66
Leigh .....	66
Katherine.....	67
Pablo Diego.....	67
Gabrielle.....	68
Jaime .....	68
Ching.....	69

Anne .....	69
Peter .....	70
Kate .....	70
Amy .....	71
Olga .....	72
Jordan.....	72
Lucy .....	73
Erin .....	74
David.....	75
Summary of Participant Descriptions .....	76
Chapter Five: Findings.....	77
Talking About Language, Language Learning, Study Abroad, and Identity.....	77
Language.....	77
Labels for heritage language.....	77
Location and heritage language proficiency .....	79
Other interpretive repertoires for heritage languages .....	81
Heritage and expectations of language proficiency .....	83
Language learning.....	84
Language learning and ability.....	85
Language learning and immersion.....	86
Parental influence on language learning .....	88
Underestimation of heritage language proficiency .....	92
Language learning goals .....	94
Growth in proficiency while abroad .....	96
Future children and language acquisition .....	99
Study abroad .....	102
Choosing a study abroad location .....	102
Parents’ reactions to the participants’ study abroad plans .....	107
Other interpretive repertoires for study abroad.....	109
The effect of study abroad on family relationships .....	111
Identity .....	114

Non-ethnic subject positions.....	115
Reactions from others while abroad .....	115
Ethnic identity.....	116
Tensions in identity.....	126
Heritage language vs. non-heritage language learners abroad..	137
Summary of Findings.....	140
Chapter Six: Conclusion .....	146
Discussion.....	146
Availability of interpretive repertoires for HL learning .....	146
The role of the study abroad office.....	148
Variation in background and experiences of participants.....	151
Study abroad and HL immersion .....	153
Heritage language as a resource.....	155
Ideas for further research .....	156
Limitations .....	159
Conclusion .....	161
Appendixes .....	163
Appendix A: Introductory Information for Participants .....	163
Appendix B: Consent Form and List of Requirements.....	166
Appendix C: Guide for Interview #1 .....	169
Appendix D: Guide for Interview #2.....	170
Appendix E: Email Reflection Prompts.....	171
Appendix F: Focus Group Prompts .....	173
Appendix G: Transcription Notations.....	174
Bibliography .....	175
Vita .....	186

## List of Tables

Table 3.1: Summary of Data Collection .....	46
Table 4.1: Overview of Participants .....	64

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **RE-CONCEPTUALIZING STUDY ABROAD**

Heritage language (HL) learners, many of whom are minorities in the context of the United States, are underrepresented among those who study abroad during their undergraduate years. Reasons for this historically have included perceived cost, fear of travel to unknown areas, fear of discrimination, and the high college attrition rates of minorities (excluding Asian Americans) as compared to Caucasians (Hembroff & Ruzs, 1993). Nevertheless, the old model of study abroad, which is based on the idea that upper middle-class, white students spend a semester in prosperous Western European nations, is becoming increasingly inaccurate (Landau & Moore, 2001). Universities are taking more effort to provide financial aid to underrepresented student populations to study abroad, and are also providing a wider selection of study abroad programs that might appeal to minorities (Open Doors Report, 2008). Study abroad is becoming more popular among all undergraduates and more minorities are participating every year. Study abroad participation was up 150% in the 2006-2007 school year as compared to participation a decade earlier. The percentages of Asians and Hispanics studying abroad are increasing as well (Open Doors Report, 2008). The Open Doors Report finds that students are more frequently choosing non-traditional study abroad destinations. In recent years there have been marked increases in the number of students studying abroad in China, Argentina, South Africa, Ecuador, and India, for example.

It is generally assumed that most students who go abroad are immersing themselves in a different culture from the one they are exposed to in their homes and communities in the United States. Students are often thought to be interacting in a language that they have only been studying for a year or two, getting to know natives who were complete strangers to them until their arrival, and discovering how to act in a culture that is, at least at first, a mystery to them. These ideas about the study abroad

experience are challenged when the program participants are HL learners who have been exposed to a particular non-English language from an early age, are familiar with some aspects of the culture because of their upbringing, and may even have family or friends in the country where they are studying. In this context, the learners are not so much immersed in difference as they are exploring their recent roots to which they still have very real connections.

There are many factors that influence students' decisions to study abroad and the experiences they have during the sojourn. Some of these include gender, sexual orientation, age, major, career plans, language proficiency goals, parental pressure, sense of identification with a particular culture, socioeconomic status, religion, race, and ethnicity (Hembroff & Ruzs, 1993; Siegal, 1994; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Ng, 2003; Sanderson, 2002). Although many of these variables influenced the participants, this study focused on ethnicity, identification with a particular culture, and language background.

In this dissertation I explore the individual experiences of HL learners who decided to study abroad in a country where they could be immersed in their HL and how these learning experiences relate to issues of identity. I contextualize their individual encounters with study abroad by describing their personal histories, including their cultural and language learning experiences throughout their lives. To some extent, these experiences have been colored by larger societal forces. In order to better understand what HL learners think, feel, and believe about language learning and their time abroad, I first place this study in a more global context.

## **CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY**

The seventeen participants in this study are students from the University of Texas at Austin and Rice University in Houston. They were initially exposed to their heritage language at home because their parents or grandparents immigrated to the United States from another country or because the participants themselves were born in another country

but came to the United States at a young age. For this research it is important to understand that the power of English as a world language and the prominence of American culture throughout much of the globe may have played a role in the participants' experiences whether they realized it or not (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The participants' dominant language is English, which residents in some of the host countries were seeking to learn. Additionally, the fact that the participants speak American English and are receiving a college degree from an American university likely impacted their experiences when they were abroad.

### **The choice to study a heritage language**

The participants all decided to study in locations where they could improve their HL proficiency. Even HL speakers of a language of wider communication such as Spanish or French sometimes still choose to learn other languages instead. Szekely (1998) found that, for instance, Hispanic students study abroad in greater numbers in non-Spanish speaking countries than in Spanish speaking countries. The participants in this study, who come from various HL backgrounds, however, elected to study their HL. For some, the global status associated with that language was one of the reasons they chose to continue studying it abroad, and for others the language's lack of status and power did not deter them from wanting to improve their proficiency. Additionally, they made efforts to improve their bilingualism as residents of a country, the United States, where monolingualism is considered the norm (Wiley, 1996). Pomerantz (2002) claimed that expertise in a non-English language is seen as detrimental to minorities, as it threatens their identity as Americans which may limit their potential for social and economic mobility. Paradoxically, when the same language is learned to a lesser degree of proficiency by an Anglo or non-heritage language learner, it is viewed as a valuable form of economic capital that can improve their mobility. As representative of this tension, the federal government has funneled a great deal of money into promoting foreign language learning to increase the number of potential bilingual staff available to

work in intelligence agencies, while at the same time passing legislation that hinders the academic acquisition of heritage languages in this country by those who are already at least semi-bilingual (Freeman, 1998).

### **Choosing a study abroad destination**

Another level on which larger, societal issues such as power and social class may have affected the participants of this study has to do with in which country the students chose to study their HL. The participants all studied their HL, but not necessarily within their heritage country. Some of them had little choice of destination, for example, Korea is the only country it makes sense to go to when learning Korean. The Spanish and French HL learners, however, had several potential destination countries from which to choose. While none of the participants directly stated this, it is possible that underlying biases about particular countries and the variety of language spoken there informed their choice of a study abroad destination. However, study abroad students take many factors into account when choosing the country in which they will study. Students may choose to study where a friend has already decided to go, they may enroll in the least expensive program, they may pick a site where they can meet requirements for their majors, or they may base their decisions on how well the program dates fit with their schedules. Sometimes the perceived safety and standard of living a country, or the access they might have to recreational and tourist activities, determines where they study abroad.

### **Tensions and possibilities for heritage language learners abroad**

Heritage language learners are often placed in complex situations when they study abroad. Research indicates, for example, that Mexican Americans who choose to study in Mexico may face intolerance because of their Mexican American accents and their lack of competency in standard Mexican Spanish. The following two studies explore this possibility, but arrive at different conclusions. Riegelhaupt & Carrasco (2000) followed a group of Mexican American teachers who took courses in Mexico. The Mexican

American Spanish they spoke, which contains dialectical differences often belittled by Standard Spanish speakers, caused their hosts to view the teachers as members of a lower class and as not as well educated. Especially because they were teachers, the host families felt they should speak Standard Mexican Spanish and proceeded to correct the teachers harshly. These corrections had the unfortunate effect of undermining the teachers' confidence and further Spanish acquisition. The second study (McLaughlin, 2001) also involved HL learners in Mexico and found the opposite of Riegelhaupt and Carrasco. McLaughlin's learners, who were undergraduates, did not face harsh criticism or the expectation that they should speak perfect Standard Spanish from the Mexicans with whom they came into contact. Overall, the participants' attitudes toward their Spanish improved as a result of their time abroad. Their perceptions of their identity and bilingualism changed positively as a result, as well. The learners realized how much the English language and American culture were a part of their identity, but they were able to reconcile this with their Mexican-ness. They also felt, at times, self-conscious and guilty about their language abilities, but overall they felt supported and encouraged – despite the fact that they did not speak Standard Spanish as perceived by the Mexicans who hosted and befriended them. Research conducted on Asians (Beausoleil, 2008; Van Der Meid, 2003) and African Americans (Hutchins, 1996) abroad has indicated that the same potential for increased awareness of identity and ridicule for non-standard HL variety exists.

These global issues of ethnicity, class, and power form the backdrop of this study. The participants' experiences growing up in the United States, becoming English dominant, choosing to study their HL, and dealing with the complexities of being abroad are influenced both subtly and overtly by these larger dynamics. Therefore, in my analysis I considered the status of the HL of each participant, how recently their families immigrated, and American society's perceptions of their ethnic group. Exploring these

details contextualized each individual's experiences learning their HL and being abroad so that more accurate and helpful conclusions could be drawn from this study.

## **THE STUDY**

### **Research questions**

The purpose of this study is to highlight the complexities associated with learning a HL abroad – specifically with regard to identity, expectations, and beliefs about language and language learning – by examining the ways that learners talk about their experiences and beliefs. These features, in addition to potentially higher language proficiency and more cultural awareness, are the elements that are most relevant to what makes the experiences of HL learners different from someone who is not studying their HL while abroad. With this in mind, the main research question to be addressed in the study is:

#### **What is the study abroad experience like for American undergraduates who are heritage language learners?**

A few more specific questions are relevant to this main topic:

1. Why do the participants decide to study abroad? What factors play a role in their decision to study abroad? What difficulties related to culture, identity, and language ideology do they experience as they go through the study abroad process? How are these experiences advantageous?
2. What are the participants' beliefs about heritage language learning? According to the learners, how do American society and their heritage language culture view heritage language learning? How do these beliefs affect their decision to improve proficiency in their heritage language?
3. How do the participants talk about themselves as heritage language learners both in the United States and abroad? Does their study abroad experience result in a shift in the way they discuss who they are, and if so, in what ways?

## **Rationale for study**

Kumaravadivelu (2003) claimed that language education, more than other areas of education, requires students to continually re-negotiate their identities. McNamara (1997) agrees, and suggests that this re-negotiation is “a process that has profound implications for their attitudes to their own language and the learning of the majority group's language” (p. 561). My interest in language and language learning ideologies comes from the fact that perceptions of language learning have been shown to influence language acquisition in study abroad (Wilkinson, 1998). This focus on beliefs is important because beliefs play a role in if and how people choose to learn a language. Because I used discourse analysis to investigate learners’ beliefs, something which is advocated by Kalaja (1995), I was also able to delve more thoroughly into the ways learners talk about and frame their beliefs, and how they use them to provide support for their feelings and experiences. By paying special attention to identity, beliefs about language and language learning, and the participants’ expectations going into their study abroad experiences, I gained insight into aspects of study abroad for HL learners that other studies have not. This is important because study abroad programs are becoming more popular as are attempts to design language courses to meet the needs of HL speakers. In addition, there is a need in the United States for more fluent speakers of strategic languages. Encouraging HL learners to study abroad, and providing them appropriate support while they do so, is one way to increase the number of fluent bilinguals in this country.

It is my hope that some of the findings of this dissertation will give teachers of HL students and study abroad advisors ideas about additional topics to cover in classes and advising sessions that may help students make decisions about whether and where to study abroad, as well as help students process and learn from the experiences they have while learning their HL and studying abroad. In addition, this study should provide insight into better ways for universities to tailor HL programs and study abroad programs

for HL learners, based on what this study reveals about the participants' motivation for and attitudes toward participating in these types of programs.

### **Overview of dissertation**

The following is a summary of the remainder of this dissertation. Chapter Two examines the relevant literature, including the definition of heritage languages and HL learners, special needs of HL learners, the history of study abroad, experiences of minorities who study abroad, research on language learning abroad, beliefs about language learning, and the relationship between language learning and identity development.

Chapter Three explains in detail the methodology that is used in the study. It includes information about participant recruitment, demographic data about the participants, who I am as the researcher, and why this study fits within the qualitative research paradigm. It details how the study approaches the collection and analysis of data from the perspective of discursive psychology, and describes the preliminary study that informs this methodological approach.

Chapter Four provides descriptions of the participants, including the immigration histories of their families, their HL proficiencies before studying abroad, and their study abroad plans.

Chapter Five details the findings of the study. It explores the actual words used by the participants to talk about themselves and their beliefs about language and language learning, and provides a detailed and nuanced description of what it is like to be a HL learner abroad. Discursive psychology allows for the complexities of being a HL learner abroad to be highlighted.

Chapter Six includes a discussion of the findings, limitations, implications, and ideas for further research that emerge from the study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter examines previous research in order to arrive at a working definition of heritage languages and heritage language (HL) learners. It then focuses on the special needs of HL learners, the history of study abroad, research on language learning abroad, experiences of minorities who study abroad, beliefs about language learning, and ethnic identity development. This chapter also includes a discussion of how research on these topics informs the current study and an examination what gaps previous research has left that the current study will attempt to fill.

### **HERITAGE LANGUAGE**

#### **Heritage language learners: A definition**

Researchers are currently debating the appropriate definitions of the terms “heritage language” and “heritage language learner” in the literature. This is because the terms have come into wider use only recently, and the definitions depend largely on context and disciplinary orientation. Heritage language learners are a very large, heterogeneous population with different historical and cultural backgrounds. They have been referred to by many different terms, including as native speakers, quasi-native speakers, residual speakers, bilingual speakers, and home-background speakers (Valdés, 1997). In order to simplify the discussion, this section of the literature review will focus on how heritage languages and HL learners are defined in the context of the United States.

Carriera (2004) offers the following guidelines for creating a definition of HL learners. The definition must accomplish three goals: it must distinguish the HL learner from the second language (L2) learner; it must distinguish the HL learner from the first language (L1) learner; and it must distinguish among the different types of HL learners (which will be discussed in the following paragraph). Heritage language learners are

what Valdés and Figueroa (1994) call circumstantial bilinguals whereas L2 learners are elective bilinguals. Heritage language learners do not choose to be exposed to the HL at a young age. Their familial connections with the language result in identity and linguistic needs that are different from those of L2 learners. Also, they are different from L1 learners in that while they have had some exposure to the HL and heritage culture, they have not had sufficient exposure to meet all their identity and linguistic needs (Carriera, 2004).

Carriera (2004) then divides HL learners into three types based on how they've been defined in the literature. The first type is dependent upon the learner's place in the HL community, which is similar to Fishman's (1999) category of indigenous heritage language learners. The second is dependent upon the learner's (potentially somewhat distant) personal connection to the HL and heritage culture, and is otherwise known as "heritage seekers," or in Fishman's terms, "colonial heritage language learners." This second group often does not have any exposure to the HL in the home and therefore does not have any linguistic advantages over traditional L2 learners. Van Duesen-Scholl (2003) discusses this distinction between HL learners and heritage seekers. An example he gives of heritage seekers are African Americans who choose to study Swahili (or even Afrikaans!) because of the perceived connections they may have with those African languages. Sometimes the cultural connection for heritage seekers can be so distant that they are not even sure what language their ancestors spoke. The third type of HL learner Carriera found in the literature is dependent upon HL proficiency, which is the most restrictive type, and fits Fishman's idea of immigrant heritage language learners. It is important to keep in mind that in real life, learners cannot be so easily categorized, as it is actually more appropriate to characterize individuals as falling along a continuum.

Some researchers such as Fishman (1999) give open definitions of HL learners by, for example, including colonial HL learners, or those who have only ancestral ties to the language and have had no exposure to it whatsoever in the home. Fishman refers to

the HL simply as a “language with personal relevance other than English.” Hornberger and Wang (2008) also have a fairly open definition and include the notion of agency. According to them, HL learners have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and exert their agency in determining whether or not they are learners of that HL or heritage culture.

In contrast to these more loosely construed definitions, the most commonly agreed upon definition of HL learners in the literature fits Valdés’ (2001) three criteria: they are raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken; they speak or at least understand the HL; and they are to some degree bilingual in English and the HL. According to Kondo-Brown (2003), the main distinction is that HL acquisition begins in the home, while foreign language acquisition begins in the classroom. Not everyone agrees that the HL must have been spoken at home, however. Some argue that it could be learned from relatives who do not live with the learner, or from other people in the heritage community (Van Duesen-Scholl, 2003). Nevertheless, the point is that the language is not first acquired in the classroom. Brecht and Ingold (2002) give a similar definition to that of Valdés, adding only that the learner is generally fully proficient in English. Lynch’s (2003) definition focuses on the relationship between age of acquisition and HL status. For HL speakers, acquisition of English continues throughout development, while HL acquisition is significantly curtailed or stagnates near adolescence. Sometimes, there is even attrition of the HL beginning at this point. By the time HL learners are in college, acquisition of the HL becomes more of an L2 process than an L1 process, but they are not really either L1 or L2 speakers of the language.

Not as many researchers focus on defining heritage languages because that definition is so dependent on whom the learners/speakers are in the first place. Kondo-Brown (2003) defined a HL as an “endangered indigenous or immigrant language” which is somewhat in line with Fishman’s (1999) indigenous/colonial/immigrant language distinction. I would argue, however, that languages do not need to be endangered to be

considered heritage languages. I suggest that within the United States, a HL is the non-English language that is spoken by a HL learner, and which allows the speaker to fit the definition of a HL learner.

For this study, I selected HL learners who were first exposed to the language in a non-classroom environment, who were dominant in English, and who they themselves, or their grandparents or parents, emigrated from their heritage country to the United States. All of the participants had at least a basic ability to comprehend and communicate in their heritage languages.

### **Unique needs of heritage language learners**

There are a number of issues which distinguish HL from foreign language education. The distinctions I will discuss are motivation, self-esteem, identity, power, class, and pedagogical issues.

Heritage language learners may have different motivations for learning the language than foreign language students. These motivations may include a desire to deepen an understanding of their cultural heritage, to communicate with family members better, or to find a shortcut to fulfill university requirements (Van Duesen-Scholl, 2003). Luo and Wiseman's (2000) study on Chinese American children found that the dynamics of students' decisions to maintain their HL are complex and involve influence from peers, parents, grandparents, and prior experiences. The group that motivated students most to maintain their HL, however, was the students' peers.

Research has shown that issues of self-esteem are another factor that is different for HL learners than foreign language learners. According to Martinez (2003), HL students arrive at universities with deep-seated emotional issues related to their HL. They have been taught, and in many cases they have internalized, a feeling of inferiority about their HL. They have been programmed with what Haugen (1956) called a "linguistic self-hate." This translates into a heightened sense of linguistic insecurity and inhibition that directly interferes with the language development process. Wright and

Taylor (1995) did a study with some Inuit children (HL learners) who had early HL classes and some who had L2 classes. After one year, they found that the children in the HL classes had increased personal self-esteem while the other HL learners placed in L2 classes did not. Lynch (2003) found that when HL learners are placed with L2 learners who have acquired more classroom knowledge of aspects of the language such as grammar, there can be detrimental consequences. When L2 learners outperform HL learners, it can be psychologically devastating and send the message to the HL learners that they do not know their own language and are therefore somehow “less” of a person than they should be. Carriera (2004) suggested a solution for the low self-esteem of HL learners. Teachers should strive to create a classroom culture where HL learners are seen as valuable resources for other students, and an atmosphere that is identity-affirming and empowering.

Kondo-Brown (2003) claimed that a strong relationship exists between HL learning and socio-cultural factors such as identity and the learners’ attitude toward the heritage group or language. However, HL instruction does not have a uniform effect on ethnic identity formation on all HL learners (Jo, 2002). As I have already discussed in this chapter, HL learners have additional identity and linguistic needs that may not be filled by HL learning (Carriera, 2004). Several authors emphasize the concept of power. Suarez (2002) conceptualizes HL maintenance as consisting of “resistance to linguistic hegemony,” placing the emphasis squarely on rebelling against the power associated with English. Along the same lines, Pomerantz (2002) believes that the beliefs about language we hold in the United States create an asymmetrical power relationship between HL learners and foreign language students, as was discussed in more detail in the Introduction Chapter.

Related to the idea of power, class also plays a role in HL instruction. Lynch (2003) found that middle class Mexican Americans in Texas tend to value and maintain Spanish language skills more than those of the lower class. This is probably because the

middle class HL speakers have attained equitable socioeconomic status, and from their viewpoint, Spanish is not an obstacle to economic success. On the contrary, they view Spanish as an aspect of their heritage and identity that should be maintained. However, Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang (2001) found that the upper class Mexican American families had children with lower Spanish language proficiency than lower class families. Clearly social class plays a complex role in the Mexican American community and may affect the degree of HL proficiency present.

Finally, certain methodological and curricular concerns unique to HL students should affect the way the classroom is run. Many researchers have given concrete suggestions about ways to teach HL learners. Some of these recommendations vary depending on which HL is being taught. For example, Matsunaga (2003) found that Japanese HL learners outperform non-HL learners in oral ability, but need more time to practice reading *Kanji*<sup>1</sup> than their Chinese classmates who were more familiar with reading *Kanji* but who needed to work on their speaking ability. Regarding vocabulary, Kondo-Brown (2003) recommended helping HL learners expand their vocabulary beyond personal/home/family words, while foreign language learners would need to spend more time on those types of words. Literacy instruction is another area that is unique for HL learners. Chevalier (2004) suggested that curriculum be organized so that HL students can initially draw on their knowledge of the spoken language when practicing their reading and writing. Van Duesen-Scholl (2003) agreed that acquisition of literacy is one of the special pedagogical needs of HL learners, in addition to having access to prestige varieties of the HL, developing academic language proficiency, and having a focus on grammatical accuracy. Instruction in writing specifically needs to be given sensitively, since research has shown that HL learners often experience high anxiety when asked to write in their HL (Tallon, 2006). Finally, HL learners would greatly benefit from instruction on the full range of stylistic choices available in their language (Chevalier,

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<sup>1</sup> One of the three scripts used in the Japanese language. Kanji is made up of Chinese characters

2004), the different registers that exist (Kondo-Brown, 2003), and dialectical differences (Martinez, 2003). Because of the great variation within any given language and because people carry assumptions about speakers of different language varieties, there needs to be discussion about the social functions of language in HL classes more than in other language classes (Martinez, 2003).

This discussion of the differences between foreign/second language learners and HL learners provides additional context in which this study can be understood. The participants' experiences were affected on some level by their unique motivations, self-esteem and identity needs, and the degree to which their teachers were able to meet the pedagogical requirements of teaching HL learners. The following section provides a brief history of study abroad and discusses the research with regard to language learning and minorities within the field.

## **STUDY ABROAD**

### **Study abroad: History**

The formalization of the study abroad concept began in the United States in the 1880s, when Indiana University began a summer study program in 1882. Soon thereafter, in 1898, Princeton started a volunteer program in Asia (Bolen, 2001). Study abroad programs then began to become more popular after the University of Delaware implemented its Junior Year Abroad program in 1923. The program was designed to promote cross-cultural understanding after World War I, and the first students went by boat to France (University of Delaware website). Since World War II, the quantity of study abroad programs as well as the number of participants in such programs have been steadily growing.

Barrutia wrote an article in 1971, however, claiming that many of these programs were not of high caliber and were designed more to encourage tourism than learning. Fulbright scholarships were established in 1946, but were only available to the elite in

academia, and study abroad in general was considered an option only available to the wealthy. Federal aid for study abroad explicitly became available to students in 1992. This innovation helped diversify the populations able to participate (Bolen, 2001).

During the 1990s, study abroad exploded as institutions of higher education became more interested in creating global citizens and internationalizing their curricula (Posey, 2003). According to the Lincoln Briefing (2004), U.S. students' participation in study abroad tripled between the mid-1980s and the 2002-2003 school year, to over 160,000 sojourners. In recent years those numbers have continued to grow. During the 2006-2007 school year, almost a quarter of a million American students studied abroad (Open Doors Report, 2008). More females than males study abroad, and there is an increasing trend toward shorter stays overseas. Historically, students went abroad for their entire junior year; currently over 90% of students who study abroad do so for a semester or less. Although the absolute numbers of students studying abroad has been steadily increasing, at this time, less than 1% of the undergraduate population studies abroad (Lincoln Briefing, 2004).

### **Study abroad and language learning**

The majority of the research conducted on study abroad has been completed since 1990. Prior to that time, most of what was written about study abroad was merely program description or opinion about the impact of study abroad on foreign language learners that was not backed up by research (Kline, 1998). Most study abroad research has utilized quantitative or mixed methods. This literature review will focus specifically on research that examines language learning in study abroad, not on other areas that are frequently investigated in the field such as health abroad, intercultural sensitivity, culture shock, or the impact of the study abroad experience on future employment or the likelihood to study abroad again.

A common claim is that studying abroad results in language gains for students (Freed, 1995) and for language teachers who go abroad (Rissel, 1995; Thompson, 2002).

The June 2004 issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* explored the link between language acquisition and context, comparing the learning of an L2 in a foreign language class, in an immersion program within the United States, and in a study abroad program. The articles in the issue focused on the acquisition of oral fluency (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004), morphosyntactic and lexical development (Collentine, 2004), phonology (Díaz-Campos, 2004), reading ability (Dewey, 2004), and on the use of communication strategies (Lafford, 2004) in the three different contexts. Taken together, these studies showed that there is no one “best” context for language learning that is superior for all students and for all aspects of language acquisition. The study abroad context appears to be better for lexical acquisition, narrative ability, and oral fluency, but to not be better for phonological and morphosyntactic control. These findings are supported by previous research. Students in the immersion program context performed better than in the study abroad context in some aspects of language acquisition because immersion is a more controlled environment, where rules regarding language use are often imposed more rigorously. In addition, when students are abroad they often choose to interact mostly with other Americans in English instead of in the target language (Collentine & Freed, 2004).

Other researchers have sought to determine the roles gender, attitude, and student characteristics play in the acquisition of language abroad. Two studies of students learning Russian abroad found that males experienced more linguistic gains than women (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1993; Ginsberg, 1992). Polanyi (1995) found by looking at the qualitative data from these studies that the reason women had more difficulty is because they had to constantly fend off advances from aggressive Russian men and were therefore missing out on more productive interactions with native speakers. Siegal (1994, 1995) also found gender differences in language acquisition abroad. She found that women have more difficulty learning Japanese abroad than men because the pragmatic norms women need to learn to speak Japanese properly are more complicated than the

ones men need to learn. While gender can play a role in language acquisition abroad, students' attitude is also important. Having a negative attitude toward the target language and culture can affect language acquisition in undesirable ways (Wilkinson, 1998; Newmark, 1990; Brecht & Robinson, 1995). And finally, Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg found that several student characteristics are significant predictors of successful language learning during study abroad, including, not surprisingly, knowledge of another foreign language and strong pre-program L2 reading and grammar knowledge.

A major difference that separates both HL learning and learning language in a study abroad setting from traditional foreign language learning is the exposure most HL learners and study abroad participants have to the target language outside of the classroom. Most students, teachers, and researchers hold the opinion that study abroad is an effective means of second language acquisition (SLA) in part because of the extensive opportunities it offers for authentic communication and personal interaction with native speakers (Pellegrino, 1998). The same rich learning environment often exists for HL speakers in the United States as well. A common belief in SLA research is that the more opportunity learners have to participate in "negotiation of meaning" with native speakers, the more chance they have to improve their language abilities (Long, 1996; Gass & Selinker, 1994). According to Ellis (1994), there is some support for the claim that exposure to language in informal settings enhances what is learned through formal instruction. Yager (1998) and Levin (2001) demonstrated that students who have more informal interactive contact with native speakers show more linguistic gains than those who have less contact.

However, not all research agrees that interaction with target language speakers in informal settings is necessarily beneficial (Potowski, 2004; Freed, 1995). Wilkinson (2002) studied students' interactions with target language speakers and found by using qualitative methods that the interactions students had with their hosts were patterned after classroom interactions. Students did not have enough practice in initiating real

conversations, changing topics, or other aspects of authentic communication, which often frustrated both the students and their hosts. This contributed to a negative attitude on the part of some students who subsequently made less effort to interact with their hosts. So it is not only the amount of contact with the target language outside of class but the nature of those interactions which determines the linguistic gains made. Studies by Spada (1985, 1986) and Freed (1990) found that beginning and intermediate level learners benefited most from interactive contact with the target language outside the classroom, while advanced level students found non-interactive contact outside of the classroom (books, newspapers, radio, TV, etc.) to be more beneficial. As a consequence, the role informal interaction with target language speakers plays is unclear, and it may depend on the participants' proficiency levels and attitudes toward the language. However, because it is commonly believed that language learners need to seek out opportunities to interact with target speakers if they want to become fluent, the participants in this study made interaction with speakers outside of the classroom a primary goal while they were abroad. Those who did not interact as much as they had wanted with native speakers returned with feelings of regret.

### **Study abroad and minorities**

Research has shown that minority students of all types are underrepresented among those who study abroad (Hembroff & Rusz, 1993). Eighty-two percent of students going abroad are Caucasian, but only 68% of the undergraduate population in the United States is Caucasian (Open Doors Report, 2002). Although this section focuses on the experiences of African Americans and HL learners who study abroad, it also touches on studies about women and the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) community abroad. This is because other ways of being a minority that are not related to ethnicity can affect the participants' experience by compounding the difficulties or heightening the joys of the sojourn. While not immediately relevant to this paper, religious minorities have also been the subjects of study abroad research (Resnick, 1998;

Sanders & Morgan, 2002), as have people with disabilities (Johnson, 2000; Hameister, Matthews, Holsey, & Coffin Groff, 1999).

### ***Gender and sexual orientation***

A few studies on minorities who studied abroad address gender. One investigated the experience of women (Twombly, 1995) and another the LGBT community (Sanderson, 2002). Twombly found in her study in Costa Rica that being a woman affected the study abroad experience in negative ways. Her female participants felt alienated due to the constant *piropos*<sup>2</sup> they had to deal with and the difficulty they had making female Costa Rican friends, although she does not discuss how this affected their language acquisition. Sanderson set out to determine what effects sexual orientation may have on the study abroad experience. He did not reveal any concrete findings indicating the experience was significantly different, but he found that students were not getting enough pre-departure information on LGBT issues relevant to the countries in which they were studying.

### ***African Americans***

More work has been done on the experiences of African Americans who study abroad. One study looks at an African American in Spain; four other studies examined African Americans studying in Africa, which is more of a heritage context.

Talburt and Stewart (1999) conducted an ethnographic study of a group of students studying in Spain, one of whom was an African American female. This student developed a negative attitude toward Spanish culture because she had difficulties adjusting to the *piropos*, which she believed were aimed at her more often than at the Anglo Americans with whom she was studying. She brought up this complaint during one of her classes and the authors analyzed the ensuing classroom discussion in their article. The authors found that this discussion helped the other students think about their

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<sup>2</sup> These are flirtatious, sometimes vulgar comments directed at women by male strangers

white privileged status in Spain and about the differences in race relations between the United States and Spain – topics that would not have been discussed had the student not brought the matter to the attention of the teachers.

Day-Vines (1998) completed a mixed methods dissertation on African Americans studying in Ghana. She administered tests before and after the trip to determine if the students experienced changes in racial identity development or intercultural development. The qualitative portion of her study revealed that both types of development were promoted by the time spent in Ghana in ways that were not measurable by the quantitative methods. Also, students reported that their experiences with the host culture were liberating. Similarly, Hutchins (1996) found that the two African American women in her study who spent time in Africa experienced an increase in self-esteem and an improvement in their sense of identity as a result of the experience.

Another qualitative study on African American females who studied in Africa was conducted by Morgon, Mwegelo, and Turner (2002). One student expressed difficulty understanding why the Africans who welcomed them did not perceive the deep meaning the sojourn held for the participants as disenfranchised women of African descent who were looking to Africa for a link to their lost culture. The African American students were instead seen simply as Americans who had money to purchase handicrafts. Another woman, in contrast, felt that she was able to establish a cultural connection which was a source of strength for her, especially because she previously felt secluded from her own race because she lacked a comprehensive understanding of Africans and people of African descent from all over the world. This trip to West Africa helped her gain more understanding in that area.

Finally, Landau and Moore (2001) compared the experiences of Anglo American and African American undergraduates in Ghana. They found that, in general, the Anglo Americans were received with more enthusiasm. The authors attributed this to media portrayals of African Americans as lazy criminals and to the indifference many

Ghanaians have regarding the slave trade. Because of this, the African Americans did not receive the warm homecoming they expected.

Unlike the majority of the studies involving Asian and Hispanic students discussed below, none of the studies on African Americans cited above were able address the experiences of learning a HL. Few African Americans have families that immigrated recently enough that their HL is still spoken in the home. Some similarities exist between the experiences of African Americans and HL learners, however, such as their being immersed in their heritage culture, the expectations that the host culture might have of them, their personal motivations for the sojourn, and the degree of connection they might feel with their hosts.

### *Asian and Hispanic heritage language learners*

This last section discussing studies dealing with minorities studying abroad is focused on Asian Americans and Hispanics who chose to study abroad. Van Der Meid (2003) examined why and where Asian Americans (not necessarily HL speakers) choose to study abroad. He found that the most popular destination is England (22%) followed by Taiwan (10%). Most of the other top countries where Asian American students choose to study are in Asia, which is different from the pattern found among the general study abroad population. Among the general population of study abroad students, only one Asian country (China) is among the top ten destinations (Open Doors Report, 2008). Of the reasons Van Der Meid found for deciding to study abroad, the desire to improve language skills was ranked third and the desire to learn about one's own cultural roots ranked fifth. He also reported that most Asian American students who studied abroad faced at least one major challenge. These included homesickness, racial discrimination, communication issues, and difficulty adjusting to the lack of a structured environment. His participants also indicated that they did not have the extra support they needed while abroad. Another study on Asian Americans sought to determine how study abroad impacts Asian American family relationships and racial identity. The quantitative

analysis concluded there was no impact. However, qualitative interviews, which were discussed for only a few pages of the dissertation, indicated improved parent-child relationships because students better understood their parents culturally after being abroad, and students were more fluent so they could better communicate with their parents in the native language (Ng, 2003).

A few studies of HL learners provide qualitative analyses of HL learners' experiences abroad. Tse (1997) examined what Asian American students had to say about the time they spent abroad learning their HL and exploring their identity and ethnicity. She found that the more time the students spent abroad, the less they felt as if they belonged there. The students struggled with feeling inadequate because they looked like they could speak the language but they could not. One limitation of her study is that she used published accounts and therefore could not ask additional questions or obtain clarifications from her "participants."

Beausoleil (2008) completed a mixed-methods study on students from California schools studying in Korea. Many of the students in her study were Korean American and Korean HL learners. The findings from the qualitative part of her study indicated that the participants dealt with complex ethnic identity issues related to the influence of family, student expectations, and determining the definition of Korean American heritage.

Rogers (2002) studied college-aged Portuguese HL learners in the Azores, a group of islands in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean between Europe and North America. He was interested in what the students learned about culture, their identity abroad, and the limitations of the American K-12 curriculum in providing them encouragement to learn about their culture and identity. Rogers had very little focus on the participants' beliefs about language learning or attitudes toward the language, which was interesting given the close relationship that exists among culture, identity (the foci of his study), and language.

The studies by Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2000) and McLaughlin (2001), which were briefly discussed in the introduction chapter, examined Mexican American HL learners. The participants in the two studies had very different experiences studying Spanish in Mexico with respect to their identity development, confidence, and language acquisition. It is possible that some of these differences are because the students in Riegelhaupt and Carrasco's study were Spanish teachers in the States, and therefore their Mexican hosts had higher expectations of them, while the students in McLaughlin's study were still undergraduate students. Because of this, the McLaughlin study is more relevant to my own. Her participants' attitudes toward Spanish, their heritage, and their identity improved, and they found ways to reconcile their Mexican identity, American identity, and Mexican American identity as a result of their time abroad. The McLaughlin study helps provide a focus for my own because it confirms that I need to explore if and how the participants reconcile the various parts of their identities. It also shows that I need to look at the influence that the study abroad semester has on participants' attitudes toward language learning and their heritage.

### ***Study abroad and heritage language learners: Conclusion***

In the existing research that has been conducted on minorities who study abroad, there is little examination of language learning in any depth. Only six qualitative studies have addressed the experiences of HL learners abroad. These six studies have examined Mexican Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Americans in general, and students with Azorean heritage. Because my dissertation research does not focus on a specific nationality or ethnic group, it helps illuminate commonalities and differences among experiences of HL learners who study abroad generally. In addition, because of the discourse analytic approach taken in the dissertation, I am able to explore the ways in which the participants talk about their identity development, motivations, expectations, and language and language learning ideologies in more depth than previous studies have done.

The final two sections of this literature review, discussing beliefs about language learning and ethnic identity development, serve as background on topics that were relevant to the participants in this study.

### **BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Researchers define “beliefs” to be psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are held to be true (Richardson, 1996). Our life experiences, previous education, and socialization contribute to the beliefs we hold, and at the same time, our beliefs often have an impact on our subsequent learning (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Research on language learning beliefs started around the mid-1980s. A few studies have been qualitative in nature and have examined the beliefs of only a small number of learners (e.g., Wenden, 1986; Barcelos, 1995), while most of the studies have been conducted with closed-choice questionnaires and are thus quantitative. The initial survey, Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), was developed by Horwitz (1987, 1988) and focused on five major areas of beliefs: foreign language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations. This inventory has been modified and used by many researchers to study groups of students and teachers with varying nationalities, first languages, and target languages.

In 1999, Horwitz wrote an article that synthesized the research that had been done to date with her instrument (BALLI) and found that there did not seem to be clear-cut differences in language learning beliefs due to culture. However, she hypothesized that different beliefs may have more to do with age, stage of learning, professional status, or learning circumstances. Interestingly, another factor that might affect the difference in beliefs is the relative status of language learning in the different countries where studies were conducted. Huang and Tsai (2003) found that proficiency level is related to different beliefs, so students who have higher proficiency usually have more positive beliefs about language learning.

Some of the specific aspects of beliefs that have been examined include students' notions about the following: the importance of accent; the effect of previous language learning experiences; whether one gender is better than the other at learning language; the difference between student and teacher beliefs; the role of the teacher in learning; the role of feedback, practice, interaction, memorization, and entertainment in the L2; and the learners' sense of self-efficacy. Yang (1999) divided students' beliefs into two parts: the metacognitive dimension and the motivational dimension. The meta-cognitive dimension includes what learners know about themselves as L2 learners (proficiency, aptitude, learning style, etc.), what learners think about the task of learning the L2 (difficulty and nature of language learning), and what they believe about how best to learn a second language (learning strategies). The motivational dimension includes the learners' expectations about their ability to learn, their goals for learning, and their emotional reactions to second language learning. Kuntz (1999) reminds us that beliefs change over time; some will strengthen and some will weaken. For instance, the belief that children learn languages more easily than adults intensified over time among the participants in her study.

This focus on beliefs is important because beliefs play a role in if and how people choose to learn a language. Exploring beliefs about both language learning and identity is important in studies on HL learning. When interviewing the participants and analyzing the data, I looked for evidence of the various aspects of beliefs about language learning that have been identified in previous research. My study's sub-focus on the language learning beliefs of American students who decide to learn language in the context of study abroad is unique. Additionally, none of the studies I read have differentiated specifically between the language learning ideologies of HL learners and other learners. Finally, because I used discourse analysis to investigate learners' beliefs, which is advocated by Kalaja (1995), I was able to delve more thoroughly into the ways learners

talk about and frame their beliefs and how they use them to provide support for their feelings and experiences.

## **ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

Ethnic identity refers to the sense of identification a person feels with his or her culture of origin based on a shared sense of history, traditions, and language (Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu, 1995). The issue of ethnic identity is particularly salient for students whose parents are immigrants (Rumbaut, 1994). This is due to the fact that they have been socialized by parents who carry with them the language, values, and customs from their country of origin, but they have been educated by the American school system which emphasizes American customs, values, and English proficiency (Phinney, et al., 2001). This dual socialization results in complicated identity formation and negotiation for HL students.

In conducting this literature review, I found that the terms “identity formation,” “identity development,” and “identity integration” are often used to refer to the process that people go through as they become aware of and negotiate the different identities they have and determine which ones they will foreground as they go through life. The term “identity integration” refers specifically to the intersections between race, gender, class, sexuality, and age, and suggests that as individuals mature they will seek to continually use those identities harmoniously, not oppositionally or hierarchically. However, this task is made more difficult when people are faced with racism, oppression, or the invalidation of one of their identities, which is typical of the minority experience (Stewart, 2002). Reynolds and Pope (1991) propose four patterns of identity resolution:

1. Identification with only one aspect of the self that is assigned by society;
2. Identification with only one aspect of the self that is chosen by the individual;
3. Identification with multiple aspects of the self in a segmented fashion; and
4. Identification with combined aspects of life.

Language is an important element in identity development. Researchers have found that foreign language study, whether performed in classroom or natural settings, is bound to issues of learner identity formation, contestation, and transitioning (Belz, 2003). Despite this, I found studies that sought to develop models of ethnic identity development in minorities that did not include language, such as a study of Asian Pacific American college students by Kawaguchi (2003) and one by Brown and Smirles (2003) concerning American Indian ethnic identity. Cano-Gomez (1991) is one researcher who did take language into account in a study of Mexican American university students. The participants in the study had undergone a period during childhood where they wanted to be associated with the majority group and stopped speaking Spanish. This changed after they entered college and came to value their Spanish proficiency as an important component of their ethnic identity.

Tse's (1997) dissertation study found that HL attitudes may be determined in large part by the stages of ethnic identity formation. She created a model that demonstrates the relationship between HL attitudes and ethnic identity development. It has four parts:

STAGE 1: Unawareness of ethnic identity and language minority status.

STAGE 2: Ambivalence toward/evasion of identification with minority culture and language. In this stage, the student prefers to identify with the majority culture and use the majority language.

STAGE 3: Ethnic emergence. Identity and ethnicity are explored; the student wants to learn more of the student's heritage language.

STAGE 4: Ethnic identity incorporation. The student has a positive attitude toward his or her heritage language, and has come to terms with the level of proficiency he or she has, the level he or she can attain, and what is required by the group the student either has or desires to have membership in.

Another model of cultural identity formation was developed by Parra Cardona, Busby, and Wampler (2004) specifically with Latinos in mind. The categories in this

model are not meant to be moved through in a sequential manner. Movement can depend partly on what is happening in the person's environment. The categories are as follow:

CATEGORY 1. Original culture identification: Individuals might live in the United States but will consider themselves as nationals of their birth country. In this category, immigrants do not want to identify themselves with many elements of the host culture.

CATEGORY 2. New country cultural identification: Individuals consider themselves citizens of the new country and do not want to incorporate many elements of the original culture and might even reject it.

CATEGORY 3. Original cultural identification open to expand: Individuals in this category will continue to consider themselves as nationals of their birth country and will be open to incorporate elements of the host culture.

CATEGORY 4. New country cultural identification open to expand: Individuals consider themselves citizens of the new country and are willing to incorporate elements of a second culture.

CATEGORY 5. Integrated identification: This category includes individuals who have been able to incorporate elements from both cultures and whose identity is based on such integration.

Finally, a study by Jo (2002) on Korean HL learners found that identity formation is not always the same for everyone. She found that the actual interaction with the language was complexly and heterogeneously experienced among the participants, especially in relation to the ethnic identity formation process. Participants' language proficiency and cultural preferences located them on different places along a continuum of Koreanness vs. Americanness. Along the same lines, Hornberger (2005) suggested that ethnic identity is fluid and constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in different contexts, especially in the adolescent years.

In summary, there is a developmental process of minority ethnic identity exploration that involves language and is related to other variables such as context and class (Phinney et al., 2001). Ethnic identity development, along with many of the other variables discussed in this literature review, affected the experiences the participants had and the ways in which they talked about themselves before, during, and after their sojourn abroad.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### INTRODUCTION

This study employed qualitative and discourse analytic methods to explore and gain understanding of the experiences of seventeen heritage language (HL) learners who chose to study abroad in order to improve their proficiency in their HL. The purpose of this study is to highlight the complexities associated with learning a HL abroad, specifically with regard to identity, expectations, and beliefs about language and language learning, by examining the ways that learners talk about their experiences and beliefs.

Among the research that has been conducted on minorities who study abroad, there is little examination of the experiences of HL learners in any depth. The few qualitative studies that address the experiences of HL learners abroad each focus on only one ethnicity or heritage language. Because my dissertation research does not focus on a specific nationality or ethnic group, it will help explore the general experience of HL learners who study abroad. Both study abroad and courses designed to meet the needs of HL learners are becoming more popular. It is my hope that the findings of this dissertation will give study abroad advisors and teachers of HL students ideas about additional topics to cover in their classes and advising sessions that may help their HL students make decisions about whether and where to study abroad, as well as help students think meaningfully about the experiences they have while learning their heritage language.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is the following:

**What is the study abroad experience like for American undergraduates who are heritage language learners?**

Specific questions that I will be addressing are as follows:

1. Why do the participants decide to study abroad? What factors play a role in their decision to study abroad? What difficulties related to culture, identity, and language ideology do they experience as they go through the study abroad process? How are these experiences advantageous?
2. What are the participants' beliefs about heritage language learning? According to the learners, how do American society and their heritage language culture view heritage language learning? How do these beliefs affect their decision to improve proficiency in their heritage language?
3. How do the participants talk about themselves as heritage language learners both in the United States and abroad? Does their study abroad experience result in a shift in the way they discuss who they are, and if so, in what ways?

These research questions were formed based on what I learned from a preliminary study that I conducted on the same topic as well as from previous research conducted on HL learners. The preliminary study will be discussed in detail further below in this chapter.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### **Definition of heritage language learners**

Many different ways of defining HL learners have been used in the literature, as was discussed in the previous chapter. For this study, I used four criteria to determine whether potential participants fit the requirements of this study with regard to HL learner status:

- First, they must not have attended school (K-12) in their HL country for more than two years, although they may have been born in either the United States or abroad.
- Second, they must have been exposed to their parents' or grandparents' native language at home; first exposure to the HL must have been outside of the

classroom setting. More specifically, at least one family member that the participants grew up living with must speak the HL fluently and daily, even if it is not with the students themselves.

- Third, they must have at least a basic oral comprehension of the HL, although they may or may not be able to orally produce the language themselves. Their oral comprehension must be at least equivalent to that of a student who has completed one year of undergraduate foreign language classes.
- Fourth, they must not define themselves as balanced bilinguals in most situations. Instead, the participants must have a definite preference for English under most circumstances.

These criteria used to define HL learners for my study incorporate elements of the definitions of HL learners given by Valdés (2001), Kondo-Brown (2003), Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), Brecht and Ingold (2002), and Lynch (2003). I restricted my definition in this way because I specifically wanted the participants to not be foreign language learners or simply students “brushing up” on their first language as they study abroad. Students who are of mixed ethnicity and/or who have multiple heritage languages were considered for the study, provided they met the four criteria listed above.

### **Access to participants**

I sought participants from both Rice University in Houston, Texas and the University of Texas at Austin. Because I majored in Spanish at Rice University and participated in its study abroad program, I have connections in its study abroad office, with foreign language professors, and with student organizations that facilitated the participant search. I also have some connections at the University of Texas because I am a doctoral candidate in its Foreign Language Education program. The fact that University of Texas has one of the largest study abroad programs in the country and that the undergraduate population is ethnically diverse, also made it a good choice for

participant recruitment. In addition, because Houston and Austin are relatively close to each other, I knew I would be able to meet with participants from both schools when I traveled to Texas to conduct research. When I contacted the directors of the study abroad offices at both universities, they expressed a willingness to help me with my research, and they believed I would be able to find a sufficient number of participants to complete my study.

To find HL learners who were planning to study abroad, I contacted many individuals and groups on both campuses by email. I recruited participants in two waves. I sent the first wave of emails in February and March of 2007. To recruit participants in the first wave at the University of Texas I emailed peers in my Foreign Language Education program (since they often have contact with undergraduates who are studying foreign languages), professors I knew from both the German and Spanish departments, a friend who leads a large campus student organization, the study abroad office, and the business school's international office. These contacts forwarded my email to potential participants who they have contact with. To recruit participants in the first wave at Rice University I emailed the university's study abroad office, the secretaries of all nine dormitories, five foreign language department heads, and the student leaders of twenty-six clubs. All of the clubs that I contacted had a link to language or culture in some way and included groups such as the Black Student Association, Chinese Student Association, French Club, Hillel, Iranian Society, and South Asian Society. I contacted student organizations and foreign language departments was because HL learners may be more likely than foreign language learners to travel to their heritage country without going through a study abroad office.

The second wave of participant recruitment occurred in October 2007 after I determined that I needed additional participants to provide a more diverse and representative sample for the study. I contacted the study abroad office and business school international program at the University of Texas and the study abroad office and

Spanish department at Rice University, as these groups were able to help me recruit the most participants during the first wave. As I begin to make contact with prospective participants, I requested that they inform their friends and classmates who fit the criteria for participation about the project, thus making use of snowball sampling (Berg, 2004). I do not know if any of the participants, however, were recruited in that way.

In my recruitment emails I provided a description of my research, an invitation for HL learners to participate in my study, and a link to a web page survey I had developed to collect data on potential participants. The web survey was hosted for free at [www.hostedsurvey.com](http://www.hostedsurvey.com). When a student completed the survey a copy was sent to my email address. This survey was intended only to help me determine if a student would fit my study; it was not designed to collect any actual data for the study. I chose to collect prospective participant information in this way because the web survey allowed me to create drop-down answer choices, thereby making it easier for students to respond. The text of the email request for participants and the web survey questions are provided in Appendix A.

### **Participant selection**

In total, twenty undergraduate students responded to my emails requesting participants. Two of the respondents did not qualify for the study. One of these students was not planning to go abroad. The other was determined to be a balanced bilingual and not a HL learner; she had attended school for eight years in Korea and was planning to return for a semester abroad. An additional student responded to my request to set up an initial interview but cancelled it and then never re-scheduled it with me. Consequently, my study involved seventeen participants.

This dissertation takes into consideration data from all seventeen participants. One of these students completed the first interview and then decided not to go abroad due to unrest in his heritage country (Israel). Two participants completed the initial interview, went abroad, and did not respond to my requests for a second interview after

they returned. One of these students, however, did return one email reflection. I decided to include these participants in the study's data set because I was still able to learn about these participants' expectations and concerns regarding being immersed in their heritage languages abroad before they left and I found their interviews to be insightful. Finally, one of the seventeen students contacted me while she was already abroad and asked to be part of the study. I collected email reflections from this participant and then conducted one, longer interview after the participant returned from her study abroad experience instead of two separate interviews.

In total, thirteen participants studied abroad and completed both the first and second interview. Interestingly, two of these students also studied abroad in a non-HL country at some point during the same year they were part of my study. I asked these two participants extra questions to evaluate how their experiences studying in a heritage country and in a non-heritage country compared.

I accounted for attrition as I made decisions about how much participant recruiting to conduct. I had expected that if the study began with fifteen to twenty participants, approximately twelve to fifteen continue until the end. This proved to be an accurate estimate.

To determine how many participants to include in the study, I read dissertations that used discursive psychology as their main approach to analysis to determine how many participants those authors had utilized. For example, Woodard (2003) studied eight participants in his dissertation and conducted two to three interviews with each of them. Brock (2000) and Johnson (2006) also studied eight participants. Brock conducted two hour-long interviews with each of her participants and Johnson conducted one hour-long interview with each participant and also taped fifteen hours of seminar discussions they had. Sheep (2006) included twenty interviewees in his dissertation study that used discursive psychology. Thus, my study with roughly 17 participants (13 of which completed all aspects of data collection) is a few more participants than most similar

dissertation studies. Part of the reason I determined that this number of participants was appropriate for my study is that I needed to have small sub-groups of participants who fit into subcategories based on HL or ethnicity, and it would have been difficult to accomplish this if I had recruited fewer participants.

Because one of my objectives was to gain insight into the study abroad experience of HL learners in general (rather than simply speakers of one specific language), I intended for my study sample to involve at least three different heritage languages. In the end, a total of eight heritage languages were represented among the seventeen participants. I sought participants who had oral comprehension of their HL at least equal to that of someone who has completed the first year of language courses at the college level. To determine their level of proficiency during my initial contact with prospective participants, I asked about language courses they had taken in high school and college and I asked them to conduct a brief self-assessment of their ability to interact with native speakers and to read HL texts. The students in my study were studying either in their heritage country or in another country where their HL is spoken.

After I identified a group of students who were interested in participating in the research and determined which individuals qualified for the study, I decided to accept all of those who qualified into the study. I had initially developed a list of criteria to help me select diverse participants (based on gender, HL background, etc.). I realized, however, that if I included everyone who qualified I would have enough participants to complete data collection in fourteen months. In addition, I found that the students who expressed interest in participating in the study already represented a good mix of students.

A summary of the final breakdown of participant backgrounds is as follows: five males and twelve females; nine students from Rice University and eight from University of Texas, seven spoke Spanish, four spoke Mandarin, and one participant each spoke Hebrew, Tigrinya, French, German, Korean, and Cantonese; six studied in Asia, four studied in North America, Central America, or the Caribbean, three studied in Europe,

two studied in Africa, one studied in South America, and one planned to study in the Middle East. Finally, the seventeen students studied in a total of fourteen different HL countries: Mexico, Spain, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Korea, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Germany, Mali, Eritrea, Singapore, China, Taiwan, and one participant planned to study in Israel but was unable to do so.

Because this study was longitudinal, I provided \$20 gift cards to participants who participated for the duration of the study. They chose the store that they wanted the gift card from during the first interview and I gave them the gift card they had requested when I met with them for the second interview. This gift simply served as a token of appreciation and a bit of motivation for the students to continue their participation in the study. Giving small gifts such as these is a relatively common practice in educational research. Please see Appendix B for a copy of the participant consent form and other information that participants received.

### **THE RESEARCHER**

I am a Caucasian female originally from the Midwestern United States. I lived in a small town in Texas, on the border of Mexico, during junior high school and high school. Until junior high school, my Spanish proficiency was limited to vocabulary I had learned on Sesame Street. In our house, my parents occasionally used German phrases that they had learned in high school and college German classes. Although my heritage on both sides of my family is mainly German, no one in my family speaks it as a heritage language. My great-grandparents were the last ones to have any exposure to German in the home.

In Texas, most of my friends in school were Mexican or Mexican American; I heard Spanish on a daily basis. I did not learn much of the language other than some slang and the ability to pronounce Spanish words better than typical *gringos*. In college I decided to study abroad in Spain for semester. When I returned I declared a Spanish major. Most of my volunteer and work experiences during college and graduate school

involved interacting with and teaching minorities, immigrants, and international students from all over the world. For example, I taught science to inner-city African American and Hispanic junior high students in Houston, and I have taught English as a Second Language (ESL) on various occasions to international students and immigrants from countries including Mexico, Ecuador, Chile, China, Korea, Turkey, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, Austria, and South Africa.

Because my husband was born in Colombia, I now have a Hispanic last name and Hispanic family.

Although I am not an ethnic minority in this country, I had hoped to be able to connect with the participants in my study on some level because of my experiences living with people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds here in the United States and because of the time I spent studying abroad. I am a strong advocate of study abroad and enjoy discussing it with high school and college students. In addition, since attending high school on the border of Mexico and learning about border culture, I have had an interest in border crossings, both geographical and metaphorical. I hypothesized that the participants would deal with feeling like they are not quite part of American culture yet not quite part of their heritage culture either (much like the people with whom I attended high school). Heritage language learners cross metaphorical borders every day as they go between home and school, since borderlands exist anywhere people of different cultures, races, or classes occupy the same territory (Anzaldúa, 1999). The students that are the focus of this study also crossed physical, geographical borders during this research project as they went abroad to study their HL.

During the 2005-2006 school year, I taught high school Spanish full-time in a small city in Southwestern Idaho. Roughly half of my students were of Mexican descent and most of these were HL learners. I found throughout the year that I was able to connect with my HL students because of the knowledge I had gained while living in South Texas during high school. Likewise, I am hopeful that I was able to establish

relationships with the participants which made them comfortable enough to share openly with me about their beliefs and experiences to some extent. Something else that helped me establish these relationships was the fact that I interviewed the participants both before and after their study abroad trips. Most of the students were noticeably more comfortable and talkative during the second interview as compared to the first interview because by that time we had established familiarity and rapport.

While in my master's program, I was a participant in a dissertation that involved an interview. The interviewer did not ask many follow-up questions, did not offer her thoughts or experiences, and tended to ignore any tangential topics that I brought up. This did not encourage me to share more with her. By asking open-ended questions and encouraging personal narratives, I aimed to create an interview environment that was conversational in nature to help the participants feel at ease. I hoped to encourage them to explore their beliefs and experiences in a thoughtful way and to share ideas about personal, sensitive topics such as identity. To help facilitate sharing, I was willing to carefully share parts of my experiences and thoughts with them so that they could get to know me better as well. I also encouraged the participants to tell stories and ask me questions if they wished.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Rationale for using qualitative methodology**

According to Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000), the selection of a research paradigm should depend on the researcher's personal goals and training in addition to a consideration of what paradigm best matches the research questions. Merriam (1998) added that personal qualities should play a role as well. Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) offered the reminder that previous research on the topic should also help determine whether the study will be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. All of these

considerations contributed to my decision to employ qualitative research methods in my study.

The study fits well within the qualitative research paradigm because my aim was to gain a deeper, richer understanding of the experience of a small number of students while they were studying abroad. I was able to learn how they talk about themselves, their identities, their language proficiency, and their time abroad, and I examined underlying issues that informed the way they discuss these topics. I could not have obtained this type of nuanced, thick description of the participants' experiences and insights into their beliefs by having them simply complete a survey or take a test. Conducting qualitative research allowed me to have access to the information that I needed to answer the research questions.

I have been personally interested in questions that can be answered through qualitative methods since early in my undergraduate career, as evidenced by the fact that Anthropology was one of my majors. One of the characteristics of a good qualitative researcher is being someone who listens intently and asks good questions (Merriam, 1998). Often, my preferred way to interact with people is by doing just that. I thoroughly enjoy it when friends and family are willing to share about their lives and let me ask as many questions as I want. Listening to their stories allows me to put their behavior into context and helps me understand their actions, which is what Seidman (1998) says interviewing is all about. In addition, I am aware of and comfortable with the ambiguity (Merriam, 1998) and complexity that is inherent in qualitative research. Throughout this dissertation I try to share my thought process as I chose participants, conducted interviews, and analyzed the data so that the reader can learn more about that background information, and be able to judge whether my research is useful. Although helpful in quantitative research, sharing information like this is essential in qualitative research.

## **Rationale for discursive psychology as the approach to analysis**

Discursive psychology is a form of discourse analysis that started to emerge in the early 1980s (Stubbe et al., 2003). It draws from the fields of conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, semiology, and speech act theory (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) in its attempt to provide an alternative approach for exploring social psychological phenomena such as identity, attitude, prejudice, and beliefs. Discursive psychology was developed within the field of psychology; Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell, Derek Edwards, Stephanie Taylor, Simeon J. Yates, Michael Billig, and Rom Harré are all credited with contributing to its foundation.

Traditional qualitative research generally views talk and texts as being static, transparent representations of the inner states of the participants (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discursive psychology, however, does not assume that speakers are neutral sources of information or that meanings are fixed. Instead, its goal is to observe how speakers present themselves and their ideas in purposeful ways as they attempt to describe and defend their beliefs, decisions, and experiences. In doing so, speakers often seem to contradict themselves or to draw upon competing strains of thought and produce accounts with significant variability. This variability is not a problem for discursive psychology because the approach is not concerned with whether accounts are “accurate” descriptions of mental states or not. Instead, its focus is on understanding why people construct their accounts in the ways they do and the consequences of those constructions. In short, discursive psychology allows researchers to approach discourse as the complex, sometimes incongruous, socially constructed phenomenon that it is.

In adopting discursive psychology as an approach to qualitative research, some of its tenets about discourse need to be explained. According to Potter and Edwards (2001), discourse is situated, action-oriented, and constructed. By saying discourse is situated, the authors mean that the occurrences and meanings of utterances depend in part on context (who is present, what type of interaction it is, what other topics have been

discussed, power dynamics among participants, etc.). Describing discourse as action-oriented means that it is used by speakers to accomplish certain things. For example, statements about race are often made in a way that positions the speaker as distant from racist sentiments and as simply stating facts. This positioning is an accomplishment. Edley (2001) agreed that discourse should be viewed as being action-oriented. His research demonstrated the fluidity of gender identities and how they are largely accomplished as people talk with one another. Depending on context, speakers may want to accomplish a variety of positionings with regard to the same topic. The result is that at times their utterances are contradictory. Viewing discourse in this way can help make sense of the sometimes perplexing variability in the way people speak. Finally, discursive psychology views discourse as both constructed and constructive. By this, Potter and Edwards mean that speakers use words to construct an external representation of their internal thoughts, beliefs, motivations, etc.; and, at the same time, the words speakers use can help form and solidify these internal ideas. In addition, saying that discourse is constructed means that speakers draw upon pre-existing phrases, idioms, sayings, and chunks of language when they speak. They actively choose the linguistic resources they draw on to construct their position.

Discursive psychology is concerned with the various linguistic resources available to speakers, the operation of power, and the situated orientation of discourse. It focuses on three different elements in data analysis in order to explore these concepts. These elements are interpretive repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and subject positions (Edley, 2001).

Interpretive repertoires are different ways of talking about a topic through the use of vocabulary and metaphor. Often, these ways of talking about a topic are part of recognizable routines (they consist of “what everyone knows” about the topic) and are the building blocks that people use in order to think about and discuss their particular version of the world (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

Ideological dilemmas refer to the way these different ways of talking have developed together as opposing positions in an unfolding, historical exchange. Generally, people's discourse is highly variable and inconsistent when discussing any given topic, depending on context. This variability allows for ideological dilemmas to arise as people argue and puzzle over the competing threads (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). Classic examples of ideological dilemmas include the sayings "Look before you leap" versus "He who hesitates is lost," and "Many hands make light work" versus "Too many cooks spoil the broth." Because these repertoires are in opposition to each other, hence causing ideological dilemmas, they are rich and flexible resources for making sense out of life, which itself is often contradictory, or at least not straight-forward (Edley, 2001).

Finally, subject positions refer to how people are drawn into certain positions or identities by discourse and create positions for themselves through discourse. The positions that are chosen for them and that they choose themselves are often influenced by power relationships and history. In addition, as the direction of the conversation changes, as additional interlocutors join in, or simply as different interpretive repertoires are employed, in some sense the identities of the speakers change as well (Edley, 2001).

Discursive psychology is appropriate for my research because it investigates the ways in which people ordinarily describe and account for themselves and each other (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). It is concerned with investigating how aspects of mind – cognitions, personality, identity, attitudes, etc. – are invoked through language (Wooffitt, 2001). This in turn provides insight into why people think, do, believe, and feel the way they do. I feel comfortable with the conclusions to which discursive psychology can lead because it does not claim to determine the true nature of the self, something that is likely not possible through research anyway. Instead, discursive psychology more conservatively seeks to determine how the self is talked about and how people make sense of their experiences (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Language learning and identity

are both complex topics that require students to draw upon competing repertoires in strategic ways to position themselves as they discuss their experiences. Through using discursive psychology as an approach to analysis, I gained understanding about the participants' perceptions toward HL learning and how they perceived themselves during their residence abroad.

Finally, a few points on the topic of variability in discourse deserve clarification. According to Reynolds and Wetherell (2003), positions developed in talk will be distributed and multiple. Indeed, the participants did not present uniform pictures of themselves, their attitudes toward the heritage language, or their beliefs about how language is learned. Discursive psychology gives me a way to deal with this lack of uniformity without having to dismiss the data as being invalid. I did not have to try to resolve the variation between accounts, but instead worked this variation into my analysis. Indeed, it is this variation that helped give my dissertation the depth and richness that I sought to capture.

While consistency is still important, I cannot assume that the same people would make use of the same interpretive repertoires and subject positions at another point in time (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It is precisely this ability of discursive psychological analysis to be flexible and to allow participants to claim different aspects of their identity at different times that makes it so useful in understanding the way people navigate highly complex categories such as ethnicity, class, and race in their everyday lives. Membership in these social categories involves managing both negative and idealized categorizations simultaneously. The way the participants positioned themselves as minorities (or not) and as language learners (or not) through the way they talked about themselves has great implications.

In summary, I used discursive psychology as the approach to data analysis in this study. This approach views discourse as being variable, co-constructed, purposeful, and context-dependent. By sorting through the data to find the interpretive repertoires,

ideological dilemmas, and subject positions the participants used, I was able to explore complex topics such as identity and beliefs and gain a deeper understanding of what it means to study abroad as a HL learner.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The data collected for the study consisted of four different types of discourse: individual interviews, a focus group, written reflections, and blog entries. I made four separate trips to Texas to complete the data collection phase. I traveled to Texas in April, August, and October of 2007 and March of 2008 for approximately four to six days each time. I needed to conduct a handful of interviews via long distance phone calls because I was unable to schedule additional trips that coincided with participants' schedules. These phone interviews were conducted using a speaker phone so that I could still use my digital voice recorder and they did not differ much in length or substance from the in-person interviews.

In addition to conducting interviews, Potter and Wetherell (1987) recommend collecting data that is intended for audiences other than the researcher or that is collected in a different way (i.e., through writing). By doing so, researchers are given access to the widest possible variation in accounts and a fuller idea of the way participants employ repertoires and positioning as they talk about their experiences. The written data collected for this study include blog entries and written email reflections.

The timeline for data collection is presented in Table 3.1 below.

<b>TYPE OF DATA</b>	<b>WHEN COLLECTED</b>
<b>Prior To Going Abroad</b>	
Individual Interview #1	Approximately one to five months before departure
Blog Entries	When participant begins them

(continued)

<b>While Abroad</b>	
Blog Entries	Continuous
Written Reflections by Email (three)	#1 within two weeks of arrival #2 in middle of stay #3 two weeks before return
<b>After Returning from Abroad</b>	
Individual Interview #2	As soon as possible after return (goal: within six weeks)
Focus Group	As soon as possible after return, depending on participants' schedules
Written Reflection by Email (one)	Three months after return
Blog Entries	Continuous until about three months after return, unless discontinued before then.

Table 3.1: Summary of Data Collection

As shown in Table 3.1, I collected data before, during, and after my participants' study abroad experiences. This design allowed me to answer the research questions about the experiences the participants had as they studied abroad and about whether the way they talked about themselves changed as a result of studying abroad. I also designed the data collection so that the participants communicated with different audiences about their experiences. I was the audience for the individual interviews and the written reflections. Their family and friends were the primary audiences for the blog entries, though the participants were aware that I was also reading them. Finally, the participants' peers (other HL learners who studied abroad) were the primary audience during the focus group. This is the primary way my study was triangulated.

Seidman (1998) recommended that three interviews be conducted in this type of qualitative research in order to capture a picture of the participants before, during, and after the phenomenon to be studied. I conducted only two individual interviews: the first and third interview of Seidman's three interview series. It was not practical for me to travel to all the different countries the participants were studying in so that I could conduct what would have been the second interview of Seidman's three interview series.

In place of the second interview, I read the participants' blogs while they were abroad and elicited three written reflections by email.

While I could not control the content of the blogs, I created prompts for the written email reflections which resulted in data that were relevant to the study for the time period that the participants were abroad. My goal was that the data I collected from these written methods be as authentic as possible. I was able to follow up with any participants who did not post blog entries during the second individual interview after they returned to the United States. Even though I was subscribed to their blogs, since there were many other family and friends also reading the participants' updates, I do not think my presence as an audience member had an overwhelming affect on what the students wrote. I reassured them that only excerpts relevant to the study would be analyzed and that they could always choose to withdraw a certain entry from the data pool if they wish. The following is a more detailed description of the four types of discourse that I collected.

### **Individual interviews**

Mishler (1986) discussed an approach to conducting interviews that is in line with the philosophy of discursive psychology. Namely, he proposed that researchers reconceptualize the interview as: (1) a specific form of discourse (a speech event) (2) jointly produced by interviewer and interviewee, (3) contextually grounded, and (4) analyzed by the researcher, starting with transcription, depending on how the researcher understands talk and its relation to meaning.

According to Mishler (1986), there are many implications of conceptualizing interviewing in this way. Because the questions asked are considered part of the context, and because every question is unique, what the interviewer says is transcribed, reported when relevant, and considered in the analysis of the answers given. Mishler advised researchers to pay special attention to stories told by the participants, and to try to prompt storytelling during interviews. Storytelling is a natural way of communicating meaning

and is one way we can encourage participants' voices to be heard. According to Mishler (1986) and Brockmeier and Harré (1997), telling stories is one way that people are able to arrive at an understanding of the events in their lives. In addition, the role of the interviewer is to be an involved and responsive partner in the conversation that evolves and unfolds during the interview. Because the presence of the interviewer is unavoidable, it is best to make use of it. Mishler suggested having the interviewer encourage storytelling and allow participants to direct the course of the interview to some extent. This is better than following a strict interview schedule in an attempt to diminish the effects of the researcher's presence at the expense of rich data and more empowered participants. This approach to interviewing, which Mishler referred to as eliciting "focused-interview narratives," is more likely to result in richer descriptions from participants and appropriate analysis from researchers.

Mishler's (1986) approach to interviewing was a fitting way for me to conceptualize interviews in this study. As Mishler explained, "this form of interview is designed to study variation in perceptions and responses of individuals who have been exposed to the same event or been involved in the same situation" (p. 99). Although the participants were exposed to diverse and unique experiences, on a more general level their experiences had some similarities because they were all HL learners. Each student participated in a HL learning experience that influenced how they saw themselves and their society, and each wrestled in their own way with the meanings and implications of that experience.

Individual interview #1 lasted approximately 25-60 minutes and occurred anywhere from one to five months before the participants left for their time abroad. This initial interview allowed the participants to discuss background topics including the immigration history of their families, their socioeconomic status both in the United States and in their heritage country, their travel experiences, their language exposure, and their schooling. In addition, details about their current study abroad plans were discussed,

including the decision to study abroad, their parents' influence on this decision and their opinions about it, other factors they considered when deciding whether and where to study abroad (money, location, career, etc.), expectations about language learning, their opinion of working with the study abroad office (if they did), the ethnic group(s) they claim membership in, and labels they use to describe themselves. The purpose of collecting this data was to provide the background for understanding the reasons participants decided to learn their HL and study abroad and to explore the ways they talked about themselves, their languages, and their heritage before the study abroad experience. See Appendix C for a list of questions I used as a loose guide for the first individual interview.

Individual interview #2 lasted approximately 30-60 minutes and occurred as soon as possible upon each participant's return to the United States. It covered the participants' immediate reactions to being abroad and returning, the benefits and difficulties of being abroad, if and how family dynamics had changed as a result, and how their expectations were or were not met. The second interview allowed participants to discuss in greater detail their email reflections, what they wish they had known before they had traveled, what ethnic group(s) they identified with while abroad, and their future plans regarding heritage and language learning. See Appendix D for a list of questions I used as a loose guide for the second individual interview.

Edley (2001) recommends the use of simple, straightforward questions during interviews. His examples include: "What is feminism?" and "What do feminists want?" (p. 199). He states that by keeping questions relatively simple, it is easier to determine the different ways of talking about that particular topic, and researchers are able to discover what kinds of limits are placed on the ways people can position themselves and others. I tried to keep the questions provided in Appendixes C and D for this study simple and straightforward. I revised the questions that I had used during my preliminary study after reviewing the interview transcript to see which questions elicited interesting

information and which questions may have been confusing. Additionally, I consulted the questions used in completed studies that employed discursive psychology.

I recorded both interviews with a digital voice recorder. I assured participants of confidentiality and informed them that recordings would be carefully stored. In addition, in this dissertation I use pseudonyms for the students' names and other potentially identifying information that they revealed during the interview. I gave participants the option to choose their own pseudonym if they wished, but asked that they keep it consistent with the language and ethnicity associated with their actual name. Because their identities remain confidential, there should not be any potential negative consequences for the participants who were unenthusiastic about HL learning or about the cultures they lived in, or who revealed any potentially embarrassing information during the data collection phase. The same applies for the focus group recording.

In the end, I conducted thirty interviews, totaling just over seventeen hours of taped discussion. Transcribed, this amounted to 335 pages of single-spaced interview data.

### **Blog entries and/or mass emails**

I asked all participants if they planned to send out mass emails or submit entries to a blog (such as Xanga, LiveJournal, Blogger, etc.) for their family and friends to read while they were abroad. I asked to be placed on any mass email list and for the address of any blog that they created for the trip. None of the participants decided to send out mass emails, and 31% of them (5 of 16) chose to keep a blog. I saved entries that referred to the topics involved in this study, but did not include replies or comments from anyone other than the participants due to ethical constraints. There were very few comments left on any of my participants' blogs in any event. In addition to the five participants who kept blogs, a few more also posted photos on sites like Flickr, Facebook, and MySpace. The blog entries on the topic of study abroad began before the participants actually left the United States, so I started checking their blogs before they departed.

This type of data collection was on-going as participants continually updated their blogs while they were abroad and some posted reflections about their trip after they returned. When I initially wrote the proposal for this study, the use of blogs had been increasing significantly in the previous few years and was becoming more common among college students. Around the time that I actually started data collection, however, the trend of blogging started waning in favor of microblogging such as that which can be found on Facebook and Twitter. Unfortunately, the one-sentence status updates did not lead to much rich data from the participants who have accounts on these sites.

By collecting this blog data from the participants who chose to keep one, I was able to learn more about the participants' study abroad experiences and the way they discussed their trips with people who are close to them. Although the blogs of the five students who kept them were insightful, I had hoped that more of the participants would have kept them. I informed the participants about my blog address as well, so that they could read about my life while they were abroad. I hope this served as a form of reciprocity and helped me build closer relationships with the participants.

### **Written reflections by email**

I created email reflection topics to be sent to the participants one week after their arrival, at the mid-point of their stay, and three weeks before they returned to the United States. I asked the participants to return their reflections via email within one week of receiving the topics of reflection. Most of the participants were abroad for a semester, so about one month transpired between each of the times that the written reflections were due, and for the students who studied abroad in the summer, there were a few weeks between each reflection. Because I know that finding a quick, cheap internet connection can be difficult in some countries, I designed the topics so that the responses should not have taken more than ten or fifteen minutes for the participants to write. Responses consisted of short reflections on the concepts of identity, (mis)communication, expectations, tensions, and emotional responses to being in their study abroad country. In

addition, each reflection required a brief, qualitative assessment of their language learning progress up to that point. I asked participants to give concrete examples to support their reflections if possible. Please see Appendix E for the specific reflection topics.

The main purpose of the written reflections was to serve as a substitute for what would be the second interview in the traditional three-interview format common in qualitative research. The reflections allowed the participants to describe to me some of their thoughts and feelings about being a HL learner abroad while they were actually on their sojourn. Another purpose of these written reflections was to give me ideas of specific topics to touch on during the second interviews after participants returned from being abroad. A few of the participants expressed that they appreciated having the email reflections sent to them while they were abroad. They liked being given the chance to stop and reflect, which they felt they would not have done on their own. I also noticed that some of the participants were more comfortable sharing their thoughts with me in writing through the email reflections than during the interviews, so I am especially glad that I chose to employ both methods of data collection.

Initially, I planned on sending a fourth written reflection prompt three months after the participants returned to the United States. However, I found that the majority of the time, this was too close to the time of the actual second interview, so it felt redundant to send the fourth written reflection prompt. I sent only one fourth prompt to a student who returned well before I was able to interview her. Appendix E also contains this final reflection prompt. In total, 69% of the email reflections were returned (34 of 49).

### **Focus group**

I held one small focus group (with three participants) after the participants returned from being abroad. I digitally recorded the participants' discussion and tried to guide them toward topics like identity, living in a country where their HL is spoken, language learning ideologies, etc. The participants in the focus group had studied in

Eritrea, Guatemala, and Hong Kong, so they had diverse backgrounds and experiences. One of the goals was to help me to see in what ways the experiences of my HL learner participants who studied abroad are similar regardless of their background, as they were in dialogue with each other. According to Edley (2001), the goal of the interviewer in a focus group is to create an informal atmosphere in which the participants themselves direct the conversation. I provided prompts to keep the discussion going, but encouraged them to converse naturally with each other as much as possible. This provided me with another set of data that was not directed specifically at me. Please see Appendix F for the focus group prompts that I used.

I started the focus group with a short introduction about the goals for the focus group and I asked participants to introduce themselves. The focus group lasted about 25 minutes, and resulted in eight pages of written transcript. Verkuyten and de Wolf (2002) ran their six small focus groups in the same way: They intervened as little as possible, brought up broad topics, provided an introduction and conclusion to the discussion, and explained that they were interested in the ways the participants talked to each other, not to the researcher. I decided after conducting the first focus group that the amount of additional information I had learned did not merit asking the participants to take more time out of their busy schedules to meet with me again. In addition, I was finding that it was difficult enough to schedule individual interviews with all the participants given that I live on the other side of the country and was only in town for a few days each time I made a data collection trip.

This section elaborated on the rationale behind the methodology used to collect and analyze data for the study. It also presented the timeline for collection. Finally, it detailed each type of data collected: individual interviews, blog entries, written email reflections, and a focus group. The next section will discuss details concerning data analysis.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

This section explains the approach to transcription, coding, and analysis of the data. Finally, it addresses issues of trustworthiness.

### **Transcription**

The first step of data analysis is transcription. Transcription is part of data analysis because it inevitably involves selecting certain features of talk to foreground and ignoring others; transcription is not a neutral process (Taylor, 2001). I performed all transcription. I chose to transcribe the interviews and focus group discussion for content and accuracy with regard to word choice. I included marks for intonation when it changed the meaning of the sentence or provided emphasis that was important for me to note. Other details such as pauses, pitch, speed, exact pronunciation (through the use of IPA symbols), or overlap were not marked unless these significantly added to the meaning. My preliminary study interview was transcribed with the notations listed in Appendix G, which I found helpful as I worked with the data, so I used the same notations in the present study.

Verkuyten and de Wolf (2002) took a similar approach to transcription when they investigated ethnic identity among a similar population of students. Their transcriptions were prepared for basic content and were not detailed, except for pauses and stress. Edley (2001) also approached transcription in this way in his study of masculinity. According to Mishler (1986), transcriptions should selectively focus only on aspects of speech that will aid in the accomplishment of specific goals of the study. Taylor (2001) agrees that studies employing discursive psychology do not necessitate a high level of detail in their transcripts.

A final point about transcription is that the interviews and focus groups were transcribed almost in full. It was important for me to know exactly how I asked each question and interacted with the participant during the interview in order to convey some of the context to the answers that were given (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Mishler, 1986).

Everything I said as the researcher was included in the transcript, except for a few very tangential discussions that we had while the recorder was running.

## **Analysis**

The goal of analyzing discourse from the perspective of discursive psychology is to figure out how participants make sense of a situation (Horton-Salway, 2001). The goal is not, however, to generalize or make predictions based on the data (Taylor, 2001). According to Taylor, instead of generalizing, the objective is simply to describe some aspect of the whole phenomenon and to show that the discourses being employed by participants are “significant and persistent” and that “the ramifications are fairly widespread” (p. 14). Verkuyten and de Wolf (2002) agree that the goal is to describe some of the discourses that participants use in accounting for the way they talk about themselves and others.

I analyzed the transcripts created from the individual interviews and focus group discussion, the copies of blog entries and the written reflections in a similar way. I read over the data repeatedly and noted interesting claims, places where there seemed to be tension or contradiction, and areas where participants talked about themselves. I also noted where participants discussed identity, language, language learning, race, culture, and other topics that are related to the research questions as they discussed their decision to go abroad and the experiences they had while abroad. In doing so I kept in mind that the responses I received were not simply answers to pre-formulated questions (Mishler, 1986). The participants and I were negotiating meaning and creating the context of the interview as we conversed, and I considered how the questions I asked and the remarks I made might affect the responses I received. As I started to obtain an idea of how the participants talked about these issues and areas where they struggled, I searched for patterns as Potter and Wetherell (1987) recommend. The patterns I found were in the forms of both variability and consistency among accounts and participants. Then I began to form hypotheses as to why these patterns existed by investigating the functions being

fulfilled by the use of certain interpretive repertoires, subject positions, and the ideological dilemmas that were created at different points in the data.

Edley (2001) approached data analysis in this way in his study on masculinity. He first created topical files (fatherhood, sexuality, relationships, etc.) from his discourse data and then reorganized his analysis around the interpretive repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and subject positions he found as he looked at each topic on its own. I compared and contrasted my findings for each participant with the other participants in order to acquire a more complete picture of what the study abroad experience was like for HL learners. To do so I first considered each participant's data as a whole and determined which repertoires, subject positions, and tensions were most salient for that particular participant. Then I focused on describing the ways in which most or all of the participants talked about being abroad in the same way and how they talked about their experiences in different ways.

The process of data analysis required more than a few sessions, as this type of analysis is relatively open-ended and circular (Taylor, 2001). I did not use a specialized software program to assist in the analysis of the data. In discourse analysis like this, researchers make use of broad and even overlapping categories when coding their data. I therefore did not necessarily attempt to set up exclusive coding categories as is typically done in other approaches to data analysis. Taylor claimed that it is probably impossible to actually reach the end of the data analysis process in research like this because the data are so rich and will never be exhausted. There is no recipe to follow. To a degree, conducting analysis such as this depended on following hunches and trying out certain interpretations to see what fit and consequently discarding some attempts (Edley, 2001). In order to determine that had I read through the transcripts and copies of data sufficiently, I continued to read and re-read until I had enough familiarity with the data that I began to feel as though I had "heard it all before" and that the participants were starting to make the same kinds of arguments as each other or drawing on the same

interpretive repertoires. Edley claimed that this happens with repeated reading of transcripts, which may be because natural language use is usually highly stereotyped and quite predictable (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Verkuyten and de Wolf (2002) offered the advice to study the material as an entire discursive account to see if recurring patterns of talk emerge, and to mark all instances of terms referring to whatever concept the research is concerned with. This is what the authors did in their study of minority ethnic identity. They then focused on the varying things their participants were able to achieve through positioning themselves in different ways.

In summary, as I read through the data, I looked for the three elements of talk that are the focus of discursive psychology: interpretive repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and subject positions. This method allowed me to focus on the way the participants positioned themselves as language learners through the way they talked and wrote about themselves and others. It also provided insight into how different ways of talking about the same thing can be used strategically. I looked both for similarities and differences across the participants' experiences as HL learners abroad. I also paid special attention to how issues of identity, beliefs about language, and beliefs about language learning are communicated in the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Many different criteria have been named for dealing with issues related to the trustworthiness of qualitative research as the paradigm is being developed and mainstreamed. This section discusses how some of these ways of providing evidence for trustworthiness were implemented in the study.

The current study has been located in previous work, which Taylor (2001) suggested is a general principle for good practice in research. Other principles, which I incorporated, include that the research be coherent, rigorous (Taylor, 2001), and triangulated. The term "coherent" in this case means that the interpretations are presented persuasively and allow the reader to see broad patterns as well as account for

smaller patterns within the larger patterns in the data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The term “rigor” has to do with the level of detail both in the data, the analysis, and the explanation of how the analysis was completed and interpretations were reached (Taylor, 2001). Triangulation is another key way in which qualitative research can be made more trustworthy. I am using multiple sources of data and multiple ways to collect that data in my investigation, as was recommended by Merriam (1998) and Berg (2004).

A very important way to establish trustworthiness in this study has to do with accounting for reactivity by disclosing the role of the researcher and the research context (Mishler, 1986). Obviously, in qualitative research the researcher cannot separate herself from the research, which means that it is not productive to consider ideas like replicability when judging the trustworthiness of the research. The identity of the researcher is relevant because it influences everything, including the topic of the research, the degree of openness the participants feel, and the conclusions reached. To help others understand how I affected the research I described myself, why I am interested in the topics at hand, and how I related to the participants and the data throughout the research process (Taylor, 2001). I was also open with the participants in sharing who I am with them and tried to position myself simply as an outsider who was curious about their situations and not as an “insider.” Taylor (2001) suggested that this is more honest and acknowledges the power relationships between researcher and participant.

Discourse analysis and discursive psychology in particular are unique in that they require a good amount of raw data to be presented throughout the write-up of the research (Potter & Edwards, 2001). Presenting so much of the raw data affects the trustworthiness of the study because it allows readers to see exactly what researchers use in drawing their conclusions (Taylor, 2001; Verkuyten & de Wolf, 2002). This openness allows readers to understand the analytical process for themselves and therefore make their own judgments of researchers’ claims. I present data which shows the deviant cases or areas of inconsistency. This type of data can only result in a richer understanding of issues like

identity and language learning ideologies because it is in places of tension that the most interesting things are occurring. Because these inconsistencies can highlight where there are boundaries of different interpretive repertoires, they are useful in determining whether the research is trustworthy (Taylor, 2001; Mishler, 1986).

## **RESEARCH SUMMARY**

Before providing a brief, concluding overview of this research study, I first summarize my findings from the preliminary study that informed the way I designed this dissertation study.

### **Preliminary study**

The idea for this dissertation study came from a much smaller study that I completed on the same topic as part of a Discourse Analysis class in the spring of 2004. I conducted one 90-minute-long interview with a Mandarin Chinese HL learner, Curtis, who had studied abroad in Taiwan a total of three times as an undergraduate. The interview was conducted approximately ten months after his last stay abroad had ended. From my analysis I found that Curtis used varying interpretive repertoires and subject positions to discuss topics of identity and language learning ideologies. I was able to obtain a glimpse of what it is like for a HL learner to study abroad through the way he talked about himself and his experiences.

### ***Language learning ideologies***

Curtis spoke about language learning in many different, coherent ways. He claimed it was worthwhile and even common sense to spend time learning Chinese. Growing up studying Chinese was “dreaded work,” a “chore,” and something he “hated.” However, once he entered college he started to perceive learning the language as a more positive experience. That is when “learning Chinese became [his] thing and no one coaxed [him] about it.”

Curtis talked about many different factors that influenced his ability to learn Mandarin throughout his life. Some of his claims about this topic were seemingly contradictory. He believed that language learning relies on innate ability, which he just doesn't possess. Therefore, later on in the conversation Curtis needed to justify why he bothered to make the effort to spend so much time in Taiwan learning Mandarin, since he does not have "very good language skills" anyway. He drew upon other, competing repertoires about language learning, which claim that other factors besides innate ability affect learning. Drawing on these other repertoires had a variety of functions. It served to justify his decision to study abroad (because he needed more exposure to the language) and to show the influence other people and motivation had on his progress, which all show that language learning does not come down to just innate ability. Although he argued that he needed more exposure to the language and that is why he decided to keep returning to Taiwan, he later stated that if he could get the foundation of the language down he could "just work on it [himself]." Finally, in discussing a particularly supportive Chinese professor, he saw that his ability to learn Chinese improved because his professor made an effort to instill confidence and pride in her students. Clearly, Curtis was aware of the other factors that affect language learning that do not have to do with innate ability and drew upon many of them as he explained his decisions and the experiences he had while abroad. Nevertheless, he still made use of the idea of innate ability to justify his perceived lack of sufficient progress in the language.

### ***Language learner identities***

Not only did Curtis's experiences learning language as a child and his beliefs about learning language influence the decisions he made to study Mandarin and live in Taiwan, but his identity as an Asian American also played an important role in the decisions he made. Throughout the interview Curtis referred to himself in many different ways. Some of these included Chinese, Chinese American, American, Asian, and Asian American, depending on the context. Surprisingly, he also called himself White, and said

that he sometimes tends to “forget” that he is Chinese. He feels that when he claims his Chinese identity in the United States he risks being marginalized and positions himself as “deviant”. However, Curtis feels that because he does not know Mandarin well enough to be able to communicate like a native speaker, he is also marginalized by the older generations of Asians and Asian Americans and by his relatives both in the United States and Taiwan. A common theme that was repeated was that of not being fully Chinese because he could not speak Mandarin well.

As if Curtis’s identities as a language learner were not already complex enough within the context of the United States, Curtis took on additional identities when he was in Taiwan. At times when he was in Taiwan, Curtis did not feel like the adult that he was. He felt like a “child,” that he was being “babied,” and he therefore entered “little kid mode,” which meant that he would do his best to be quiet and go unnoticed. He even called himself a “Victorian girl,” a quiet, proper child who does his/her best to not cause anyone any trouble. The result is that Curtis felt stifled and uncomfortable for much of the time he spent in Taiwan. Most of this he blamed on his lack of ability to communicate. It seems that Curtis experienced an ideological dilemma in figuring out how to position himself as a learner in Taiwan. He wanted to be perceived as a capable adult, but was not often seen that way because of his inability to communicate and he ended up feeling like a little kid. What’s worse, he also claimed to not even feel like a human being. He sees himself as a capable person, and if he were also capable in Mandarin, he would not feel tension in that anymore. He would feel as if he were “with it,” like he “belonged,” and like he truly was capable in all aspects of his life. As a researcher and foreign language educator, I wonder the degree to which these tensions that played out while Curtis was abroad affected his ability to learn the language he so desperately wanted to be proficient in. The tensions in the various ways he positioned himself and the assorted beliefs about language learning that he drew upon in the

interview provided me with a way to investigate what the experience of studying abroad was like for this HL learner.

## **CONCLUSION**

One of the key differences between HL education and foreign language education is that HL learners are both similar to members of the target culture due to familial connections and yet different from them because of geographic distance and being raised as minorities in a majority culture (He, 2004). This has implications for the way HL learners view themselves and are viewed by others both within the United States and while they are abroad, which may also affect their HL learning progress. Using discursive psychology to study participants who are involved in such complex interactions is helpful because it allows topics such as identity, memories, and attitudes to be more accurately studied as being fluid and negotiated, whereas traditional research views them as being fixed (Taylor, 2001). By interviewing participants from a variety of HL backgrounds before and after they went abroad, collecting reflections from them while they were abroad, and holding a focus group discussion with them, I was able to gain an understanding of what studying abroad might be like for HL learners generally. Study abroad is becoming increasingly popular, as are HL classes. I hope that the findings of the present study provide some insight into the complex issues that affect HL students who choose to study their HL in an immersion context abroad.

## Chapter Four: Descriptions of the Participants

Chapter Four provides descriptions of the participants in this study. These descriptions are useful in order to more fully understand the findings discussed in Chapter Five. As described in Chapter Three, eight heritage languages were represented among the seventeen participants in this study. The participants studied either in their heritage country or in another country where their HL is spoken. In total, the participants studied in fourteen different countries. Six studied in Asia, four in North America, Central America, or the Caribbean, three in Europe, two in Africa, one in South America, and one planned to study in the Middle East. Table 4.1 below shows an overview of the participants. The chapter then provides short descriptions of the background of each participant.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Heritage Language</b>	<b>Destination</b>	<b>Semester Abroad</b>	<b>Major(s)</b>
Louis	Spanish	Guatemala	Summer 2007 (2 months)	Biochemistry and Hispanic Studies
April	Spanish	Dominican Republic	Fall 2007 (4 months)	Government and Mexican Studies
Leigh	Spanish	Argentina	Fall 2007 (5 months)	Government and Spanish
Katherine	Spanish	Spain	Fall 2007 (4 months)	Computer Science
Pablo Diego	Spanish	Mexico	Fall 2007 (4 months)	Business Administration
Gabrielle	Spanish	Costa Rica	Summer 2007 (1 month)	Studio Arts, Theater, and Spanish
Jaime	Spanish	Spain	Fall 2007 (4 months)	Kinesiology
Ching	Cantonese	Hong Kong	Spring 2007 (4 months)	Chemical Engineering
Anne	Mandarin	China	Spring 2008 (4 months)	Political Science and Economics

(continued)

Peter	Mandarin	Taiwan	Spring 2008 (4 months)	Biochemistry and Asian Studies
Kate	Mandarin	Singapore	Spring 2008 (4 months)	Business, Finance, and English
Amy	Mandarin	Hong Kong	Fall 2007 (4 months)	Management Information Systems
Olga	Korean	Korea	Summer 2007 (3 months)	Marketing
Jordan	Tigrinya	Eritrea	Summer 2007 (2 months)	Biology and Policy Studies
Lucy	French	Mali	Fall 2007 (4 months)	Humanities
Erin	German	Germany	2007-2008 (10 months)	German and English
David	Hebrew	Israel	Spring 2008 (did not go)	Math and Physics

Table 4.1: Overview of Participants

In the following descriptions of the participants, results from a self-assessment of language proficiency are presented. The participants each completed this self-assessment as part of the web survey they initially filled out to show interest in the study. I created this simple self-assessment specifically to give me a better idea of the students' fluency in their HL prior to the interviews and to make sure they were not actually balanced bilinguals, which would likely have resulted in them choosing "5" for each category. The directions on the survey were as follows:

Describe how well you feel you know your heritage language on a scale of 1-5 for the categories below:  
(1=beginner (completely non-native), 2= some understanding and/or communication occurs, 3=full understanding in most situations, generally able to communicate what you want, 4= near native proficiency in home setting, not comfortable in more formal situations such as debates, classrooms, public speaking, 5= native proficiency in all situations)

The categories were: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Culture.

## **THE PARTICIPANTS**

### **Louis**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 4

Reading: 4

Writing: 4

Culture: 5

Louis spent the summer of 2007 in Guatemala, the country where his maternal grandmother was born. She came to the United States in the 1950s and married an American man. Both of Louis' parents were born in the United States. His father is not Hispanic and only speaks a little Spanish, but his mother is fluent in the language. Louis is only one quarter Hispanic. Louis said that his mother taught him some Spanish when he was younger, but not enough to be fluent. The trip which is the subject of this study was his first trip to Guatemala, although Louis had spent some time in Mexico on vacations and assisting with service projects.

While Louis was in Guatemala he spent some time visiting his large group of extended relatives, many of whom he had never met before. Despite never having met them, Louis felt like he fit in well with them and they were able to interact as family and not as strangers. Although Louis wanted to go to Guatemala to spend time with his extended family and improve his Spanish, his main focus while abroad was on working in a rural clinic that served an indigenous area of the country. Consequently, he the majority of his time with people who did not speak Spanish natively. He spoke of frustrations with the lack of resources at the clinic and with not feeling like he could really help the patients as much as he wanted to, largely due to linguistic and cultural barriers. The clinic was not well funded and did not have all the supplies required to be able to treat the patients sufficiently. In addition, because the patients were not native Spanish speakers, Louis had a hard time communicating with them and feeling like he could really help out.

**April**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 5

Speaking: 4

Reading: 5

Writing: 4

Culture: 5

April spent the fall of 2007 in the Dominican Republic. Both of her parents were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States when they were teenagers. April was primarily raised by her grandmother who lived with her family. Her grandmother is a monolingual Spanish speaker. April speaks Spanish with her father and spoke both English and Spanish with her mother until she passed away when April was fourteen years old. One of April's main motivations for studying abroad was to gain experience doing community service work in developing countries. Prior to going to the Dominican Republic she spent a month in China studying abroad. She also planned to study in Thailand during the spring of 2008 to learn about organic farming and globalization. However, she was not able to fit that program into her degree plan and graduate on time. April was pleased with the community service project in which she was able to participate, and enjoyed living with her host family.

**Leigh**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 2

Speaking: 2

Reading: 2

Writing: 2

Culture: 3

Leigh studied in Argentina during the fall of 2007. Out of all the participants, she had one of the lowest HL proficiencies prior to going abroad, based on how she spoke about her knowledge of and comfort with Spanish. She mentioned that the thing she was most scared about, when it came to going to Argentina, was having to speak the language. She was even required to take two additional Spanish classes the summer before she left for Argentina to satisfy her school's requirements for studying abroad.

Leigh is half Hispanic; her mother is a Mexican American who was born in Texas and her father is a Polish American whose parents lived in a Polish community in New York. Leigh's Spanish-speaking grandmother babysat her when she was younger, but for the most part her family spoke to her in English.

### **Katherine**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 3

Reading: 3

Writing: 3

Culture: 3

Katherine went to Spain to study abroad in the fall of 2007. Her grandparents are from the South Texas border region, and she and her parents were born in Texas. Although her parents are bilingual, they speak to Katherine mostly in English. When her grandparents speak to her in Spanish, she typically answers them in English. She has been to Mexico twice, but decided she wanted to study abroad in Spain because she wanted to be able to travel in Europe. Katherine is considering adding a Spanish major to her Computer Science major.

### **Pablo Diego**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 5

Speaking: 4

Reading: 3

Writing: 3

Culture: 5

Pablo Diego spent the fall of 2007 in Mexico. Pablo Diego's parents are from the interior of Mexico and moved to the border looking for work. Pablo Diego himself was born in Mexico and lived there for the first four years of his life. During this time his dad worked on the U.S. side of the border and his family lived on the Mexican side. After those first four years in Mexico, Pablo Diego lived in a small town on the U.S. side of the border. During first, second, and third grade Pablo Diego was enrolled in bilingual classes. Throughout his childhood his family spent a significant amount of time

vacationing in Mexico and visiting relatives. His parents have always spoken to him in Spanish but they encouraged him to speak English so they could learn English better as well. Pablo Diego's main motivation to go to Mexico was to be a part of the culture and to improve his Spanish. Pablo Diego was seriously considering moving to Mexico after graduation to work.

### **Gabrielle**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 4

Reading: 5

Writing: 5

Culture: 5

Gabrielle spent a month in Costa Rica during the summer of 2007. She was born in Mexico to a Lebanese mother and an Ecuadorian father. She only lived in Mexico until she was three and has spent the rest of her life in the United States. Growing up, her mother spoke to her in English and Arabic, and her father and her Mexican housekeeper conversed with Gabrielle in Spanish. Now, her mother has learned enough Spanish that the language usually used in their house is Spanish. Gabrielle has traveled to and vacationed frequently in Mexico and Ecuador, often to visit family. She and her family are rather wealthy and have traveled to many other countries as well. Because she is a raw-food vegan, Gabrielle chose her study abroad destination based on where she could find the best fresh, tropical fruits. Improving her Spanish was only a secondary focus of her trip.

### **Jaime**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 3

Speaking: 3

Reading: 2

Writing: 2

Culture: 2

Jaime studied abroad in Spain in the fall of 2007. His father was born in the interior of Mexico and his mother is Mexican American and does not speak Spanish.

Jaime grew up on the border of Mexico in Texas and was born in a hospital in Mexico, even though his parents lived on the U.S. side of the border at that time. His parents divorced when he was five and he lived with his monolingual English-speaking mother after that. He said he never picked up Spanish while living on the border, even though he was in bilingual classes from kindergarten through third grade where he was the only student who was not already fluent in Spanish. Jaime decided to go to Spain instead of Mexico because Spain “is the root of everything [Mexican],” and because he wanted to travel through Europe. Jaime did not complete the second interview after he returned from Spain, but he did return one email reflection.

### **Ching**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 3

Speaking: 2

Reading: 2

Writing: 1

Culture: 4

Ching studied abroad in Hong Kong during the spring of 2007. She speaks Cantonese as her heritage language. Her parents both grew up in Hong Kong and moved to the United States when they were teenagers. Her parents have always spoken to her in both English and Cantonese. Ching attended Chinese school when in elementary school. Ching also studied Spanish while in college and wanted to learn more Spanish, but decided to study in a place where she could learn Cantonese instead because it was more important to her to learn about her culture and background.

### **Anne**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 4

Reading: 2

Writing: 2

Culture: 4

Anne went abroad to Mainland China during the spring of 2008. Her parents grew up in Taiwan and they speak Mandarin in their home. Anne also attended Chinese

school growing up, which she did not enjoy. She initially considered studying abroad in London but decided to go to China instead because she wanted to experience a culture that was more distinct from that in the United States. In addition, she is thinking about pursuing a career in China or Taiwan and she knew studying in China would help her decide if she would like to work there in the future. Anne lived in a dorm during the majority of the semester, but she was able to do a home stay for three weeks, which she found to be the best part of the trip. She said that because she already spoke conversational Chinese, the host family helped her learn to discuss more advanced and abstract concepts like the economy and government.

**Peter**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 3

Reading: 2

Writing: 2

Culture: 3

Peter studied abroad in Taiwan in the spring of 2008. He is the only participant that I was unable to meet in person, so both of our interviews were conducted on the phone. Both of his parents grew up in Taiwan and moved to the United States for graduate school. He attended Chinese school on weekends and his family was active in a Chinese church for years. He chose to take Mandarin in high school for three years. His family typically traveled back to Taiwan approximately every two years while Peter was growing up.

**Kate**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 5

Speaking: 4

Reading: 3

Writing: 2

Culture: 4

Kate studied abroad in Singapore during the spring of 2008. Her HL is Mandarin and her parents are from China. She moved to the United States when she was eight,

after she had completed first and second grade in China in an international school that offered classes in both Mandarin and English. Kate did not attend Chinese school while growing up. Kate still speaks in Mandarin with her parents and visits China about once a year to spend time with relatives. Kate has not taken any formal Mandarin classes since moving to the United States. While she was in Singapore, Kate found that she did not have opportunities to use Mandarin much.

### **Amy**

Results of self-assessment in Mandarin prior to going abroad:

Listening: 2

Speaking: 1

Reading: 1

Writing: 1

Culture: 2

Amy studied abroad in Hong Kong in the fall of 2007. Her parents are from Shanghai and her heritage languages are Mandarin and Shanghainese. Amy and her sister were born in Texas, but when Amy was a year and a half old they were sent to live with their aunt in Shanghai because her parents did not have room for the girls in the crowded apartment they shared with other families. Amy stayed in Shanghai with her aunt until she was four years old. She grew up mostly speaking Shanghainese and English but picked up some Mandarin as well, primarily from her friends' families during her elementary, middle, and high school years. In addition, Amy did attend Chinese school for two years but her parents pulled her out of it because she was not learning much. Another reason Amy cited for discontinuing her Chinese school attendance was that she was rather rebellious and her parents were tired of apologizing to her teachers. Amy said that occasionally her parents would try to speak only Mandarin in the home but it never lasted very long. She and her parents still have a hard time communicating because she is not very fluent in Mandarin or Shanghainese and they are not very fluent in English. One of her main reasons for studying Mandarin in college was to improve her communication with her parents. She decided not to take a Mandarin class while in Hong

Kong because it was too intensive, and she hoped that she would be able to pick up the language outside of class instead.

I was not sure whether to include Amy in the study when during the first interview I discovered that she was going to be in Hong Kong, a place where little Mandarin is spoken. Because she claims that her Mandarin did improve in small ways as a result of being abroad, however, I decided to keep her in the study.

### **Olga**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 3

Reading: 4

Writing: 3

Culture: 4

Olga's HL is Korean. She studied abroad in Korea during the summer of 2007 and in Hong Kong with Amy during the fall of 2007. Olga was born in Korea but lived in the Philippines for three years while her parents were doing church work there. She attended an English-speaking school in the Philippines and then moved to the United States when she was in third grade. Her parents have always spoken to her in Korean and they have been involved in Korean churches since moving to the States, and she credits this with her ability to retain her Korean proficiency. She did not take any formal Korean classes after moving away from Korea. Prior to the study abroad trip, she had not been back to Korea, and she does not have any close relatives left in the country. Olga chose a study abroad program that was not a Korean language program because she is already fairly fluent in the language. All of her classes (in politics and law) were taught in English. Another bonus of the program she chose is that it had an internship component. Olga worked for a Korean company the first month she was in Korea and then took classes for the last two months.

### **Jordan**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 4

Speaking: 4  
Reading: 1  
Writing: 1  
Culture: 4

Jordan spent the summer of 2007 in Eritrea, a country in Eastern Africa near Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Red Sea. Her HL is Tigrinya, which is the country's dominant language. Her parents grew up in Eritrea and moved to the United States because of the civil war in Eritrea, in which her father had fought. Jordan was born in Texas and had only been to Eritrea twice before her study abroad trip. Most of her extended family still lives in Eritrea. Jordan grew up speaking English with her siblings and Tigrinya with her parents, and spent time in the Eritrean community in their hometown in Texas, so she feels fairly comfortable with the language and culture. Jordan was in bilingual classes from first through fourth grade. Jordan did not consider her trip to be a "study abroad trip" because she has family there and she did not take classes while there. She had an internship shadowing a pediatrician in Eritrea and she was tutored once a week by someone who helped her learn how to read and write Tigrinya.

### **Lucy**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 2  
Speaking: 3  
Reading: 3  
Writing: 2  
Culture: 4

Lucy is not a typical HL learner. She spent the fall of 2007 in Mali, a country in West Africa. Lucy's HL is French, but her relatives are not from Africa. If forced to identify with a particular race, Lucy would say she is white. Her language background includes several varieties of French. Her father's parents are French speakers from Quebec and her mother's father was Haitian, so his first language was also French. Lucy grew up in New Orleans and was exposed to French Creole through her mother's boyfriend who has been part of the family for years. Her sister attended a French immersion school in New Orleans and is a fluent speaker of the Parisian variety of

French. Lucy traveled to France on a high school trip and also visited Quebec with her sister once. Lucy took French in high school and started learning Bambara in college. Bambara and French are two of the main languages spoken in Mali, which is where she wants to live after college if she gets accepted into the Peace Corps or Doctors Without Borders. Lucy's main motivations for going to Mali were to learn more French and Bambara, and to learn more about international health and the specific health concerns of people in Mali.

The classes Lucy took while in Mali were taught in different languages, so she had class time in French, English, and Bambara. She took classes for three months and then spent one month doing a field work seminar in which she completed an independent study project. Lucy lived with two different host families while she was taking classes, and she mostly spoke Bambara with the women and French with the men in the households, as per cultural norms. Lucy focused on learning yet another language during her fieldwork month. She worked at a school for the deaf and learned some American Sign Language for Francophone West Africa while she was doing her research there. While she was living at the deaf school she taught the students some English. Teaching the deaf students English involved a mix of Lucy using her beginning sign language skills, writing words on the board in French and English, and occasionally mouthing words in Bambara that the women in the class could lip-read and then translate into French for the men in the class so that they could then learn the English equivalent!

**Erin**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 5

Speaking: 5

Reading: 5

Writing: 5

Culture: 4

Erin was at the end of her senior year of college when we had our first interview in April of 2007. She had been accepted into the Fulbright English Teaching

Assistantship program and was about to leave for Germany for the next ten months. Her HL is German. Erin's mother's parents are from Germany and moved to the United States in the late 1930s where they met each other. Erin's mother did not learn much German from her parents, though, because by the time she was born in the 1950s, her grandparents were in a stage of rejecting all things German and that included using the language in the house. Erin explained that this decision had to do with societal pressure for German Americans to disassociate themselves from Germany after World War II. However, by the time Erin was born in the 1980s, her grandparents were back to celebrating their heritage and roots so they spoke in German more freely with their grandchildren. Erin took two trips to Germany during high school to study the language and lived with host families. Her family also hosted two different German speaking exchange students while she was in high school and she took German in college as well. After her junior year of college she spent the summer in Germany working as a teacher's assistant in a summer program. Erin did not reply to any of the email reflection prompts that I sent her while she was in Germany, nor did she respond to my requests for a second interview after she returned.

### **David**

Results of self-assessment prior to going abroad:

Listening: 3

Speaking: 3

Reading: 2

Writing: 2

Culture: 2

David's HL is Hebrew and he was born in Israel. David spoke Hebrew until he was seven when his family moved to the United States and he gradually started speaking in English more. He still speaks in Hebrew with his parents. David took Hebrew classes in college that he thought were fairly easy. He has also studied Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish. He decided after we completed the first interview not to go to Israel to study

abroad in the spring of 2008 after all. David made this decision mostly because there were teacher strikes occurring in the university where he wanted to study.

### **SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS**

It is evident in the descriptions of each participant that their language proficiencies, degrees of exposure to the HL in the home, amount of formal language study, and reasons for studying abroad all vary. In addition to the participants having a wide variety of backgrounds, many of the participants used their HL proficiency as a resource to access other opportunities in the countries in which they studied. For example, in addition to studying language and culture, their HL proficiency allowed the participants to study health care, agriculture, and business in depth while they were abroad.

The following analysis chapter will explore the actual words used by the participants to talk about themselves and their beliefs about language and language learning. It will also provide a detailed and nuanced description of what I learned from the participants about what it is like to be a HL learner abroad.

## Chapter Five: Findings

### TALKING ABOUT LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE LEARNING, STUDY ABROAD, AND IDENTITY

This chapter explores the actual words used by the participants to talk about themselves, language, language learning, and study abroad. In doing so, pictures of what it is like to be a heritage language (HL) learner, specifically one who studies abroad, emerge from the data. This chapter includes discussions of the interpretive repertoires and subject positions the participants employed and the ideological dilemmas that arose as they talked and wrote about themselves and their time abroad. Interpretive repertoires are different ways of talking about a topic through the use of vocabulary and metaphor. Ideological dilemmas refer to how these different ways of talking have developed together as opposing positions in an unfolding, historical exchange. Subject positions refers to how people are drawn into certain positions or identities by discourse and create identities for themselves through discourse. Note that throughout this chapter, I have added Italics to parts of the data to draw attention to specific words and phrases.

#### **Language**

The participants discussed various ways to label their relationship to their HL, how location influences how proficient they feel in their HL, and the expectations they have about HL proficiency because of their heritage.

#### ***Labels for heritage language***

I asked each participant what words they use to refer to their HL. Pablo Diego's response below is similar to what many other participants said.

Kirstin: And, you call Spanish your first language, second language? What do you call it?

Pablo Diego: It varies. First it was my first language, then it transitioned to my second language, and now it's like 50/50. But I still consider Spanish my first language.

Kirstin: And English is like your second language?

Pablo Diego: My first language, too.  
(Interview 1)

Like Pablo Diego, most of the participants talked about their HL proficiency as something that was in flux throughout their life compared to their proficiency in English, and had a difficult time pinpointing just one label for their HL. The uncertainty of what to call their HL was commonly discussed. Participants often did not have the ability to simply and succinctly state their relationship to their HL. This may be an indication that none of the standard ways of talking about language really fit the HL learner situation. One participant outright refused to put a standard label on her relationship to her heritage language:

Kirstin: And how do you describe your relationship to Spanish, do you say it's your first language, it's your second language, it's a language that you just study? What do you call it?

Leigh: I don't know, *I'm really not that good at Spanish*. I hope to improve it. I just tell people that I don't speak Spanish very well or I speak very little Spanish.  
(Interview 1)

Leigh had a low proficiency in Spanish compared to my other participants' HL proficiency. Perhaps she was reluctant to claim Spanish as being one of her languages because of the expectations of proficiency that come along with a label such as "first language," "second language," or "heritage language." Another participant, Jaime, claimed Spanglish as his heritage language.

Kirstin: Hispanic. Okay. And Spanish, what do you call Spanish? It's your first language, second language, what is it? Not really either of those, what would you call it?

Jaime: I'd say it's like my *1.5 language*.

Kirstin: 1.5 language.

Jaime: It's hard to explain it. I grew up with Spanglish. *Like really really poor broken Spanglish*. Like mostly English with a mixture of Spanish in there. So I

don't know what I would call it.  
(Interview 1)

Jaime's use of the phrase "1.5 language" is also interesting. Because he learned Spanish mixed with English on the border, he can only claim to be a .5 Spanish speaker. Plus, he was exposed to both English and Spanish when he was little, so it did not seem quite right to him to call Spanish a first or a second language. So he chose to call it 1.5, indicating that it is somewhere between his first and second language.

### ***Location and heritage language proficiency***

The participants expanded upon this idea that HL proficiency is complex and shifts back and forth over time by discussing how their proficiency seems to change depending on geographical location, as well. This is seen in my interviews with Pablo Diego and Gabrielle after they returned from being abroad.

Pablo Diego: I think it's just the environment. Like, I just when I go down there [to Mexico] I just feel like my Spanish is so normal like I can talk to anyone conversely, conversationally. *And when I get back over here, I just feel like uh uh- what the hell. I feel retarded, like what happened to my Spanish?*

Kirstin: Is it happening again right now?

Pablo Diego: Yeah, it's happening again. I think it's cause like I need to get the rhythm going. In Mexico I'm speaking Spanish 24/7 and here it's just every so often. And I guess I get it mixed up with English and I don't know, it's so weird.  
(Interview 2)

Kirstin: And with your brother and your sister, what do you speak with them?

Gabrielle: We speak English, with my sister we speak Spanish a lot. But I guess just being in America you learn to just speak English around people. *The odd part is when we're in Peru or Mexico we speak Spanish but when we're here we speak English.* Very interesting how that works.  
(Interview 2)

Pablo Diego and Gabrielle were unable to explain why they feel more proficient in their HL when in a country where it is spoken. To them, HL proficiency is almost something mysterious that changes within them, and geographical location plays a role in that.

Jordan and Katherine also felt that location affects their HL proficiency and how much they use the language even though they have plenty of opportunities to use it when they are in the States. Katherine offers many possible reasons for this.

Kirstin: Do you think you could have gotten to the same level of Spanish proficiency by just hanging out with your family members more who speak Spanish?

Katherine: No, I don't think so. *My parents are really guarded* about speaking their Spanish with me, it's a little strange. And my friends who speak Spanish fluently too, they'll speak to me in Spanish but they're a little *less patient* sometimes. They'd rather just speak in English because they speak English better than I speak Spanish. But it's definitely, it's a *completely different experience being completely immersed in a culture*, especially in Sevilla, where practically nobody you meet in Sevilla speaks English and they're very proud of that fact. And so *you have to speak Spanish* or you're not going to get anything done.

Kirstin: What do you mean your parents are guarded?

Katherine: I guess it's kind of weird, I guess they're so *used to speaking English* with us. That's how they know to communicate with us. We have several words that they naturally say in Spanish, they'll always say in Spanish. But 95% of what they say is going to be in English.

Kirstin: But they speak to each other in Spanish?

Katherine: They speak in kind of a mixture of both I guess. I guess more so English sometimes, when they're upset maybe a little more Spanish.  
(Interview 2)

Katherine noticed that both her parents and friends who are native speakers of Spanish are unwilling to engage in long conversations with her in Spanish either out of the habit of speaking English with her or because they are impatient with her less than perfect Spanish abilities. Although Katherine does not explore the issue any further, it is possible that her parents actually do not speak with her in Spanish because their own Spanish proficiency has atrophied. Another possibility is that they may not feel comfortable speaking Spanish with her because they perceive her Spanish to be academic and "correct" because she has taken Spanish in college, whereas theirs may be informal and colloquial. As a result, when Katherine was in Spain she felt she could speak the language better because there was more motivation to do so and she had more willing

conversation partners, ones who were not already in the habit of speaking to her in English.

Leigh also was not speaking much Spanish after she returned to the United States.

Leigh: Well, now after I'm back because I don't really speak Spanish with anybody, it's not that I don't feel comfortable, but I haven't really found *anybody that makes me want to speak Spanish to them.*

(Interview 2)

While Katherine has had a hard time finding people who want to talk to her in Spanish, Leigh has had a hard time finding people that *she* wants to talk to in Spanish. Both of them blame other people for their lack of HL use in the States. Speaking of language use as being dependent on the environment (other people or geography) in this way allowed the participants to position themselves as somewhat helpless with regard to practicing and using their heritage language. It made it easier for the participants to think that it was not their fault if they were unable to continue learning their HL as they had hoped.

### ***Other interpretive repertoires for heritage languages***

Some participants discussed other elements of their relationship to their HL. Amy spoke about Mandarin as something she could “test out” and “try out” in Hong Kong.

Amy: Every once in a while you'd find somebody from the mainland. And I would just *try out my Chinese*. Interesting story is the first day me and my friend got there, we flew there together. I decided to *try out my Chinese* first thing, and I took us to a different university and I didn't know.

(Interview 2)

Amy was clearly unsure of her ability to communicate in Mandarin when she arrived in Hong Kong. Her use of the phrases “test out” and “try out” imply that she was willing to forgo using her HL while abroad if she was unable to communicate in it well enough. She had this luxury because she chose to study in a location where her HL is not the main language spoken.

In their first interviews, Lucy called French “a language I speak when I'm drinking with my family” and Olga called Korean “my fun side language.” Katherine called Spanish “my mom and dad's secret language.” It is fun for Katherine to be in on

the secret now that she is more proficient in Spanish. These three participants are drawing on the idea that language can be used for amusement. When the participants discussed why they want to study their HL and be immersed in it abroad, however, none of them made use of this interpretive repertoire about language. Instead, they cited the usefulness of being more fluent in their HL in opening up job opportunities and in learning more about themselves and their heritage.

Anne: But now I feel like since I'm going abroad and I have reasons to actually learn Chinese. And as I've grown up I've also like matured and realized how having *an additional skill on your resume* and being able to speak another language is very *useful in the workforce*. So I'm more motivated to actually learn. (Interview 1)

Kirstin: How do you think you'll use Cantonese or Mandarin for the rest of your life job-wise, or do you think you'll use it?

Ching: Job-wise, I think it will make me *more desirable* because I am multi-lingual. And if I become fluent you know they can send me to the Asian countries and things like that. I was just mostly concerned about family and with my family if I decide to get married and have a family then I can teach my children Cantonese. (Interview)

Anne, Ching, Katherine, and a few others justified their decision to study their HL abroad through the use of the interpretive repertoire that claims that bilingualism opens up job opportunities that monolinguals do not have. Ching also mentioned wanting to improve her Cantonese so she could connect more with her family and teach it to her children.

Erin, on the other hand, decided to focus on learning German because she personally wanted to learn about her own heritage.

Erin: And then when I was in eighth grade and you have the opportunity to take a language, I had the choices of Spanish, French, and German. And I decided not to take French because I thought well that's a completely useless language. This is my thinking in eighth grade, and then I thought Spanish, that would be useful but everybody's taking Spanish. And I really wanted to take German and my parents were like that's not a good idea, you should probably take Spanish. German is probably more useless than French. And it was a little battle for a while, but I got my way. So I started taking German in eighth grade and took German through twelfth grade in high school and really liked it and just wanted to

learn everything I could about Germany's history and culture and obviously the language also.  
(Interview)

Erin invested a lot of time and effort into learning German despite believing that German proficiency is not very useful in the United States and being advised by her parents to study Spanish instead.

Thus, the participants chose to further their HL learning both because they thought it would be helpful once they start looking for a job, and some chose to study their HL despite its perceived lack of usefulness.

### ***Heritage and expectations of language proficiency***

Several of the participants spoke about wanting to learn their HL because of certain identity-related expectations they had of themselves. To different degrees, many of them felt as though their heritage obligated them to speak their HL well, and they struggled to reconcile that with the fact that they were dominant in English. Participants in the quantitative study completed by Talon (2006) indicated they felt the same obligation. Although this idea will be explored in detail later in the chapter under the subheading "Identity", this section discusses some data that highlight this connection participants felt between being who they are and feeling as though they should speak their HL.

Katherine: I guess I feel like I should learn Spanish since it is part of my history... So I guess I feel like I have a responsibility to learn Spanish. And I guess I feel like it would be more fulfilling culturally I guess, that's kind of a weird way to put it but I guess a little bit that I could speak Spanish. I guess I've never really felt stunted or anything like that by the fact, but yeah.  
(Interview 1)

Kirstin: Uh huh. So then what do you think changed between quitting in eighth grade or whatever and then deciding to go to Hong Kong this past Spring?

Ching: Eventually I realized I guess, living in college *that I really really liked being Chinese* and I really missed that, because there are hardly any Cantonese speakers at Rice, so I was kind of like missing that and people would look at me

and I'm obviously Chinese so *they expect me to be able to speak and do all that*, but I couldn't do a lot of it. I kind of felt *disappointed in myself*. I eventually decided I really want to work on this. I *really want to become fluent and do all this and learn more about my culture*, so I thought a good place to start would be Hong Kong.  
(Interview 1)

Both Ching and Katherine spoke about their HL as though it is something they should know because it is part of their culture. They were both rather enthusiastic about these expectations. David, on the other hand, was not.

Kirstin: How do you feel about the exposure you've had to Hebrew?

David: How do I feel about it? *I suppose it's nice that I know the language*. I don't know. I'd like to know the language better, that's part of the reason why I'm going back to Israel. It's nice to be able to communicate with someone in another way.  
(Interview 1)

Kirstin: Okay. So what your goals for your trip?

David: My goals. Learn some math and physics. *I guess I'd like to learn the language better*. I'd like to be able to communicate at a more advanced level in Hebrew. And just get to know what it's like to be Israeli.  
(Interview 1)

Although David claims to be interested in furthering his Hebrew, he was remarkably ambivalent at some points in the interview about learning more of the language.

In summary, the HL learners in this study had a difficult time pinpointing their exact relationship to their HL, drew on various interpretive repertoires when discussing their HL and their reasons for studying it, and felt that their proficiency in the HL varied depending on who they were talking to and what country they were in. The following section explores the participants' attitudes toward, and goals for, HL learning in more depth.

### **Language learning**

The following section describes the interpretive repertoires used by the participants to talk about language learning. They discussed how language learning is

related to ability, immersion, and parental influence. They explained how they view their HL proficiency, their goals for learning language, in what ways their proficiency improved while abroad, and their hopes for future children regarding language learning. When the participants talked about their beliefs about learning language, they drew on many of the same interpretive repertoires that Curtis used in my preliminary study.

### ***Language learning and ability***

Some participants spoke about language learning as being an innate skill that they either did or did not possess. For example, language learning is easy for Olga.

Olga: And so when I came here *I picked up English*, it was *easy* for me to retain both.  
(Interview 1)

Anne and Amy, however, did not feel that language learning was easy for them.

Anne: My language learning capabilities are very poor. The only reason that Chinese I'm interested in or I'm continuing is because it's part of my culture and I speak it at home so it's not really that, like speaking is really easy for me. But reading and writing I'm working hard on. It's just something I've grown up with so it's a lot easier than French. Like Spanish with you you don't get that exposure so it's more difficult for you.  
(Interview 1)

Kirstin: Okay. Have you ever studied any other languages at all or do you know any other languages? Or just Shanghainese and some Mandarin?

Amy: In a very shaky way, I don't like to point this out, but I did take Spanish in high school. But after the third year I just called it quits, I had enough credits for college or whatever. That's pretty much it. I do wish I could pick up languages easily. But for some people I find it does come easier for them, but it never seems to stick for me.  
(Interview 1)

Although it has been easier for Anne and Amy to learn their HL than the foreign languages they studied in school, they explained that they still do not feel as though languages come easily to them. Despite this, they made the effort to go abroad and try to learn more of their HL. I do not know if Anne and Amy actually find it more challenging

to learn languages than average, or instead, if their expectations about how quickly or easily they should be able to learn their HL made them feel like poor language learners.

David blames something other than his innate language learning ability for his Hebrew proficiency.

Kirstin: So how did you feel about speaking Hebrew when you were younger, though, after you came here? Do you remember?

David: I don't know, I guess I started speaking English and then I got *lazy* and stopped speaking Hebrew. Because eventually the English got easier for me. And now I just mostly speak in English. I guess I kind of regret that now.  
(Interview 1)

David claims that laziness played a role in his gradual shift to speaking English after he moved to the United States.

### ***Language learning and immersion***

A number of the participants spoke about the importance of being immersed in the language in order to acquire the language.

Kirstin: So how do you think study abroad is going to affect your acquisition of Spanish or your goals as far as Spanish goes?

Katherine: I'm hoping a lot because I'm going to be *immersed* in it. I guess I'm worried that it's an American program so I'm going to spend a lot of time with Americans and I'm going to speak English with them. But I'm going to *try to make Spanish friends* and I'll be in the homestay so I hope *if I'm immersed in it it's just going to start clicking more*. I guess like I have all the words in my head, but they just don't always click very fluidly. So I'm hoping that they'll click together, if that makes sense, that they'll flow together. If that makes sense.  
(Interview 1)

Kirstin: So you're not taking any Mandarin at all?

Kate: No. *I'm hoping that just by being around just a more Chinese environment I'll pick up more*. Because I notice when I'm in China at least I can read menus better, like small things like that.  
(Interview 1)

Ching and Jaime also spoke about how they looked forward to having native speakers to talk with while they are abroad. As a foreign language learner myself, at first I was a

little surprised by how often the participants talked about wanting to study abroad so that they could be immersed in their HL. From my perspective, I thought most of the participants could be nearly immersed in their HL just by spending the day at their parents' or grandparents' homes or churches right here in the United States. During the data collection period I began to realize that HL immersion while in the United States is not a given for HL learners. Jaime's comment below helped me understand that even though HL learners may at times be immersed in their HL here in the United States, the draw to speak English when abroad is strong, so it is probably even stronger when in the States surrounded by English speakers.

Jaime: Like I said I really really hope that it helps reinforce my Spanish speaking. And I heard that *it only will as much as I put into it*, you know. Because it's really *easy just to talk to the American foreign exchange students*. But so hopefully staying with the homestay, I'm going to stay with the homestay.  
(Interview 1)

A caveat that Jaime touched on is that even when immersed in his HL abroad, if he does not make the effort to speak the language then he will not learn as much as he could. In Katherine's quote above she also expressed concern that she would spend a lot of time with Americans and speaking English with them instead of focusing on learning Spanish. Indeed, the majority of the participants reported that they did spend too much time speaking English when they were abroad, as Lucy expresses below.

Lucy: I'm not as good at focusing on immersion as I thought. I speak English with the other people in my program and it really limits my progress.  
(Email Reflection 3)

Even though research shows that foreign language students typically spend significant time speaking English when abroad (Whitworth, 2006; Collentine & Freed, 2002), I expected the HL learners in this study to immerse themselves more in the language while abroad. However, overall I found that they were just as prone to speaking English as most foreign language learners are in their study abroad programs. Peter, Olga, and Gabrielle were exceptions in that they did speak their HL a significant portion of their time abroad. Peter's program incorporated the use of Taiwanese student

ambassadors whose job was to befriend and spend time with the American students. Their presence helped Peter speak a significant amount of Mandarin while abroad. Olga found it easy to speak in Korean during her month-long internship because everyone she worked with spoke Korean. And Gabrielle found that she was more comfortable speaking in Spanish with the locals in Costa Rica and did not spend much time with other American students.

Peter, like Curtis, spoke about the desire to achieve a certain level of HL proficiency after which it would be easier to acquire additional vocabulary.

Peter: I feel like professional goals, just for the future. I think that if you learn the language *to a certain capacity* it will be easier to [xx]

Kirstin: It will be easier to what?

Peter: To pull in new words. *The more you know the easier it is to learn in the future.* And I guess one part, I have this Chinese medical book and I looked over it a couple times this summer and I couldn't really retain anything. And I feel like *if I get a better mastery first and if I study that later, it will stick a lot better.*  
(Interview 1)

This level of proficiency is something Peter felt he needed to acquire while immersed in China, and then, after he reached a level of fluency, he would be able to study on his own and continue learning Chinese more easily. Anne and Ching agreed that they should be able to continue learning Chinese on their own after they returned from their study abroad trips. They indicated that they planned to do some self-studying by reading books.

### ***Parental influence on language learning***

The participants' parents played a role in forming the participants' attitudes toward HL acquisition. When the Asian participants discussed the role of their parents in learning their HL, the topic of weekend Chinese school classes was brought up often. Overall, my Asian participants who were required to attend these classes did not enjoy them. They had a difficult time seeing the usefulness of learning Chinese. Anne's parents even encouraged her to just focus on learning what she needed to for the weekly quizzes. The Asian participants all claimed that these classes did little to help them learn

Chinese. Kate's parents did not make her go to Chinese school. It was important to them not to force her to do things she did not want to do. Instead, they implemented a more formal Chinese language learning time at home using authentic materials. Kate's mom would have her read sections of the Chinese newspaper to her to help her keep up with her Chinese.

Kate: I didn't really like learning English, no. So I didn't really like it. So at the time I had like a second grade level of Mandarin, like I could write some and I could read it, things like that. But since I've been here *my parents don't really make me study it or anything, so it's gone down significantly*. That was the exposure, when I was little, my mom a lot of her friends would send their kids to Chinese school to learn, but I was like no all you do there is play games and kids hate it and they never learn anything, and she was like yeah, that's true.

Kirstin: You never went!

Kate: So I never had to go, so it was really good. Yeah, my parents are really good about not forcing me, so never had to go there. *And my mom used to make me read her the Chinese newspaper. She was like, you pick a section you have to read it to me. I used to read her the celebrity section.* It was like when I was in elementary school. *I would read it to her and that's how she would make sure I could learn Chinese.*

(Interview 1)

Some of the other participants' parents also made conscious decisions to teach their children the heritage language.

Kirstin: So does your mom, would she talk to you most of the time in Spanish or just occasionally?

Louis: *Just occasionally, but she really tried to get us to learn. She would buy songs in Spanish to play in the car and she even got me a language curriculum which you might have heard of, it's called Paraglide (?) you haven't heard of that?*

Kirstin: No, huh uh.

Louis: Oh, I forget the guy's name, he's a linguist. Robert. His name is Dr. Robert, um, I'll have to send it to you, but he founded Paraglide, and it's this really interesting way of teaching kids languages and he knows, he's fluent in like twelve different languages or something like that. And the way he would teach kids, supposedly, is he tried it in Russian with a kindergarten class and he would just read stories and add a Russian word here and there and then eventually he just kept adding more and more until eventually he could read literature to them in Russian. So that was sort of the approach they did, and so they had cassette tapes

and a book and *my mom got that book and would sit and try to teach that to me.*  
(Interview 1)

I find it interesting that Louis's mom, who was fluent in Spanish, only occasionally talked to him in Spanish, yet spent the time and effort to buy Spanish language learning materials for him and to designate formal Spanish learning times in their home. Louis mentioned in another part of the interview that his mom took him to spend time with a neighbor who was from Venezuela so he could learn Spanish from him! Louis reported enjoying all these activities but did not question why his mother neglected to simply speak Spanish to him while he was growing up. Likely, part of the reason is because Louis's father does not speak Spanish, so Spanish was not the main language used in the home.

April's mother also rejected formalized language classes offered outside the home. She decided to talk to April in Spanish instead.

Kirstin: So you were never in any classes that were ESL classes or bilingual classes, or were you?

April: My mother had a pretty strong political stance on bilingual classes. She didn't like them...And she just felt that *it didn't make sense for her children to be educated in Spanish when she could educate them herself in Spanish at home.* She felt like it would be better for them to be educated in English.

Kirstin: So did your mom do any actual formal teaching of Spanish to you, or just talking? Did she read books to you in Spanish?

April: *Just talking.*  
(Interview 1)

April thinks she learned enough Spanish this way. Anne also felt that her parents gave her enough exposure to her HL just by talking to her in Chinese.

A few of the participants primarily were exposed to their HL through someone who was not a relative. Amy learned Mandarin more from her friends' families as she spent time in their houses after school than from her parents. Gabrielle thinks the exposure to Spanish she received through her housekeeper played a significant role in her Spanish acquisition.

Gabrielle: And my housekeeper. My housekeeper had a huge part in bringing me up, like we brought her from Mexico. She had a huge part in making sure that I grew up and kept my Spanish. Like I know when it's your first language it's hard to forget but I'm pretty sure that I would have lost a lot more if she had not been in my life because my father was gone so much.

(Interview 1)

Gabrielle, who has two heritage languages, also talked about the fact that she is more comfortable in Spanish and is closer to her Hispanic father, whereas her sister is more comfortable in Arabic and has a better relationship with their Lebanese mother. She thinks they better learned the HL of the parent with whom they had more connection. Along the same lines, Miville et al. (2005) found that multi-racial students adopt the ethnic label of the parent to whom they feel closest.

Some of the participants' parents purposefully did not expose them to their HL. They did not enroll them in language classes, purchase language curriculum or books, or speak to them much in the language. For example, Katherine said that she feels her parents were very guarded about speaking Spanish with her because it was a mark of being lower class. And Leigh's mother, who is a third grade bilingual teacher, never spoke to her children in Spanish when they were growing up!

Kirstin: So your mom always just spoke to you in English pretty much?

Leigh: Yeah, I've always been spoke to in English. My mother, she's a third grade bilingual teacher, so she's definitely fluent in it.

Kirstin: How do you feel about that? Do you wish she had, or are you okay with it?

Leigh: I guess there's a little bit of resentment in that area, because I feel that I'm at a loss because she has a *gift* to speak a second language *and she didn't pass it on to us*. I remember when I was little I used to try to speak Spanish by myself, so I would ask her what certain words were, like how do you say "go"? And she would say you can't speak Spanish like that. But I never really understood why. I guess she thought it was *too complicated to explain it to me*. So I'm a little bitter.

(Interview 1)

Leigh, Katherine, and Jaime expressed frustration that their parents did not speak much Spanish to them while they were growing up. Leigh spoke of her HL as a gift that

her mom chose not to pass on to her, a decision that she still does not understand even today. Unlike Katherine's parents, who did not teach her much Spanish because they felt it was a mark of being lower class, it can be assumed that Leigh's mother, who is a bilingual teacher, feels positively about bilingualism and Spanish proficiency. This highlights the complex emotions and decisions surrounding the participants' HL acquisition as young children. As a group, they were exposed to their HL to varying degrees, in formal and informal ways, by people in and out of their home, and by parents who felt positively and negatively about their children acquiring their HL. Despite reluctance on the behalf of some parents to intentionally expose their children to the HL, all of the participants acquired some proficiency in their HL outside of the formal classroom setting. This can be partially attributed to the fact that many of the participants were members of peer-speech communities while growing up and therefore heard other friends, classmates, or relatives their age speaking the HL.

### ***Underestimation of heritage language proficiency***

As I conducted interviews, I was surprised to find out that several of the participants who had tested out of semesters' worth of language classes at the university chose to enroll in lower-level classes. Some participants lacked trust in the placement exams given. This is seen in the quotes below from Pablo Diego and Katherine. Leigh also enrolled in a lower Spanish class than she could have.

Kirstin: So you said you think you would start in second year, second semester Spanish?

Pablo Diego: I guess. I took the AP exam and I got a 5 on it. So that covered my four or my five years of Spanish here. *If I were to take Spanish I would probably start from the beginning.*

Kirstin: Ahhh, really?

Pablo Diego: Yeah, I don't know.

Kirstin: Why?

Pablo Diego: *Just so I can learn it more formally. I want to learn it how it should be.* Back in high school I learned it, I knew it because I spoke it and I read it a lot but still, my writing skills. I mean, it's more my writing and the way you put the words together.

(Interview 1)

Kirstin: And which class are you in right now?

Katherine: It's 312L, second semester second year.

Kirstin: Okay. So then after that you would go on to composition?

Katherine: Yeah. *I actually tested out of this class but I figured I should take it just to make sure I'm prepared for Spain.*

(Interview 1)

After returning from his semester in Mexico, Pablo Diego and I had the following exchange during his second interview.

Kirstin: So, are you taking any Spanish classes this semester?

Pablo Diego: I was, I was signed up for Spanish something but I got to the class and all of them were like white students. I mean, I understand white students, but they were all white.

Kirstin: It must have been a pretty high level, too?

Pablo Diego: Yeah, it was high level Spanish. Well, it was the last level of the basics like the fourth one. And the professor was pretty cool. And I was just like, uh, and I was going back to that whole thing where I just want to learn, learn things in the beginning and then in the end I'm just like why did I sign up for this? It's just more trouble for me when I already know Spanish. And so I took the Wisconsin placement test and the highest is 800 and I got a 780, so I tested out of that, perfect, I don't have to take it anymore. It was easy.

(Interview 2)

After spending a whole semester in Mexico, successfully completing business classes in Spanish in a Mexican university, Pablo Diego still felt the need to go back to a fourth semester Spanish class at the University of Texas. Research has shown that it is not unusual for HL speakers to have a low self-esteem regarding their HL proficiency, often because they lack academic proficiency in the language (Tallon, 2006). Pablo Diego may have been experiencing some language learning anxiety, which has been

shown to be the result of low perceptions of language ability (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 1999) and the belief that HL learners should possess native like proficiency in their HL (Tallon, 2006).

Some of the participants seemed to feel a need to have their HL proficiency verified, and not through a standardized test. Some of them are remarkably uncertain of their grasp of the basics of a language in which they are already fairly fluent. I wonder if this can be partly explained by the possibility that some of the participants have internalized what Pomerantz (2002) referred to as an asymmetrical power relationship between HL learners and foreign language learners. In her study she showed that foreign language classrooms are set up to validate foreign language learners, who are enabled to position themselves as competent users of Spanish regardless of actual proficiency. Conversely, HL speakers are often being compared to or comparing themselves to native speakers within the foreign language classroom, a standard they often cannot live up to. When HL learners are placed with L2 learners who have acquired more classroom knowledge of aspects of the language such as grammar, there can be detrimental consequences for the HL learners (Lynch, 2003). For example, after one year, Wright and Taylor (1995) found that the Inuit HL learning children who had been placed in HL classes had increased personal self-esteem while the HL learners who had been placed in L2 classes did not.

### ***Language learning goals***

In general, before the participants went abroad, they had one of two language-related goals: to improve their conversational abilities or to “set in the fluency”, as Erin called it.

Kirstin: So you said you wanted to take advantage of the option to go abroad for another year if you could go, so what are your goals or expectations for this year for yourself personally?

Erin: For myself, I guess the main goal is I call it *setting in the fluency*. Getting to the point where I'm fluent in German now but getting to the point where *over*

*that edge* where, I don't know how to describe it. I guess there's a difference between fluent and native speaker. *And I want to get closer to the native speaker end even though I guess I'll never be a native speaker.* And I think in a year that can maybe happen. So my primary goal besides my research project and the experience with the kids, I guess my personal goal is the language. And just have the experience of living abroad for a year.  
(Interview 1)

Kirstin: It sounds like you're narrowing stuff down. What are your goals for the trip?

Anne: My goals for the trip. Basically, I want to be able to come back and be more *fluent in the language and be able to read and write a lot more* after being exposed to the language, I hope that my reading and writing will have improved a lot actually. So when I come back I kind of want *to show my parents up*, and be like hey, I didn't waste my entire semester, I actually learned something. Let me read you an entire newspaper or something like ridiculous like that. So that's my goal. I also want to be able to meet a lot of people from around the States or international students, so basically yeah meeting people and not wasting my time and learning the language better.  
(Interview 1)

Anne's goals also were centered on being able to function more as a native speaker.

Leigh and Louis expressed the same goals.

Ching, Lucy, Katherine, and Peter, on the other hand, were more focused on improving their conversational skills and basic ability to communicate. Lucy and Peter mentioned wanting specifically to improve their vocabulary in their HL. Katherine's goal was to not lose her Mexican accent as she learned Spanish in Spain.

Kirstin: So what are your main goals for your trip, then?

Katherine: 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. I guess I want to travel a lot, too. That's mostly it.  
(Interview 1)

Although Katherine did not say so in the interview, I got the impression that she was perhaps interested in keeping her Mexican accent because it is part of her identity. It connects her to her family and she has a legitimate fear that she will be seen as different from them if she returns from Spain speaking more like a Spaniard.

Thus, overall, then, with regard to language learning goals before going abroad, the participants employed only two main interpretive repertoires – studying abroad to learn a little more of the language, and studying abroad to become very fluent in the language. In general, the participants did not express much specificity concerning their language learning goals.

### ***Growth in proficiency while abroad***

When the participants returned from being abroad, I received a wide variety of responses as to how their HL proficiency actually improved. Some participants were certainly surprised by the aspects of language in which they saw growth. The two most common answers I received had to do with gaining confidence in language abilities and learning more slang and colloquialisms.

A number of students said they gained confidence in their ability to speak their HL as a result of studying abroad, and they were all pleased by this.

Kirstin: So one of your goals you told me last time was to learn more Spanish but you didn't want to learn your accent. So did you learn more Spanish and did you lose your accent?

Katherine: I actually picked up a pretty decent Spanish accent. You know, I don't hate it anymore like I used to. It's kind of fun. My friends now they scoff at me. And every now and then I'll slip a *vosotros* into my speech. Like, I have a lot of Latin American friends who are like oh my gosh. But yea, I guess I could learn a good deal more Spanish. *I'm a lot more confident*, I was more so when I first came back. And now it's like ah, I'm a little less confident. I guess I *figure one of the biggest things I was lacking was confidence in my ability*. And I feel like even if you don't speak very well but you're confident when you talk about it when you talk in Spanish it comes across a lot better. And so I don't know, I picked that up so I do speak little better, a good deal better, and I understand a lot better and I can read and write pretty decent.

(Interview 2)

Katherine also reported that she did indeed pick up some of a Spanish accent and did not seem bothered by this, even though her friends in Texas made fun of her for it.

Pablo Diego spoke about learning Mexican slang while he was abroad, when he had initially expected to learn the more formal register of Spanish instead.

Kirstin: And you said you wanted to improve your Spanish speaking skills, specifically more formal and more correct.

Pablo Diego: Okay. Yeah, actually not too much formal but more informal. Very much slang, that's what they use over there. It's um, teenagers just doing their thing. And I guess I met a lot of indigenous people, too, and their form of speaking is a lot different than the regular Spanish, they have different dialects. And I'm not mad, I'm not disappointed that I didn't know informal, I'm happy that I know different ways of speaking.  
(Interview 2)

Like Pablo Diego, several other students were also surprised that they acquired the ability to tell jokes, understand *telenovelas*, and use slang while abroad more than they were improving their academic literacy in their HL. Those participants were excited to become more familiar with the youth and pop culture of the country in which they studied and they felt that gaining more colloquial proficiency in their HL was a significant accomplishment.

Other areas of the participants' HL skills improved as well. Olga's Korean reading skills improved as a result of her internship in Korea, specifically because she had to read announcements during a convention, and one primary method of communication on the job was Instant Messenger. Jordan's vocabulary specific to hospitals, transportation, and travel in Tigrinya vastly improved, something that she does not think she would have been able to learn just from speaking Tigrinya in the United States.

Nevertheless, occasional remorse was expressed by some participants who did not feel that they took as much advantage of their time abroad as they think they could have with regard to learning language.

Ching: I mean personal things like I wish I had used more Chinese and tried to learn it.

Kirstin: While you were there you mean?

Ching: Yeah, because I was at the university so it was easy to find other exchange students, people who could speak English, so I wasn't really forced to use my Chinese very often. So I wish I had forced myself to do that.

Kirstin: Do you guys feel okay with your use of Spanish and Tigrinya? Do you wish you had done more, do you agree with what she's saying?

Jordan: I definitely wish I had done more. It was funny because if I did meet someone who was from the U.S. or whatever I would automatically go into English mode. I guess I just wanted to speak it so badly. I feel like I had a lot of chances to speak Tigrinya, though. Like wherever I went if I went to a store or I went to a restaurant I would have to speak it. I didn't have a lot of chances to speak English. But I wish I had been better at practicing the writing and the reading.

(Focus Group)

Ching spoke of wishing that she had "forced" herself to speak Chinese more often. It is typical of students who study abroad to fall back on English (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Whitworth, 2006), but I was surprised that so many of these HL learners reported having a difficult time making themselves speak only their HL while they were abroad. Most participants struggled with this. A tension exists between participants' wanting to speak their HL while abroad and fulfilling the desire to connect with other exchange students in English.

Ching explained a bit more about why it was difficult for her to speak Cantonese while in Hong Kong.

Ching: It was hard making friends with the locals because they're not very outgoing and I guess like *they're intimidated by my English level of speaking*. Being able to speak English there is a very kind of coveted thing, it guarantees you a job. Which living with so many people it's hard to find a job because there's so many people, right? So they were intimidated by that and *I was intimidated by their Cantonese. Those were both a tension-causing type of thing*. There were a few that would really kind of reach out to me, my name is this and they would sit next to me and talk to me and that was really nice.

(Interview)

Ching proposed an explanation for the difficulty she had befriending locals. She believed the difficulty was due to mutual intimidation caused by each other's language proficiency. Most people are wary of sounding uneducated to someone who is more proficient in the language than themselves. Leigh expressed the same concern about not wanting to sound "dumb."

Kirstin: So how do you think studying abroad will help you with the Spanish that you're trying to learn?

Leigh: I feel like most of my problem with learning Spanish is *that I'm scared to sound dumb or say the wrong thing*, so most of the time if I know that the person can understand me in English I'll speak to them in English anyway, even if they're speaking back to me in Spanish and I'm understanding what they're saying. So it will be like a Spanish English conversation like you were talking about because I don't feel comfortable enough speaking to them in Spanish. *So I think if I go abroad I'll be forced to speak to people in Spanish and therefore improve my grip on the language.*

(Interview 1)

Leigh thought that she would be forced to speak Spanish while in Argentina, but found after arrival that she had plenty of opportunities to continue speaking English. Being in the context of study abroad did not mean that she was forced to speak only Spanish. Leigh felt a tension between wanting to focus on learning Spanish and not wanting to sound uneducated while doing so, especially given that she was a HL learner. Pablo Diego also talked about being embarrassed to speak his HL to native speakers and not wanting to be judged. Jaime was worried that the Spaniards would look down on his border Spanish and think he was butchering the language. Similarly, April feared that people in the Dominican Republic would make fun of her pronunciation. Anne found that people in China actually did make fun of her pronunciation. The people who made fun of her were not the native Chinese, however, but rather her American peers who were learning Standard Chinese spoken in Beijing. Anne was ridiculed because her pronunciation came from her parent's specific variety of Mandarin, not spoken in the capital. Finally, Peter expressed that he felt hopeless about being able to remember all the Chinese he was learning. He was frustrated because he was exposed to a significant amount of language in Taiwan but he did not think he could retain as much of it as he wanted to.

### ***Future children and language acquisition***

The final topic discussed in this section on language learning ideologies concerns how participants envision language learning in the context of their own (future) children.

I was curious to know participants' thoughts on this topic because they generally had strong feelings about how much of their HL they had been taught or exposed to (or not) while growing up.

Louis was very clear about the plans he has for his own children.

Kirstin: What about when you have children, if you have children, imagine you have kids, what are your plans for language?

Louis: *They're gonna learn Spanish.*

Kirstin: How are they gonna learn Spanish?

Louis: Me. And I'm sure we'll take them to Spanish speaking countries.  
(Interview 2)

Louis, Jordan, and April were all certain that their children will be able to learn their HL without problems by being exposed to the language in the home. More often, though, the participants were not as sure that their children would speak their HL. Ching plans to speak Cantonese at home to her children, but is aware that whether they really learn it or not may depend on their personalities. Several of the participants mentioned that their children's language acquisition would depend a lot on whether their spouse was fluent in the language or not.

In general, the HL participants value bilingualism and multilingualism in general for their children, sometimes regardless of whether the HL is part of the mix or not. I was somewhat surprised by the responses I received from Anne, Olga, and Katherine. They plan to speak to their children in their HL, but in the end, they would be happy if the children are bilingual in *any* language. This attitude was reflected in my interview with Olga.

Kirstin: What about if you have children someday, or nieces and nephews, what do you think you would do, would you speak to them in Korean or what would your plans be for that?

Olga: It depends. Like if I marry a Korean man. Like I want to teach them Korean anyways, just because I think being bilingual or being multilingual is really important, just in terms of being able to express yourself differently and being more creative with your words, I think being multilingual is important. *So I*

*want to teach them different languages, it doesn't necessarily have to be Korean.* But yea, I mean if it comes down to it, there are things you can express in Korean, but I don't know. I guess just being able to talk to my parents, so I do want to teach them enough to be able to understand my parents.

(Interview 2)

Leigh and Kate are not confident, however, that they would be able to create an environment in the home that would promote HL acquisition for their children.

Kirstin: What about when you think about the future and possibly having children, what do you hope for them or plan to do with them as far as language exposure goes? Have you thought about that?

Leigh: I *imagine* that I would want them to know Spanish, because it's kind of *neat*. If you have a friend who knows Spanish it's kind of neat to go back and forth maybe to switch between English and Spanish. I don't know, *it makes me feel special*, I imagine my kids would feel special, too.

Kirstin: So not specifically more on how you would get them to? That's cool.

Leigh: *I don't know*, I feel like nowadays you're kind of at a deficit if you only know one language. I feel fortunate that I grew up knowing English because I feel like everybody speaks English. But I don't want to fall into the dumb American category, so I would like them to at least learn two languages.

(Interview 2)

Leigh is not especially confident that it will be easy for her children to learn Spanish, which is her HL. She imagines she wants her kids to know the language because it is neat and would make them feel special. She has no ideas specifically of how to help them learn Spanish. She does not even mention speaking it in the home to them. Overall, she also would just like her children to be bilingual in any language.

In summary, the participants hold various beliefs about language learning and how it relates to ability and opportunities for immersion. The participants had rather broad language learning goals before going abroad and upon return they all reported growth in some area of language proficiency, even if only that they had gained confidence in their ability to communicate. The following section describes the ways the participants talked about study abroad.

## **Study abroad**

This section focuses on choosing a study abroad location, the participants' goals for studying abroad that are unrelated to language, what participants learned about themselves while abroad, and the effect study abroad had on participants' relationships with their families after they returned.

### ***Choosing a study abroad location***

I asked the participants if they had help from their school's study abroad office when planning their program abroad. A few of the participants went abroad not seeking college credit, so they did not need to formally involve the study abroad office. These participants all had some communication, though, with the study abroad office, even if only for the purpose of helping them apply for travel scholarships.

The students who already knew where they wanted to study abroad and what type of program they wanted thought that the study abroad offices gave them sufficient support. Some of the participants who were not exactly sure where to study, however, were disappointed with the help they received from study abroad staff.

Kirstin: Yea. So did you go through the study abroad office, did you use them for planning?

Jaime: Yeah.

Kirstin: How did that go?

Jaime: It was all right. Like *they didn't give me that much guidance*. It's kind of more like you do your own thing. Here's a catalogue, come to us if you have any questions. I just looked at a catalogue. *I narrowed it down by just only looking at one catalogue*. And then saw the cities I wanted to do and then picked Sevilla. (Interview 1)

Jaime's feelings about the lack of assistance he received from the study abroad office were echoed by other participants. He wished he had received help in determining which study abroad program to use. He had made his choice after randomly selecting only one catalogue to look through in the first place.

Both Anne and Leigh felt that there was an element of randomness in their selection of program as well. Leigh felt fine being on her own to decide where to go abroad, but Anne would have appreciated more direction. Anne's views are similar to the way I felt when I decided to study abroad as an undergraduate student.

Kirstin: And did you use the study abroad office when you were planning?

Anne: Uh huh.

Kirstin: How did that go?

Anne: I didn't feel that they were too helpful. They helped me in letting me know which programs were available, but in the end like making the decision. I mean, I know that's my job to make the decision in the first place, *but I didn't feel like they directed me towards anything*. Like when I was deciding if I wanted to go to Europe or go to China, *they just kind of threw a bunch of programs and packets at me* and was like here, these are all the programs you can go to... But other than that, the study abroad office has been relatively helpful. My advisor has been helpful getting me through the application process, making sure everything's turned in on time, in that sense they've been really on top of things. They didn't keep everything in their stack of papers and just wait and then the deadlines passed or something. They've been on top of things.  
(Interview 1)

Anne felt somewhat lost when it came to choosing her study abroad location. She was unsure whether she actually wanted to go to a HL country in the first place, and certainly did not know what specific program to apply to. Her frustration with the lack of guidance she received is reflected by her use of the word "threw" in regard to how the study abroad staff gave her information about the options available to her. Anne explained to me later in the first interview that, unfortunately, because of the lack of support she received, she wishes she had decided to go to Shanghai instead of Beijing because she is interested in finance and Shanghai is the center of finance in China.

Anne and Jaime were not the only participants who felt they could have benefited from more direction from the study abroad staff. Amy and Kate both ended up studying in locations where their heritage languages were not spoken much.

Amy: I'm working on my Chinese skills, but my Cantonese is still practically non-existent. *It's surprising that most people don't speak Mandarin here; it's*

*slightly disappointing that I don't get to practice as much as I'd like.*  
(Blog, Amy, 9/22/07)

In addition, Ching chose to study in Hong Kong, where her HL is widely spoken, but she unknowingly chose a program that did not offer Cantonese classes. She found this disappointing because she had wanted to formally study Cantonese while abroad. I am aware of no previous literature that discusses how to help undergraduates choose study abroad destinations and programs that could be compared with these findings.

The participants had many reasons for choosing their study abroad locations, in addition to wanting to improve their HL proficiency. A class that April took at the University of Texas on the topic of Peace and Conflict provided the impetus for her to study in the Dominican Republic. Amy and Leigh wanted to study abroad in a place that they did not think they would ever travel to later in life. Katherine, Olga, and Louis spoke of wanting to be in a city that did not have a lot of other English speakers so that they would not be tempted to speak English instead of their HL. An interpretive repertoire about language learning occurring best in full immersion away from other English speakers informed their decisions about where to study. Several participants are hoping to go to medical school after college and therefore chose to travel to places where they could learn more about health care.

#### *Differing views of "foreignness"*

A number of participants talked about their HL culture as being one that is different and thus part of the reason why they thought it would be worthwhile to study in a particular country. Anne, who was trying to decide between studying in China and Europe, eventually chose to travel to China.

Anne: Well, I knew I wanted to study abroad and at that time, I think I communicated with you before, I didn't know if I wanted to go to London or if I wanted to go to China, but I decided I wanted to go to China because it was more of a *culture change*. And if I had gone to London it would have been relatively similar to the US. I didn't want to go to any other country because I didn't want to have to pick up another language. And I'm thinking about pursuing a career in

China or in Taiwan cause their economy is just booming right now.  
(Interview 1)

Anne speaks of Chinese culture as being different from what she is accustomed to, and this is part of the reason she chose to study abroad in China instead of London. Other participants expressed similar reasons for studying abroad and selecting a particular study abroad country.

Kirstin: So when did you decide to study abroad and why?

Louis: I decided last August that I would study abroad this coming summer because I wanted to, I knew this would be probably the only opportunity to do it with going to medical school and all and *I wanted to have that exposure to different culture* and learn the language a lot better.  
(Interview 1)

Louis studied in Guatemala, a place where he still has many extended relatives. He considers himself to be Hispanic and of Guatemalan heritage, yet he said that Guatemalan culture is different from his own. Pablo Diego also studied in a place, Mexico, where he many relatives live.

Kirstin: How would your experience have been if you went to Spain?

Pablo Diego: I think I would have connected more with American students, I think because *it's even more foreign*.  
(Interview 2)

By calling Spain “even more foreign,” Pablo Diego implied that Mexico is also foreign to him. And Louis felt that by going to Guatemala he would be immersed in a culture different from his own. These observations are interesting because some of the literature I reviewed indicated that the case of the HL learner going abroad is *not* one of being immersed in difference (Landau & Moore, 2001). Beausoleil (2008) and McLaughlin (2001), on the other hand, indicated that when HL learners go abroad they initially expect to be comfortable in the target culture but after arrival they are surprised by how different it feels. Some of the participants clearly felt that going to the country that their relatives are from was indeed exposing them to a culture different from their own.

An ideological dilemma exists, however, regarding the way this topic was discussed by the participants. Jordan and April, for example, expressed that they did not consider going to their parents' home countries to study abroad as going to places that were different or foreign at all. In fact, April (who is of Mexican heritage) explained that she did not study abroad in Mexico precisely because it was not any place that was different to her.

April: 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. And so just recently is where I'm going to start going to different places. I'm going to go to China in the summer, I'm going to go to the Dominican in the fall, and I'm going to go to Thailand in the spring. So it's going to be my first real, *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.

(Interview 1)

April chose to go to the Dominican Republic instead of Mexico partly so she could be immersed in a different culture.

Kirstin: And did you think about Mexico at all, or you didn't want to go to Mexico?

April: Actually, I did think about Mexico at first, I did find a good program there on social justice but I chose the Dominican 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*. I've always been looking for the right thing for me to do to be able to live in Mexico for long periods of time and not just go for vacation. Most programs that are offered are just language classes and there's no point in me spending money on something I already know. And I found one on social change and grass roots organizations in Mexico and it sounded really great. *But I knew I was going to be so comfortable there and so happy there, and I don't know what to expect from the Dominican*.

(Interview 1)

Jordan also felt that studying in her heritage country would not immerse her in a culture different from her own. She was even reluctant to use the term "study abroad" to describe her summer trip. She said she was simply "going back," even though she had only been there twice before in her life. Jordan may have felt like Eritrea was a place where she belonged because she had close ties to the Eritrean community in Texas and

she felt comfortable among other Eritrean Americans, in addition to the fact that her entire extended family still lives in the country.

Jordan: I mean, I don't consider this a study abroad because I don't know, because all my family lives back there, so I just consider it *going back*.  
(Interview 1)

Jordan: I don't know, I didn't really consider it study abroad. I *think I was too familiar with the culture that I was in*. I feel like for study abroad you're learning about something that you didn't know about before. I feel more like it was about developing world medicine than about studying culture.  
(Interview 2)

This divide regarding the way study abroad is conceptualized with relation to culture indicates that the true nature of study abroad for HL learners is complex. Whether the participants thought that their trip involved going somewhere different or not did not seem to depend much on participants' actual HL proficiency. For example, both Louis and Jordan had similarly advanced levels of HL proficiency, but one talked about going abroad as going somewhere very different and the other as going somewhere that was so natural and comfortable that it was almost like home and not really "abroad" at all.

### ***Parents' reactions to the participants' study abroad plans***

About half of the participants indicated that their parents expressed some degree of negativity regarding their decision to study abroad in a country where they could learn their HL. For example, Kate's mother wanted Kate to study in Italy instead, because she wanted to be able to visit Europe and if Kate were there she would have a good excuse to do so. Katherine's parents were reluctant to let her study in Mexico because they perceived it to be dangerous, which was part of the reason why Katherine chose to travel to Spain instead (a decision which her parents were "more accepting of"). April's father was not happy that she had chosen to study in the Dominican Republic because of the presence of the Afro-Caribbean culture and his concerns about how the Dominicans

would react to his daughter who is of Mexican heritage. Anne and Pablo Diego's parents were not pleased that their children had decided to study in China and Mexico respectively. The parents had a hard time understanding why their children would want to return to the very countries they themselves had worked so hard to leave. Rubin (2004) found that parents were not always accepting of their child's decision to go back to the country of their heritage to study. The parents even felt "betrayed" that their child wanted to return, especially if the parents had to endure political instability or traumatic experiences in that country.

Kirstin: I was going to ask what your parents think of it.

Anne: They think actually they didn't want me to go at all. The way they see it is oh, *we're in America now and we worked so hard to come here, and you should be taking advantage of the educational opportunities here* because you'll be learning so much more than you would in they think of *China as a backwards country* even as it's evolving. And they think the opportunities are so much more plentiful here...They were actually more favored toward me going to the London School of Economics or something like that. So then I convinced them to let me go and they were like *you're going to take a whole semester to learn language, that sounds ridiculous to us*. And now you're coming back to college, taking Chinese courses here, *wasting our money*. The whole thing about Chinese, I'm not sure what it is. I feel like they should be like oh, wow, you're learning Chinese again. I'm so glad. But actually they're like why are you wasting your time learning this when you could be learning something else or *something more practical*. I guess they don't see the importance.  
(Interview 1)

The same interpretive repertoire was found in the protests of Pablo Diego's parents.

Kirstin: So what does your family think about you going to Mexico?

Pablo Diego: That I'm *crazy!*

Kirstin: Why?

Pablo Diego: *The reason why we came to the U.S. is so we can like get away from Mexico*. I'm very familiar and my family is very familiar with the social, political bracket in Mexico, there's a strong division. The mindset is *basically you can't do anything in Mexico*. And they're just like, how come you didn't go to Spain? Or France or England? It's like, it's more of a personal thing. And they just feel like "Ay, Pablo Diego".  
(Interview 1)

Ironically, Pablo Diego's parents, who at times seemed to want Pablo Diego to distance himself from Mexico and Mexican culture, chose to enroll him in bilingual classes for three years when they first moved to the United States. He has received mixed messages from his family about their expectations regarding his choices about language and identity.

Leigh also has received mixed messages from her family. Leigh is half Mexican and half Polish, but she decided to study abroad in Argentina because she was interested in the history, had a friend from Argentina, wanted to go somewhere different, exciting and far away, and she believed she would not have an opportunity to travel there later in life. Both her mother and aunt wanted her to go to Mexico instead. In the course of discussing her decision to study abroad, her aunt also made it clear that she wanted Leigh to marry a Mexican so as to not "dilute the family blood." This is an especially strange comment for two reasons. First, Leigh's aunt herself married a Caucasian. Second, Leigh is already "diluted" since her mother did not marry a Mexican.

Regardless of whether the participants' parents and relatives agreed with the decision for them to study their HL abroad or in a particular country, all of the participants were relatively upbeat about their decision to go abroad.

### ***Other interpretive repertoires for study abroad***

A few other ways that the participants talked about study abroad are worth noting. Anne and Amy spoke about it as an escape from their typical semester.

Anne: And I feel like this is a better opportunity for me, to just take a whole semester off and *forget about everything I'm learning*, take a *whole new view on life* and get better at language as well. My parents actually think it's just a way for me to go have *fun*.

(Interview 1)

Amy: I've always wanted to *travel*, always been really curious about going places and it was the perfect opportunity, it still is I believe one of those *once in a lifetime chances* that you don't have a lot of life pressures, I'm at the time of my life when I can truly be *selfish*, you know? So to go abroad and to *play*, obviously

I'm going to get some credits, but I'm going to take some classes pass/fail. Just because I can and it will make it more fun. So I'm really looking forward to, it's an *educational experience outside the classroom* for me.

(Interview 1)

After Anne returned from China, she expressed surprise that, while it was an escape in some senses to be abroad, she still had a lot of work to do and was very challenged academically.

Kirstin: Are you pleased with the progress that you made or do you wish you could have learned more Chinese?

Anne: I'm very happy with the progress I made. I honestly didn't think it was going to be a challenging program, because *everyone talks about study abroad as basically just a time to go out and have fun and you don't really learn. But classes are hard.* Chinese, it definitely took a lot of time to study and learn. We were in classes a lot, I felt. But then we had time to go out and do our own thing. But I don't know, it definitely challenged me.

(Interview 2)

Olga drew on an opposing interpretive repertoire when she spoke about studying abroad in Korea. She did not see her time in Korea as an escape or as a time for fun. On her blog she said she was trying to go through her days as if she really did live there and belong there. She had no desire to "tour" Korea. Jordan talked about study abroad as being an opportunity to give back to her own family and culture, something that her parents have expected her to do.

Other students talked about study abroad as opening up future job opportunities for them. They felt that the experience they had abroad would make them more desirable job candidates, especially because of the additional proficiency they gained in their HL.

A few of the participants talked about things they learned about themselves while abroad. Leigh said she learned how to be by herself while in Argentina. Before going abroad she would rarely go to cafes, parks, and stores by herself. Doing those things alone was something she found she enjoyed while in Argentina. Olga's time in Korea helped reinforce what she stands for, with regard to her faith and values. Olga and Lucy both found that their views of America changed as a result of going abroad. Their

criticisms of American culture and politics were somewhat moderated by their exposure to other cultures. Olga and Louis realized by being in the countries their families are from that they, surprisingly, are not very interested in returning again, even though they had a good time there.

Kirstin: Okay. So overall, what do you think about your experience in Korea?

Olga: So *I'm glad I went* because I wanted to go for a really long time. I really enjoyed my internship and it gave me a lot of like confidence and just the knowledge of being able to do something in an office and being able to get along with people and like understand them and get along and stuff...But I don't ever want to live there. *I don't ever want to live there and I don't know if I'll be going back anytime soon.* But there are so many people that I want to see but for vacation or just for me, not really.

(Interview 2)

Although existing research discusses gender and study abroad, only Lucy reported experiencing tension with regard to gender. She found in her Bambara class in Mali that the only male student was given much more opportunity to talk than the girls in the class. This is similar to the studies on Russian language learners in Russia (Polanyi, 1995; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1993; Ginsberg, 1992) which showed that the men were able to make more linguistic gains than the women in the study. None of the participants who were girls mentioned being frustrated by *piropos*<sup>3</sup> as the girls in the studies by Talburt and Stewart (1999) and Twombly (1995) were.

### ***The effect of study abroad on family relationships***

Another topic that the participants discussed with regard to study abroad was the effect their trips had on their relationships with their family members after returning. This was an important issue to address because Ng (2003) found in the quantitative part of his study of Asian Americans that studying abroad did not affect the sojourners' relationships with their parents, but the qualitative data in that study indicated that the trip did indeed change the familial relationships. Casteen (2006) found that the majority of the participants in her quantitative study, who were not necessarily HL learners,

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<sup>3</sup> Flirtatious, sometimes vulgar comments directed at women by male strangers

experienced additional challenges in their family relationships after returning from abroad. In contrast, the majority of the students in the present study reported positive changes in familial relationships and, Kate, Ching, and Leigh reported that their relationships with their parents did not change at all as a result of studying abroad. In fact, Leigh's mother is still unwilling to speak to Leigh in Spanish because she still thinks Leigh does not understand, despite the five months she spent in Argentina. The majority of the participants, though, report that there was some sort of positive change.

Kirstin: So then your relationship with your parents or siblings, has that changed since you've been back because of your trip do you think? Or no?

Jordan: I think so. I think *they were impressed* by the fact that, because this wasn't a program that I applied to. This was something I had to do a lot of contacts.

Kirstin: Yea, organize yourself.

Jordan: And so I think they were just impressed by the fact that I was able to find someone to intern with and then I was able to actually get it paid for and then I went there and I was by myself. *They were very impressed, my whole family. So I think they respected me for that.*

Kirstin: Cool. Do you feel like you're able to understand your parents any better?

Jordan: When they're speaking to each other and they'll, *I can understand more of what they say in the context of Eritrean culture*, where before they would say a saying and I would be like what are you talking about? It's hard to explain. *They would talk about some aspect of the culture that you can't create in the household and I would have no idea what they were referring to. But now I'm like oh yeah, I do know what you're talking about, because I saw that.*

(Interview 2)

Jordan felt that her parents respected her more as being a capable adult because she organized the whole trip to Eritrea, obtained an internship herself, and traveled abroad by herself. In addition, Jordan better understood her parents after returning from abroad because she had a greater understanding of Eritrean culture, which has helped her understand what her parents are talking about and why they think the way they do.

Anne and Pablo Diego also felt studying abroad helped them to understand where their parents get their ideas about life. Amy, who is one of the participants who studied abroad in a place where her HL is not spoken much, found that she now better understands some of her parents' idiosyncrasies as a result of traveling to Asia. She understands why they miss their homeland so much and can better understand some of their mannerisms and behavior, even though she made only minimal progress in Mandarin by studying in Hong Kong. Olga said that, while her relationship with her parents has not changed, her dad now uses higher vocabulary with her in Korean. Ching felt that her relationship with her parents has changed in that she has become less dependent on them to help her communicate in Cantonese. However, this has not resulted in more open relationships with those with whom she speaks Cantonese.

Ching: My ability to communicate is better. I can say more about what's going on in my life, but it's still at the same level, it's not as open. It's more just *I can speak for myself instead of my parents.*  
(Interview)

Katherine found that her grandmother is more comfortable speaking to her in Spanish since she has returned from Spain.

Katherine: My grandmother was actually really excited when I got back. She was like "You can speak Spanish now! Talk to me in Spanish." I didn't talk that much in Spanish but I could tell she was definitely a lot more comfortable speaking to me in Spanish. I would speak a little bit back in Spanish, and she was really excited. Me and my grandma are really close. She would tell her friends "My grand daughter studied in Spain and she can speak Spanish really well now, she talks in Spanish." Which I don't know if it's true but it's nice to hear her say it.  
(Interview 2)

Lucy also felt closer to both her sister and her mother's boyfriend because her French improved while she was in Mali.

Kirstin: Okay. So do you think, uh, I want to word this the right way. So how did your time abroad and learning French better affect the way you interact with your parents and your family members now that you're back? Has it affected it? Maybe not.

Lucy: Well, I think, with my sister I talked about *we have our culture now, like we have a closer thing*. And it's almost an exclusive thing which I don't feel great about, *but we have this thing that we share now and I don't have that with anyone else, so it's bringing me closer to her*. Or with my mom's boyfriend, *we have this thing now*. And we were close before but now it's like you know, when we make that exerted effort to speak in French together *it's like you're really here to talk to me*. I don't know how to explain that, I guess it's awkward when it's your mom's boyfriend and they're not married or something. And so having that, when I speak to him I think it makes him feel like she's making an exerted effort to connect with my culture. And him speaking back to me is like *we have this new bond*. So it definitely has brought me closer.

(Interview 2)

Lucy referred to the bond she now feels with her family members as a “thing” or a “closer thing” that exists between them. Even though her time abroad was spent in a culture so different from her own heritage cultures, because she improved her French while there, she has felt more connections to those in her family who speak French. The ways the participants' relationships with their family members changed, if they did, as a result of studying abroad were more varied than what Ng (2003) found. The qualitative part of his study showed only that family relationships improved due to the participants' increased understanding of the HL and heritage culture.

This section on study abroad discussed how the participants chose their study abroad location and how “foreignness” played into that decision, their parents' mixed reactions to study abroad, and if and how their relationships with family members changed as a result of their time abroad. The next topic to be explored in more detail is identity.

## **Identity**

This last major section of findings concerns the identities that the participants claimed throughout the data. It also touches on the identities others assumed the participants had, especially those assumed by the participants' host cultures while abroad. The section concludes with a discussion of the tensions that exist for HL learners with regard to identity, and an exploration of how the study abroad experience for the participants might have been different from that of non-HL learners who study abroad.

### ***Non-ethnic subject positions***

Most of the identities the participants discussed had to do with ethnicity, but the participants also claimed some non-ethnic identities. Ching blogged about feeling like “the equivalent of a primary student” because she could not always understand everything she heard in Hong Kong. Similarly, Leigh felt like a child because she used such simple Spanish grammar while she was in Argentina. Curtis, in my preliminary study, had reported feeling like a child as well when he was in Taiwan. Because of how strongly Curtis had felt like a child, I had expected many of the participants in the current study to report similar feelings. But Ching and Leigh were the only participants who talked about themselves as children. Leigh also specifically did not claim the identity that she felt she was projecting while in Argentina because she felt it was not her true self. She spoke about not being able to be “normal” in Argentina.

Leigh: I still am kind of lazy when it comes to vocabulary, I don't have the motivation to go look up words. So I struggle in the vocabulary area still. For the most part though I feel like I can converse if I want to. *It's not perfect to the point where I can completely live and be normal in a Spanish speaking country but it's way better than when I started.*

(Interview 2)

Leigh explained that she felt like she was boring in Spanish because she did not have the language to fully express herself and also because she is a perfectionist and did not want to talk without knowing how to speak correctly. As a result, she felt like people got to know a false Leigh.

### ***Reactions from others while abroad***

Some of the participants spoke about how they thought the people in their host countries viewed them while they were abroad. Some of these positionings were relatively positive. For example, Jaime was identified as Mexican while he was in Spain and he was pleased to find that Spaniards were curious about his origins and not rude about it, as he had expected. Ching's roommate in Hong Kong was curious and amused that Ching could speak Cantonese even though she was a foreigner. Anne, on the other

hand, did not think the Chinese people she met were impressed by her Mandarin proficiency at all or excited about her presence like they were about the presence of her Anglo peers. April felt that the Dominicans were surprised by her and, despite her desire to be seen as Dominican (even though she is Mexican), they only saw her as a “gringa.” This did not seem to bother April, though. Katherine spoke about the benefits of how the Spaniards identified her. As far as she could tell, they saw her simply as an American and not really as Hispanic.

Katherine: I guess, 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 was actually taken off of me when I was over there. 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.

(Interview 2)

Katherine was grateful that she did not feel pressured to speak perfect Spanish while in Spain. Another thing she liked about being categorized as an American was that the Spaniards did not look down on her as she perceived they do with Latin Americans.

### ***Ethnic identity***

In terms of ethnic identity, the participants spoke about themselves in multiple ways, including as having an all-encompassing or world identity, as having re-connected with their heritage, as having an increased appreciation for their American identity, as having a bridge-between-cultures identity, and as having a mixed identity.

#### ***All-encompassing identity***

One way participants described themselves was as having a world identity or an all-encompassing identity. For example, Louis agreed with his girlfriend who calls him a “citizen of the world.” David explained that even though he is Israeli, he does not feel like he is different from everyone else because at college everyone is different from everyone else. Gabrielle also claimed a more all-encompassing cultural identity.

Gabrielle: I don’t really feel part of any country, honestly. Except for South America, I feel part of the whole region. But when it comes to America, I still

consider myself to be from there more than from here. I know in my house I say a lot “those Americans.” It’s just a difference. Talking about the whole individualistic nature, some things that I would never do, that Americans do. I feel like I’m from so many cultures and people who know me know that, so you can’t really classify me under one culture, you just can’t. So I don’t really feel like I’m weighed down to defending one or the other. I just feel like I love all of them so much, and if you’re around me you can see that I love them so much. (Interview 1)

During and after her trip, Gabrielle, out of all the participants, spoke out most strongly about feeling that she become a member of her host culture. Interestingly, this occurred even though she was in Costa Rica and she is not Costa Rican. She is half Ecuadorian, half Lebanese, and was born in Mexico. This view that she had become a member of her host culture is seen in one of her blog posts about an American in Costa Rica who walked her home one night from a piano bar and wanted to kiss her.

Gabrielle: I told him I was not going to be his random get-away-girl in Costa Rica and that he thinks he can simply “lay” one on just because he’s an American on vacation. *I may have been a “Tica” full-out by living here*, but I in NO way led him on. I said good night and I locked the house behind me. This story really made me dislike American tourists. (Blog 6/25/07)

Gabrielle claimed to be a “full-out” Costa Rican (“Tica”). In our second interview, Gabrielle also stated that she was not just another study abroad student because she could relate to the culture. It is likely that the ease with which she identified with many countries, and not specifically with one country, helped her to feel so at home in Costa Rica. Meneses (2006) conducted a study on “third culture” youth, which she defined as children who are raised in various countries abroad because of their parents’ jobs, and whose families have formed a culture that is different from their home culture and the cultures lived in. A child in this situation often finds it easy to build relationships with all of the cultures to which they are exposed, but finds it difficult to take full ownership of any particular culture. This appears to partly describe Gabrielle’s experience, and helps to account for the ways she positioned herself with regard to identity. She described having a sense of loss (especially when she discussed her extended family who still live

in Ecuador), she claimed an all-encompassing identity, and she also spoke about feeling somewhat marginalized at Rice University among her peers. These are three of the characteristics Meneses found to be typical of third culture kids.

*Re-connect with heritage identity*

Although Gabrielle was the only participant who claimed to be a full member of the country she studied in, other participants felt that they were able to reconnect with their HL identity while studying abroad. Lucy used the words “reattach” and “connect” when describing how she felt personally about being in countries where French is spoken. Louis said in his third email reflection that his time in Guatemala reconnected him with his “latinicity,” meaning that he reconnected with his sentimentality, romanticism, and religion. Ching blogged about an afternoon in China that really helped her connect with her Chinese identity.

Ching: We stopped at food stalls and went down an alley where average day things were so new to us. Everywhere people were putting out food and incense and burning paper money. We found a Temple where people burn incense. They make a wish and the incense continuously sends the wish up to heaven. I bought some and offered some to Tyler. He said "Do non-Catholics take communion?" I said No. They don't. I know they don't. I have first hand experience in this matter. I had been thinking about this for a while actually. When my grandfather passed away I didn't bow to the Buddha; I never ate the food they offered up. We prepared his way to heaven for a week doing these Buddhist rituals, but I participated little in them when it involved acknowledging something that went against Catholicism.

But today. I felt drawn. *I felt like I needed to acknowledge my ancestors, my roots, my culture.* This was it. Where all Chinese go on New Year's. They rush to be the first to put their incense in front of the altars. They want their wishes to be the first ones heard by the gods. So I lit the incense, made a wish, bowed 3 times and placed them in sand in front of the altar. I wished that wherever my grandfather was, he would be happy. I don't believe in the Buddha. I believe in God. But it breaks my heart to think that I should believe that my grandfather is in Hell because he was Buddhist. This is all I'm going to say about this, in my journal anyway.  
(Blog, 2/19/07)

Ching says she “acknowledges” her Chinese culture by participating in a Chinese New Year’s ritual that she would not normally partake in, in an effort to remember her grandfather. There is a good chance that Ching would not have had this moment of

connection to her heritage culture (and to her grandfather) if she had not decided to study in Hong Kong.

### *American identity*

Some of the participants felt that their time abroad made them appreciate or acknowledge their American identities as well. Leigh blogged about being confronted with her Americanness.

Leigh: I'm way too American still – impatient and hesitant to eat fruit with ugly marks.  
(Blog, 8/7/07)

In her second interview she spoke about how she became “fully American, fully from the U.S.” while she was in Argentina, even though she was often mistaken for a South American at first by Argentinians. Similarly, Lucy said in her third email reflection from Mali that she felt more American than ever. Later in her second interview she explained why she felt that way.

Lucy: So I think I kind of reconstructed how I felt. I really felt differently about America while I was there. I've always been this really critical, always asking questions, not giving people the benefit of the doubt in politics. And I remember the first time I saw the American embassy, this feeling freaked me out, I was like oh my god it's home! The American flag has always meant like I don't know, manipulated uses of freedom and something I'd always been critical of and it was so comforting for me to see that and it freaked me out so much. So I definitely learned to appreciate being American more, realizing how much privilege I had somewhere else.  
(Interview 2)

Louis also talked about gaining appreciation for being an American in an email reflection.

Louis: 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.  
(Email Reflection 2)

McLaughlin (2001) described her Mexican American participants who studied in Mexico as having realized they are aware of and accept the American parts of their identity as a result of studying abroad. Amy also found that studying abroad made the American part

of her identity more salient. Spending the semester in Hong Kong made her feel proud, both of being from the United States and of her parents for giving her so many opportunities by moving to the States.

Kirstin: So what did it mean to you to be a Chinese American while you were in Hong Kong?

Amy: *Actually the Chinese part not so much didn't come up too much but the American part really did.* It's interesting because being here I never really think about it, like I'm American. But being abroad every once in a while you kind of get a sense of either I can't believe our history like what are we doing in the world today just questioning all these things, but at the same time you do feel proud of your country because you do have all these *rights* and you see like the difference in I guess *expectations for just living*. And you do understand how *privileged* you are. Instead of feeling kind of bad about it, *I feel kind of lucky to get that privilege and also really proud of my parents for wanting to give that to my sister and I.*

(Interview 2)

I was not surprised that Amy identified so much as an American while in Asia because her HL proficiency is lower than most of my other participants and because she does not have a very close relationship with her parents. Fuligni, Kiang, Witkow, & Baldelomar (2008) found in their study of ethnic identity labeling among minority students that those who have lower HL proficiency are less likely to claim that ethnicity as their own. What surprised me was that Olga, who is much more fluent in her HL than Amy and very involved in the Korean community in Texas, wrote in her first email reflection that she felt like a complete foreigner, regardless of her fluency in Korean.

#### *Bridge-between-cultures identity*

Two of the participants spoke about being educators or about being a bridge between the host country culture and American culture. In both cases, they spoke of educating Americans about their host country culture, not people from their host culture about America.

Kirstin: What does it mean to be who you are in the United States essentially, is what I was kind of asking.

Erin: Okay, and then the other part I was going to say and I'm sure it happens a lot with other cultures but I feel it a lot when you tell people you're German is that with it comes a lot of *responsibility*. People are so naïve about what being German is and what it means and when you're little you immediately get labeled as a Nazi and people are just mean. And when I found out about the Fulbright my roommates I mean they weren't being mean or anything, but my roommate said to me I feel really stupid saying this but what is there in Germany besides the Holocaust and Nazis and so on? And just the naïveté that's just, *you have the responsibility to educate people about Germany* and it's not, it's not like that anymore.

(Interview 1)

This idea is interesting to me because my family background is similar to Erin's. Both sides of my family came predominantly from Germany, and when asked, I often identify as having German roots. My parents dabbled in German, so I grew up knowing the colors, how to count, and a few household phrases in German. I have even been told a few times that I look quite German. However, it had never once occurred to me that part of my responsibility might be to educate others about Germany in the way that Erin explained above. Part of the reason why Erin has felt more drawn to educate others than I have may be because, unlike me, Erin has a closer connection to the language because she has living relatives who speak it natively.

Ching positioned herself as a bridge for her American classmates who were in Hong Kong with her.

Kirstin: What did it mean to you to be someone who is Chinese in Hong Kong, but someone I guess who is also American?

Ching: I felt like that I should kind of *bring both cultures and kind of be a bridge for the Americans or for the English speakers and the Chinese*, like, I could translate for them and I could *explain the little intricacies of Chinese culture*, so I felt like some of my friends there if there was a time when we needed to speak Cantonese, I would be the one to help them order food, or talk to someone or get a question asked or do stuff for them. I really like that. Helping people out. Explaining my culture and stuff like that.

(Interview)

Ching was often frustrated that her American study abroad peers did not see her as a bridge to Hong Kong culture. She spoke about two examples of this in her interview.

Ching: Um, I guess an example would be that we believe that certain foods we eat are either hot or cold.

Kirstin: Oh, yeah, I've heard about that.

Ching: Yeah, so things like that, we might talk about but if we explain it to them they won't understand it, they'll look at us weird. And I guess it's more like it frustrates me when the people I explain these things to they don't accept it or they don't understand it. People that are like oh, okay, that's interesting and they'll want to hear more about it, I really like talking about it. *I did meet plenty of people that kind of thought that I was lying when I was talking about something in my culture and it was kind of frustrating and you're looking at me like I don't know what I'm talking about but I'm obviously Chinese*, so it was more like that...

Kirstin: Yea, so why do you think they didn't believe you?

Ching: Maybe because it sounded ridiculous to them. Or it sounded just unimportant. One of the things I was always taught was you should always have both of your hands on the table. It doesn't matter if you're not using one, but it's rude to keep it under the table or keep it not seen. So, like if I told people that they would look at me like that's just weird, I mean you're not doing anything with your other hand, so kind of like little things like that.  
(Interview)

Ching was understandably frustrated in Hong Kong when the Americans who were with her did not believe her explanations of Chinese culture. Because she tried to position herself as a bridge between the two countries, she was disappointed when her friends did not use her as such.

### *Mixed identity*

A very common way the participants positioned themselves was as Chinese American, Asian American, Mexican American, etc. For April and Peter, language has played a central role in their Mexican American and Chinese American identities, respectively. Peter felt that being Chinese American gave him an advantage in Taiwan because everyone there wanted to speak English. April felt that she needed to speak Spanish to truly be Mexican American.

Kirstin: So how do you feel about the exposure you've had to Spanish growing up?

April: It's been a really positive thing in my life. *I don't think I could really identify myself without it. It's just been a big part of the culture of being Mexican American, I don't think I could be American without being Mexican and be Mexican without being American.* It's just both things of who I am, both languages are a big part of my life.  
(Interview 1)

For April, her Mexican identity and American identity are intertwined and inseparable.

Olga spoke about identity in a very different way than April.

Kirstin: So in general then, do you call yourself Korean, Korean American, Asian, like how do you, just American?

Olga: Huh. *I guess Korean American.* I feel like *it's not even Korean American* because Korean American is more second generation. But I feel like I'm kind of *split identity* you know. I could relate to my friend that went last year because she was saying when you go to Korea you find out things about yourself that you don't really, you don't really address when you're in America. Because the culture is really different. *I love Korean culture* but it's very superficial, materialistic, it's all about looks and appearances, keeping up appearances, and things like that, relationships. Things like that. But things about Korea itself are amazing to me, and there aren't any substitutes in the U.S. for it. *But those aspects of it clash with my personality because I grew up here.* And my values and the way my perspective on things, it's more liberal and less focus on those kinds of things. So I feel like it will be really suffocating. And she was saying you're always worrying about external things you know because the most part I feel like I'm pretty obliv- or not oblivious but I don't like to concern myself with what other people think about me and whatnot. And she said that becomes a bigger part of you, I guess. In that sense, *there are so many things about me that are inherently Korean and at the same time I abhor some things that are Korean. So it's two very separate things. Yeah, I don't consider myself Korean American, I just consider myself, there's a part of me that's Korean and a part of me that's American and they're like mutually exclusive.*  
(Interview 1)

Olga has a very complex relationship with Korean culture and as a result has decided that the Korean part and the American part of her are completely separate. She was the only participant who used the interpretive repertoire that her HL identity and American identity were two entirely separate parts of herself. Interestingly, in other parts of our interviews she did refer to herself as Korean American on occasion. Most of my other participants agreed with April's perspective: that the HL part of their identities and the American part of their identities are intertwined.

Ching and Erin spoke about being Chinese American and German American, respectively, as setting them apart from others, making them different, unique, and special, and they saw it as a conversation starter. Leigh, on the other hand, talked about being half Mexican American and half Polish American as making her the “epitome of American.” Thus, it is precisely her mix of backgrounds that makes her just like everyone else in the United States, and not unique or set apart at all.

Kate spoke about her experience being an Asian American as dealing with stereotypes and deciding which ones to embrace and which ones to not.

Kirstin: And this is probably a harder one. What does it mean to be who you are in the United States? Do you have any thoughts about that?

Kate: What does it mean to be who I am? Like what does it mean to be Asian American?

Kirstin: Sure.

Kate: I never thought about that. I guess it’s a balance of maintaining certain stereotypes which are true, I mean stereotypes are stereotypes and they exist because the majority or whatnot. *So it’s a balance between maintaining certain stereotypes but still being able to find my own identity in them. Or like how true they are to me personally.*

(Interview 1)

Kate felt that there is an element of choice in her identity – she can decide what type of Asian American she will be.

Amy also felt that she has a choice with regard to her HL identity. Amy spoke about being an American and not wanting to call herself an Asian American or Chinese American even though she has Chinese heritage.

Amy: *I am a U.S. citizen.* One thing that kind of infuriates my parents is during Olympics time I don’t root for China. *My identity lies, I am an American citizen, I was born here and mostly raised here and that’s what I put my identity in.* Of course they’re always like China, and yeah, there’s a *sense of pride* when something happens. But I’m an American citizen and that’s how I see myself as...*I’m a Texan.* Really I haven’t left Texas that much in my life, so I am. I am taking intro to Asian American history right now, and when we speak of, we’re trying to cover Asian American history in the very broad context sense of Asia, not just China. But when specific things come up with China like the gold rush time, or like railroads and the injustices or the opportunities Chinese Americans

found, there is a sense of *pride, they are my people, my heritage does lie with them even though I'm an American citizen*. It all goes into the melting pot that is America. *And so many people identify themselves as American but their heritage still lies somewhere else...*

Kirstin: What does it mean to be who you are in this country?

Amy: Who I am, *I think I would have more of an identity as an Asian American if growing up if I was more entrenched in the Asian American community... There is like a sense of pride not just in our heritage but just in the accomplishments that Asian Americans, not Asians but Asian Americans and Chinese Americans make here*. When I say that Plano is 20 percent Asian and most of that 20 percent is in within the top ten percent of graduating classes. Yeah, I identify with that and I am *proud* of that. And we are a very tight knit community, and sometimes a little bit extremely so. *Really if I identify myself I wouldn't say outright Asian American or Chinese American even though on all those forms that's what I circle because that's what they ask for. But really I'm just an American.*  
(Interview 1)

Amy's citizenship status is important to her in deciding who to identify with, as is where she has spent most of her life, so she called herself an American citizen and a Texan. She repeatedly expressed pride in the Chinese culture and in both present day and historical Chinese American accomplishments, but ultimately seemed most comfortable considering herself an American.

By traveling to Eritrea, Jordan gained a better understanding of her identity. During our first interview she talked about possibly wanting to live in Eritrea permanently in the future. She said that she relates more to Eritrean values than to American values. In her second email reflection while abroad, she wrote that she knows now that it would be extremely difficult for her to live in Eritrea long-term. She said that she relates more to Eritreans who live abroad than to Eritreans in Eritrea, and that there is a big difference between being Eritrean and being Eritrean American. Her time abroad helped her to realize that she falls much more within the latter category. Anne had a similar reaction. In her second interview she said that being in China helped her realize the big difference between being Chinese and being Chinese American. Ching also found that she is more Chinese American than she had thought. She realized this because

she had a hard time fitting in with the locals in Hong Kong and adjusting to their different attitudes toward life.

### ***Tensions in identity***

One of the final aspects of identity that this section explores concerns conflicts in the identities of the participants. Ten of the participants discussed tensions in this area, either within themselves, or between how they see themselves and how others see them. These kinds of conflicts have been apparent at times in preceding discussion, but they warrant further exploration. Because the nature of the tensions are different for each participant, this subsection outlines the tensions that each participant spoke about rather than seeks common themes to tie together participants' varied discourse.

The language David used to describe himself is reflects uncertainty.

Kirstin: Is there a reason why you chose Israel instead of Japan or China since you're interested in those languages, too?

David: I think I would like being there, too. But I think it's important that I get a better sense of my culture. *I see kind of myself as Israeli, so I kind of want to understand how it is to be Israeli*, because I've been away for so long. I was only there when I was little so I maybe don't understand everything quite yet...

Kirstin: How do you talk about yourself as far as ethnicity goes?

David: *I view myself as Israeli, but I realize that I'm not really I don't live like an Israeli, I've been Americanized. I act like an American, I suppose. I don't know what it's like to be an Israeli, I haven't been there very much. So I am an American citizen, I guess I do see myself as somewhat American but also somewhat Israeli.*

(Interview 1)

He claimed to be Israeli, kind of Israeli, somewhat Israeli, and claimed to not know what it is like to be an Israeli, all in the same interview. He said that he is an American citizen, has been Americanized, acts like an American, and is somewhat an American as well. It is unfortunate that David was not able to travel to Israel to study after all, because I think the trip might have helped him gain a better understanding of who he is and his identity in the way the experience helped some of the other participants.

Louis has a Guatemalan mother and an American father, and during his first interview Louis said that he likes to “embrace” where he comes from. Therefore, he was surprised that while in Guatemala he found himself wanting to feel completely Hispanic and not at all American.

Kirstin: So what did it mean to you to be American or Hispanic American or whatever you call it while you were there?

Louis: ...I guess like in a sense, *at some point there were times when I was sort of wanting to feel like I'm so Hispanic I'm not even American. That's obviously not me. And nor would I ever want to be that. I was born here and raised here in two different cultures. And I definitely have to recognize both of them where I came from.*

(Interview 2)

This internal tension did not linger after he returned to the United States. Louis realized that he would not want to be completely Hispanic and not American because that is not who he is.

The primary tension for Gabrielle concerned her imperfect Spanish proficiency and the fear that, in combination with the distance between the United States and Ecuador, it might cause a separation between her and her family members in Ecuador.

Gabrielle: When I was over there I was realizing that I lost so much of it and I couldn't speak it as perfectly as I wanted. And it made me feel like in a *way I almost couldn't relate to my family living in Ecuador* because I'm not immersed in it like they are, and I was seeing myself as so different *and I couldn't see why they'd want to accept me because I'm not like them anymore.* But I had to completely get over that and realize that they love me despite that I don't use this verb more perfectly than the other.

(Interview 2)

Gabrielle has come to terms, though, with being a little different from her family in Ecuador now. She said that she “got over it” and realized that her family loves her anyway.

Anne expected that she would stand out as coming from the United States while she was in Beijing and that she would draw attention from the locals who would want to talk to her. As she shared in an email, however, others perceived her as being from China while she was there.

Anne: Well I have experienced some surprising things since I've been here. I heard before that Chinese people can easily pinpoint you as Chinese-American, and they would all want to be your friend, or come up to you, or stare... But that was completely wrong – *I completely blend in with everyone here*. No one can tell me apart from any other Chinese person – since my Chinese is good enough where I can speak like a typical Chinese person – I just have a dialect characteristic of south China/Taiwan so people can only assume that I'm not from Beijing. For example, today on the subway, I was sitting next to two Caucasian-Americans from California, and a few of the native people started talking and asking them questions in English. *And I sat there awkwardly thinking...Wow, I'm an American, too, but no one really notices me. So it's strange blending in with the people here when I expected the opposite.*

(Email Reflection 1)

Although Anne thought that others would see her as Chinese American, in her second interview she also talked about thinking that she would integrate well into the culture because she is Chinese. She found that that was not the case, however, because of the many differences between the ways in which people live and how they conduct themselves in China and the United States. This was is an ideological dilemma with regard to Anne's expectations.

Katherine, who does not speak Spanish like a native speaker, has felt guilty because she has Mexican roots and has sensed that other Hispanics expect her to speak Spanish better than she does.

Katherine: I guess I feel like I should learn Spanish since it is part of my history...it makes me feel guilty sometimes if I interact with people who are also Hispanic and speak Spanish and I can't speak to them because I don't. I don't know I think it's also pretty much like it's kind of strange like, I guess the U.S. in general kind of puts this stigma on speaking Spanish sometimes if you're Hispanic, but like other Hispanics put a stigma on not speaking Spanish and they're a little bit antagonistic toward people who can't speak the language, cause they can I guess, I don't know. So I guess I feel like I have a responsibility to learn Spanish. And I guess I feel like it would be more fulfilling culturally I guess, that's kind of a weird way to put it but I guess a little bit that I could speak Spanish. I guess I've never really felt stunted or anything like that by the fact, but yeah...I guess I do feel more stunted when I interact with other Hispanics, but I guess people in general I don't.

(Interview 1)

Although she wants to speak Spanish better, Katherine does not always see herself as Hispanic. She also talked later in the interview about how she does not feel she is different from anybody else in America so she does not want to separate herself ethnically. Katherine felt tension because she is not sure how guilty she should feel about not speaking Spanish perfectly. She said she “guesses” she should learn Spanish and it seems that some of the pressure she has felt from other Hispanics to learn Spanish is not welcome.

Leigh seemed to identify more with being Anglo American even though she is half Mexican. She said that she feels white on the inside and that other Mexicans usually do not see her as one of them.

Leigh: I usually tell people that *I'm American*. Just because I feel like *I identify with being Mexican to the extent that I'm not around other* Mexicans because I don't feel like I'm Mexican enough for them...I always felt that me and my friends we were *white on the inside* just because of the American culture that we grew up in. But if somebody asked me what ethnicity I was I would tell them that I was Polish and Mexican...

Kirstin: So what does it mean to be someone who is Mexican and Polish and American in this country?

Leigh: Well, I think it's kind of, it's confusing. I think people don't really realize that it can be frustrating being of biracial, bicultural, whatever. Because, I don't know, I guess people mostly see things from the oh I'm Mexican and all this bad stuff happens to me because I'm Mexican. But they don't realize at the same time that *they kind of disclude [sic] people like me who don't necessarily look like them* but and I don't, I mean I realize when I grew up it was a mixture of American culture and Mexican culture. *So I don't completely identify with them, so I don't feel comfortable with them. I guess I feel more comfortable with people who embrace American culture.* But at the same time I feel like a lot of times they don't really understand all the, I don't know, a lot of times they're more likely to be ignorant of other races and stuff like that. So that kind of bothers me. *So I feel like when I'm around them I act more like I'm Mexican and when I'm around my friends I act more like I'm white. So it's this balancing act.*  
(Interview 1)

In the end, Leigh explained that she does not feel like she is completely understood by those around her regardless of their ethnicity or family background. Overall, she is confused and frustrated at times as she tries to figure out where she fits in.

Similarly to Leigh, Jaime also spoke about not fitting in, that is, not identifying with either Mexicans or Anglo Americans in the United States. In addition, he explained that he even has a hard time identifying with other people who, like him, grew up on the border and are accustomed to the mix of cultures. Part of the reason Jaime said he does not fit in with people on the border is because they generally have very strong familial connections, whereas his family is spread out and not close knit. Also, not much Spanish was spoken in his home growing up, unlike with most families on the border.

Kirstin: That's different, usually on the border people have family right there.

Jaime: Yeah, exactly. And that actually has a lot to do with my background. Like a lot of typical Mexican families are really close knit and they have their grandmas, their little abuelas and they pass on their traditions and they're really conservative and they're really tight. But with us my mom and my dad divorced when I was pretty young like five. And my mom didn't speak Spanish, so I wasn't exposed to Spanish like almost at all. So living on the border and not speaking Spanish and not having any like family there to like strengthen like our culture beliefs and stuff, it was actually weird. *I was actually like an oddball in a hardcore Mexican community...*

Kirstin: What does it mean to be who you are in the United States? That's like the easiest question I've ever asked.

Jaime: I think like I'm probably like a lot of people here that feel that they're doing what they're supposed to do as in you're in America, you're becoming an American, you're assimilating to the American culture and at the same time you're losing your culture. I mean, because *I don't break a piñata on my birthday, I don't sing las mañanitas to my mom, I don't eat menudo every Sunday. I don't like a lot of really Mexican culture, really Mexican traditions that my friends would do. So it's just like back at home I feel like a fake Mexican but here at Rice they're like "Dude you're so Mexican."* And it's just like dude you don't even know, man, you don't understand... And that's what's weird for me because my mom was like a second or third generation, I don't know what she was. And then my dad was a first generation. So I'm like and then growing up on the border I see a lot of first generation. So I'm just like a mixture at a weird point. So I don't know, I don't really know.  
(Interview 1)

Jaime described himself as an oddball, and a fake Mexican, yet he felt that his friends at college view him as being very Mexican. Jaime himself even admitted to not really embracing Mexican culture and traditions. This reflects a significant disconnect between how others view Jaime and how he views himself.

Ching wrote a powerful entry in her blog toward the beginning of her time in Asia. It highlights a tension in her identity between wanting to be Chinese and realizing that she does not really fit in there.

Ching: I've always wanted to be in Hong Kong. You have no idea how *much I really love being Chinese*. I may not be exploding with Confucian phrases and superstitious comments about luck, but I have always wanted to know more about China, about me. This is where my history lies. This is where my family began. This is where I should be. Right?

Maybe.

I guess I came here to find out. To see for myself what my family has already seen. To know what they know but cannot explain. *To become Chinese*. Because I never really felt that someone who had never seen the heart of their culture could really grasp it fully. And of course I had not. I've always lived in the U.S.. Only ever leaving to go to Chicago. My family has done a pretty good job of keeping me informed of some superstitions and instilling a good idea of what the household culture is like, but of course since my parents have been in the U.S. for some time, it is a mix of cultures. No it isn't good enough. I wanted this. Not just to visit for a few weeks, but to live here. *To embrace and learn who I am supposed to be*.

I want to become fluent.

I want to know what the locals know, to understand what they think to be common sense.

I want to learn the dragon dance.

I want to visit my ancestors.

I want it all.

*I want to be Chinese.*

*Only. I don't know if I could really ever be "Chinese."* From what I've seen here. The way they live, so fast paced. Hardly any religion. Little respect for Professors and learning. Maybe I'm being too critical. Maybe I'm too Americanized. I don't know. I just know that *I like the way I am. And I don't really fit in here. So how am I supposed to become Chinese?*

We'll see.

(Blog, 1/30/07)

In this entry, Ching said that she is Chinese, that she is in Hong Kong to become Chinese, that she is supposed to be Chinese, that she wants to be Chinese, and doubts whether she can ever be Chinese. Despite all this, Ching also said that she likes the way she is. She expresses a mix of tension and contentment with regard to who she perceives herself to be.

At one point in our first interview, which I mentioned above, Olga said that the Korean and American parts of her are completely separate. When I asked her more about that, she explained that she feels like she is more Korean than Korean American.

Kirstin: Okay, so what does it mean to be who you are within this country, in the United States? Somebody who's segregatedly Korean and American?

Olga: What does it mean? Sounds like such a beauty pageant question. World peace! I don't know, I guess I can identify with a specific group so like yeah, there are aspects of me, *I guess I am really Korean, more Korean than a normal Korean American would be because I have a lot of Korean friends.* So I am a part of that community. A lot of times I feel like I am in a predominantly Korean setting and I am the one that brings the American aspects of that circle into it. Where like, I don't know what that means, but like.

Kirstin: Like at church for example?

Olga: Yea, for example at church. I'm able to speak the language but my ideas are less Korean and I express myself in English, so in that sense.  
(Interview 1)

In Texas, Olga has attended a Korean church where she interacts with people who have lived in Korea for some of their lives. She recognized that while she can speak Korean with them, her ideas are more American than theirs. She was surprised when she went to Korea by how foreign she felt.

Kirstin: Makes sense. And you also said that the culture shock was subtle but significant. What did you mean by that?

Olga: It wasn't the culture shock like that's in your face like eating with chopsticks or I can't speak the language or someone misunderstands me. *I was very much Korean on the outside but the way I thought, the things I did, the way I interpreted situations and the things that I disagreed with about Korea were all very foreign. So that was a culture shock.* I thought that I would have more mental I guess, like an ease of transitioning mentally from America from the States to Korea but it wasn't that way. But everything else, in terms of daily routine or habitual things, convenience, it was all okay...

Kirstin: So what did it mean to be Korean American while you were there?

Olga: Being Korean American you get the weird end of the bargain, *because you look Korean but you don't think Korean and sometimes you don't speak Korean and you're not Korean in any, like no fraction of you is Korean.*  
(Interview 2)

Interestingly, after returning from Korea, Olga expressed less certainty about being Korean. She said that she realized she looked Korean but sometimes she felt that there was no part of her that was Korean. This is quite different from how she felt before she went to Korea to study.

The final student to discuss with regard to tension in identity is Pablo Diego. This discussion is longer than the preceding ones because he provided a substantial amount of relevant discourse throughout both interviews. Given how strongly he positioned himself as a Mexican before going abroad, I was surprised that he found it challenging to make friends with locals and to really connect with the Mexicans in his classes in Monterrey.

Pablo Diego attended Kindergarten in Mexico. He then came to the United States and lived on the border with Mexico, where he said he attended a “fairly typical American school.” He took classes in a bilingual program, which is actually far from “typical.” In fourth grade, Pablo Diego began attending a “more American” school that did not have as strong of a focus on bilingualism, and he said he began to feel embarrassed there.

Pablo Diego: But after third grade I moved to a different school in the same city and it was more like American. The school was an upper level from where I was. It was more rich district. *So, being in fourth grade I just felt really like, embarrassed of being a Mexican because everybody else was just like third generation and they knew English and they had their families in San Antonio, and me I'm like the oddball here with my Mexican family in Puebla and Ciudad Acuña.* And I just felt, that's why I stopped being part of Mexican-  
(Interview 1)

Pablo Diego called himself an oddball on the border because his family is too Mexican. Jaime had also felt like an oddball on the border, but that was because his family felt too American compared to other families on the border. Like with Jaime, part of what made Pablo Diego feel out of place on the border was the fact that his family was not nearby, regardless of what country they lived in. Also, note that Pablo Diego said that he felt out of place in the wealthier school district where he began attending school in fourth grade. Later on during the interview, he made it a point to position his family as well off and

himself as part of the higher class in Mexico. Pablo Diego made it clear that his family is not illegal and not poor. He explicitly rejected one of the stereotypical identities placed on Mexicans in this country.

Kirstin: How do you talk about yourself when you're in the United States? Like, what sort of words do you use to refer to yourself?

Pablo Diego: I don't think of, when I speak Spanish, I talk about myself as being like not a like a just most of the students here they think of Mexicans as illegal immigrants that are poor. *But that's not the case with me.* We grew up in a really traditional family. *My grandparents did have money in Mexico, and I just refuse to be a poor Mexican.*  
(Interview 1)

Pablo Diego also talked about feeling embarrassed of being Mexican while in fourth grade. This sentiment changed as he grew older. Throughout the first interview he spoke of having a “strong connection” to people from the interior of Mexico.

Pablo Diego: And here I got exposed to *real Mexicans* from Mexico City, Chihuahua, and Monterrey. And I just felt a *really strong connection to them* again, like being part of the group.  
(Interview 1)

In the first interview, after referring to himself a number of times of Mexican (and arguing for just how Mexican he and his family are), Pablo Diego said that he prefers to be called Hispanic instead.

Kirstin: So you've pretty much been calling yourself Mexican throughout this whole interview. Is that what you generally say, or are you Mexican American, Latino, just Mexican, just American?

Pablo Diego: *I prefer to be called Hispanic.* I mean, for this, I was just calling myself Mexican. I mean, my dad, he would always make fun of me *cause he would always make fun of me not recognizing myself as a Mexican.* He would always ask “What are you?” and I would always say I'm Hispanic. And he was like “No, you're Mexican!” And throughout my life it's been like that and it's just like, yeah, I'm Mexican. And I see it not from the point of, I see it more like the political aspect of it. *It's not more like I'm a Mexican [bragging voice] like I play soccer, wear my jersey everyday. No, it's more like formal, at a sophisticated level. I consider myself a Mexican from the viewpoint that Mexico is progressing economically and politically. And I watch the news a lot over the political campaign and stuff like that, and that's how I consider myself a Mexican.* But not like a Mexican as in where like, narco kind of thing. Not like hey, what's up? [slacker voice] like how they usually portray the guy sitting in the corner with

a sombrero. *No, that's a totally different type of Mexican. I don't feel associated with that, I feel more associated with more of the elite.* I don't know.

Kirstin: Did you like living on the border?

Pablo Diego: It was interesting. It was kind of weird having to deal with the American culture and the Mexican culture, and the huge difference just by one river. And I was exposed to people who were Mexican but who knew nothing about their culture, nothing about Spanish. All they knew was that they're American, and they're American.

(Interview 1)

After Pablo Diego explained that he prefers to be called Hispanic, he strongly asserted his identity as a very particular type of Mexican. He specifically rejected many of the typical stereotypes of Mexicans and instead identified with the “formal,” “elite,” “sophisticated” elements of Mexican culture. Kiang's (2008) study on ethnic self-labeling among young adults in the United States found that claiming a national origin label such as Mexican may require more “identity work” and effort than claiming a Mexican American or American identity does. Pablo Diego did this identity work by carefully outlining the exact type of Mexican that he feels he is.

Pablo Diego went on to distance himself from “white Mexicans” in college.

Pablo Diego: I tried to associate myself with the Hispanic Student Business Association, but I just didn't like it because they're mostly *white Mexicans*. All they knew was English and that's it. *And like their sense of Mexican culture seems really different from mine and I was just like ah, okay.*

(Interview 1)

Before the conclusion of the first interview, Pablo Diego referred to Mexicans in Mexico as “my own people,” thus asserting his identity as a real Mexican yet again.

Pablo Diego: And being taught in the U.S. and having the privilege of studying here in the U.S. I feel like I can do something about changing *my own people*. I have all the opportunities presented, I have a lot of opportunities presented but it's up to me. It's just, opportunities are endless here in the U.S. and it's just up to me what I want to do with them. I'm seriously thinking of doing something in Mexico.

(Interview 1)

After Pablo Diego returned from his study abroad in Mexico, he said that at times he felt somewhat excluded by the Mexicans while he was there.

Pablo Diego: *I think I felt a little left out* because I was born here, 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 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.

Kirstin: In Monterrey, you mean?

Pablo Diego: Yea, in Monterrey. 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?

(Interview 2)

Pablo Diego apparently had relatively dark skin compared to the other students in his classes in Mexico. Pablo Diego said that he thinks the other students were jealous of him because his English was better than theirs. Or, he said that at least they did not quite know how to view him, especially because he looked like he should not know how to speak English. I wonder how much his Mexican classmates' perceptions of him affected how Pablo Diego saw himself while in Mexico.

Kirstin: Some of the goals you set were to meet as many people as possible and to network. Do you think you-

Pablo Diego: No...*They knowing English or them learning English fairly well puts them up higher in society. And then someone like me comes who was born in Mexico and who's Mexican and knows even more English.*

(Interview 2)

Pablo Diego also talked about the fact that he spent a lot of his free time in Mexico interacting with Americans.

Pablo Diego: There were ten Americans. We just clicked and we were always together. I think that was the only downfall. At the end I felt bad because *I was isolating myself after we connected and bonded so we could be together.*

(Interview 2)

The difficulty that Pablo Diego had connecting with Mexicans, combined with the time he put into developing friendships with his study abroad peers, resulted in his speaking a substantial amount of English in Mexico.

Kirstin: So your general attitude toward the culture and society of Mexico is-

Pablo Diego: Very laid-back, very accepting. *At first I felt very very mad, very confused about the culture, why are Mexicans like this? Like here in America, everything is perfect, very organized you obey all the laws, in Mexico I just felt so mad. I think it was that, what is it, culture shock.*  
(Interview 2)

Not only did Pablo Diego talk about not fitting in with Mexicans and having difficulty making Mexican friends, but he also distanced himself from Mexicans and expressed anger at the culture. He explained later during the second interview that he was angry because he did not like how disorganized and inefficient the country seemed.

Throughout much of the second interview, Pablo Diego came across as either being positioned, or positioning himself, as Mexican American as he talked about his time in Mexico. When I asked him specifically about being Mexican American while in Mexico, he gave a very surprising response.

Kirstin: Okay, maybe you kind of answered this, but what did it mean to you to be Mexican American while you were in Mexico?

Pablo Diego: *I think I finally accepted that I'm not really a Mexican American, I'm Mexican.*

Kirstin: Why do you say that?

Pablo Diego: ...I think because of who I am, my background. I was born in Mexico, my family is from Mexico, *I carry on those Mexican ideals. I understand what a true Mexican is, not like these Mexican Americans who have probably never been in Mexico, who you know the only Spanish they hear is from their parents.*  
(Interview 2)

In the end, Pablo Diego concluded that he is truly Mexican and not Mexican American! He supported this argument, however, mostly by comparing himself to most people of Mexican descent who live in the United States, rather than by comparing himself to the Mexicans with whom he came in contact (but did not connect with) while in Mexico.

### ***Heritage language vs. non-heritage language learners abroad***

This qualitative study was not designed specifically to explore how the HL learner's experience abroad is concretely different from the non-HL learner's experience

abroad. The participants made some observations while they were on their sojourns, however, about some aspects of the experience that were different for them compared to their peers who were not HL learners.

Lucy and Leigh felt defensive and guilty when they realized that there were non-HL learners in their study abroad program who could speak their HL better than they themselves could.

Lucy: I would always feel like I was *supposed* to know more about the language of my family than other people. And I think that's not really healthy or fair to yourself. Let yourself learn, let yourself ask questions. I think that was the biggest thing for me, *I put a lot of pressure on myself to pretend like I knew more. Not pretend, but I felt guilty about not knowing more.*  
(Interview 2)

Lucy also said that if she had studied in a non-French speaking country, then she would have felt more freedom to make mistakes. She did not feel as much freedom to do so in French because it is her HL. This was an added pressure that she had to deal with during her time abroad. This is unfortunate, because it is inevitable to make mistakes when learning language and it is usually better to feel freedom to do so.

Peter found that one of the disadvantages of studying in his HL country was that he had relatives there and they had expectations about how often he would visit them. At times this felt like a burden to him, even though he was also thankful that he had the opportunity to spend time with them. Most study abroad students do not have relatives in their destination country and do not need to navigate these familial expectations. Some of the other participants also were able to spend time with relatives while abroad, but they did not say anything negative about this.

Peter also mentioned that because he is of Chinese heritage and looks like he belongs in Taiwan, the locals were not as quick to give him extra help with the language when he needed it like they were with his Caucasian friends who were in Taiwan. He was afraid that the locals saw him as dumb because they expected him to be more fluent than he was, whereas they did not have these expectations of his friends. Olga also talked

about feeling the expectation that she should know Korean because she looked Korean, a pressure that non-HL learners may not feel.

Leigh 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. This is something that would probably be more difficult for most non-HL learners to accomplish. Peter also felt that he had more access to native Mandarin speakers than non-HL students did. He said that being a HL learner gave him an advantage over American students because he was able to crack jokes more easily, and humor is important to developing social relationships.

Peter: Toward the end of our like during our farewell party many people kind of spoke about their experience and I got a pretty big insight about it. *The white students they said that whenever they talked to Taiwanese students, it was very difficult for the Taiwanese students to speak Chinese to them.*

Kirstin: Oh. Like they wanted to speak in English?

Peter: Yea, they just tried really hard to speak in English, no matter if their English was good or bad they just had this default mindset that they had to speak in English. And for my friends, they came to Taiwan to learn Chinese, they wanted to speak in Chinese to the Taiwanese students, and they couldn't really because the Taiwanese students were always speaking English back at them...

Kirstin: So people didn't try to talk to you in English then very much?

Peter: *No, it was easy for me to just speak Chinese with people all the time.*  
(Interview 2)

The participants also pointed out a few other differences between their experiences and (their perceptions of) the experiences of their non-HL learner peers. Katherine noticed that a friend of hers, who is not a Spanish HL learner and who studied abroad in Spain with her, had a very different experience because her friend did not do well outside of American culture. Kate said that she had a different experience when it came to leaving Singapore because she, unlike many of her non-Asian peers, knew that she was not leaving Asia permanently. Therefore, she did not feel nearly as sad or reluctant to leave as they did. She also said that her experience was different from her

non-Asian peers' experience because she encountered little culture shock. This is different from Olga's experience. Olga spent her summer in Korea, her HL country, and her fall semester in Hong Kong. Olga thought that she actually experienced less culture shock in Hong Kong because the culture of Hong Kong is more like American culture as compared to Korean culture.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The participants had no common interpretive repertoires to draw upon when they talked about their heritage languages. The term "heritage language" is one that they did not use themselves and they often found it challenging to determine if their HL was their first language or second language or something else all together. They would agree that they are not simply learning a foreign language and few of them actually called themselves bilinguals. Part of the reason it was so difficult for the participants to label their HL was that many of them had experienced great variability over their lifetimes in their HL proficiency. Some of the participants were more proficient in their HL when younger, and some are more proficient as college students. For some, their attitudes toward the language also changed as they grew up. In general, we talk about language as being much more static than it is for these students. Usually, individuals are thought to have one "first" language, and the language that is labeled the first language is not expected to change. For the participants, their language proficiency and relationship to language has been more fluid and complex.

When discussing why they had chosen to continue learning their heritage language, the participants primarily used two interpretive repertoires. One is that knowing another language is fun. The other is that knowing another language is useful, both for occupational reasons and for connection to themselves and to family. These two repertoires are not necessarily in conflict with each other, but they were used for different purposes by the participants. When participants were trying to downplay a focus on grades and studying while abroad, they spoke of their HL as being fun. In contrast, they

spoke about their HL as being useful when they explained how they convinced their parents to let them study abroad, when they spoke about their career goals, or when they spoke about a desire to connect with their family or heritage. The participants also talked about the influence that their environment, as well as the attitudes and habits of others, have had on whether they feel comfortable and proficient in their HL. This is one of the main ways in which they justified their desire to go abroad to improve their HL, despite the fact that most of them have access to native speakers in their own homes.

In addition to speaking about the need for immersion in a language in order to learn it, the participants talked about language learning as being affected by innate ability, and the presence or absence of laziness within themselves. Some of the participants felt sure that if they could reach a certain level of proficiency, then they would be able to learn more on their own after they returned to the States. The participants had very general language learning goals prior to going abroad, which mostly focused on improving their oral abilities. After returning they usually talked about having improved in that regard. In addition, the participants very commonly reported that they had gained more confidence in the HL, a finding supported by McLaughlin (2001). They also often gained proficiency in slang, humor, and pop culture as a result of their time abroad. Many participants regretted not speaking their HL more while abroad, something which they blamed on their laziness, a lack of native speakers to talk with, difficulty making friends, and most of all, fear of sounding unintelligent. Their fear of sounding unintelligent was compounded by the fact that they looked as though they should be fluent in the language.

The participants discussed study abroad as an escape from typical life, a challenge and a lot of work, an opportunity to live like a native, an opportunity to connect with and give back to their family and culture, an experience that would open up job opportunities, and as time to learn about themselves. Other reasons cited by the participants for wanting to go abroad included to be able to travel, to take a break from traditional studies, to get

out of their comfort zone and be exposed to a different culture, to see how their parents had lived while in that country, to help them determine what they want to do after graduation, and to simply take advantage of the freedom that they have while single and in college. They said that they chose their study abroad locations based on wanting to travel where they did not think they would visit again, not wanting to be around other English speakers, wanting to further their careers, and wanting to obtain hands-on experience in their fields. Another factor that they took into consideration when choosing a destination was foreignness. The participants differed on whether they saw a HL country as being foreign. Some chose their destination because it was foreign, others chose it because it was their home culture. Some decided to travel to another country where their HL was spoken because the country their parents came from was not foreign enough, and others chose to go to their HL country despite its lack of foreignness. Overall, the students felt that the two study abroad offices did not provide enough support with regard to helping them choosing a destination, but the support the offices provided after they had chosen a destination and program was good.

The most common negative reaction from parents to a student's decision to study abroad drew upon the interpretive repertoire that because they themselves had worked so hard to leave the HL country, why would their children want to waste their time going back there? The participants gave mixed responses when asked if and how their relationships with their relatives had changed as a result of their study abroad experiences. Some said the relationships had not changed, others said they had. Those who thought that their relationships had changed said they felt that they better understood the culture and mannerisms of their parents, that their parents had more respect for them and saw them more as adults, that their parents used more sophisticated HL vocabulary with them after returning, and that they had a deeper bond with relatives who speak the HL.

The way the participants talked about themselves changed throughout the data collection process. Some claimed the identity of a child while abroad and a few felt that they did not feel or act like their true selves while abroad. At various points, different participants claimed a world identity, native (to their study abroad location) identity, reconnection with either their HL or their American identity, bridge-between-cultures identity, and mixed identity (Chinese American, Mexican American, etc.). Those who talked about themselves as having a mixed identity spoke of the two (or more) parts of themselves as being either intertwined and inextricable or as completely separate. When they spoke of this mixed identity, they were positioning themselves as either different from others in the United States due to their mixed heritage, or just like others in the United States precisely because of their mixed heritage.

As a result of studying abroad, some participants realized that their identities are more mixed than they had originally thought. For example, while in the United States, they thought of themselves as Chinese and expected to fit in rather well in China, but once they arrived in China the American parts of themselves were highlighted and they realized that they feel in fact more Chinese American than Chinese. Other participants specifically rejected a mixed identity after returning from being abroad. One said that she is not Asian American, just simply American. At the other extreme, another participant said that he is not Mexican American but simply Mexican.

The ways in which the participants positioned themselves as they spoke about their experiences were the result of the expectations that they had held for their trips and the degree to which those expectations were met. Their ability to communicate while abroad, their personalities, and how others positioned them while they were abroad also contributed to the ways in which the participants talked about themselves. Some participants appeared to be certain of who they are, partly as a result of studying abroad. Others, however, explained that after returning from abroad they still are not certain about exactly who they are and where they fit in. Verkuyten and de Wolf (2002) studied

Dutch students of Chinese heritage and also found that their choices of ethnic labels were neither straightforward nor consistent. They spoke of their identity in three ways: being Chinese, feeling Chinese, and doing Chinese. Being Chinese was related to outward traits that made them look like they were Chinese. Feeling Chinese had to do with their psychological state. Doing Chinese was mostly related to language. The students who could not speak Chinese felt they could not really be Chinese. Yet, given these three main ways of talking about identity that were largely out of the students' control, they still talked about the ethnic identity they claimed as being their choice, their decision of how to combine the Dutch and Chinese parts of themselves. Throughout the data in this study there are indications of the participants also weighing the extent to which they can be, feel, and do their HL identity and then choosing to identify in a certain way.

Participants also discussed a few ways in which the HL experience abroad is different from others' experiences abroad. Heritage language learners sometimes need to find time to spend with relatives who they rarely have an opportunity to see (or who are complete strangers) while abroad. This was discussed as being both a positive and a negative situation to be in. It certainly does require skill in negotiation and pragmatics in the HL to not offend any relatives when making plans. Non-HL speakers do not have such language demands placed on them while abroad, at least not with the potential consequence of upsetting their extended family. Of course, non-HL speakers also do not have the luxury of relying on extended family to help them get set up in their new location or to take them on vacations while abroad. Partly because of their proficiency and partly because of the fact that they look like they are part of the majority culture, HL learners often have more (but not complete) access to native speakers while abroad than non-HL speakers do. On the other hand, because they looked like they belonged in their destination countries, almost all the participants expressed feeling that they were seen as unintelligent by locals because they did not have native fluency in the language. Most participants felt more pressure to speak correctly because of their appearance. One

participant, however, felt as though she had more freedom to make mistakes while abroad because she was seen just as an American and not as a Hispanic who should be fluent in Spanish. This is another example of how the way that the participants were positioned by others impacted their experiences.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the conclusions and implications that arise from the study findings discussed in Chapter Five. It also situates these findings within the relevant literature. Each subsection addresses the implications of this study's findings for study abroad personnel, educators, and HL learners.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Availability of interpretive repertoires for HL learning**

A key finding of this study is that the HL learners interviewed had difficulty defining their relationship to their HL. This is likely because, as Lynch (2003) discussed, the participants were not either L1 or L2 learners. The lack of availability of common terms, outside of the field of language education, to talk about HL and about being a HL learner has consequences. This lack of common terms results in HL learners and their needs as a group being less visible. Furthermore, Valdés (2005) indicated that the common terminology that does exist within the field of SLA is based on a monolingual perspective and when HL learners are considered, terms such as “first language”, “second language”, and “mother tongue” are problematic and not straightforward. She explained that this results in the field not engaging in “the examination of instructed language acquisition beyond L2 learners or to address the most challenging issues and problems that arise in various educational contexts for the most vulnerable minority language speakers” (p. 411).

It is also possible that some of the shame and embarrassment that the participants expressed was because they did not have an interpretive repertoire to draw on that would allow for the participants to have familial and cultural connections to a language – and even for it to have been their first language – without their being completely fluent or comfortable using the language as an adult. Although there is nothing inherently wrong

with the complex nature of their relationship to their HL, sometimes the participants felt that they needed to excuse themselves for not being as fluent as they felt they should be. True L2 learners are often given more leeway by others with regard to their lack of fluency, and have more interpretive repertoires to draw upon when discussing why they are not yet fluent in their second language.

Mendelson conducted a study in 2004 in which she asked study abroad students to share their wisdom and strategies for learning language while abroad. Their advice was categorized into five areas: Information (learn about study abroad and adapt expectations), Integration (acknowledge and avoid the third culture), Interaction (pursue target language contact and communication), Intention (make a plan and push the comfort zone), and Introspection (continually reflect on experiences and put them into perspective) (p. 55). After they had returned, I asked the participants of my study if they had advice to offer to other HL learners who were going to study abroad. Much of their advice concerned relaxing, allowing mistakes to be made, and not focusing too much on HL status. Their advice best fits the first of Mendelson's five areas because it addressed adjusting expectations. However, Mendelson's participants, who were likely not HL learners, did not mention that students need not feel guilt or pressure while abroad. Lucy's counsel summed up well the gist of the students' advice.

Lucy: I don't know, I guess just remember to be open minded and *don't put pressure on yourself to feel like you have to be somewhere where you're not*. I would always feel like I was supposed to know more about the language of my family than other people. *And I think that's not really healthy or fair to yourself*. Let yourself learn, let yourself ask questions. I think that was the biggest thing for me, I put a lot of pressure on myself to pretend like I knew more. Not pretend, *but I felt guilty about not knowing more*. *So don't put pressure on yourself*. *You're not your grandparents, you know*.  
(Interview 2)

The participants struggled when they encountered people who are not HL learners who were more fluent in the language than them. When they realized this the participants often felt guilty about not speaking the language better, which is similar to what Lynch

(2003) and McLaughlin (2001) found. Professors and university administrators need to be aware of the mild, underlying pressure (and at times, guilt) that some HL learners may feel about their HL proficiency, and that this may be exaggerated while abroad. Professors and administrators should validate the status of HL learners and acknowledge the complexities involved in being who they are in this country and abroad. A teacher's attitudes and actions with regard to language heritage are important. This is because the development of proficiency in more than one language "does not emerge 'naturally,' but as a result of the actions, beliefs, and attitudes of the learner's community" (Schwarzer, 2001, p.9). In addition, HL learners from various backgrounds would benefit from interaction with a few others who have similar heritages and who have already been abroad. Van Der Meid (2003), for example, suggested encouraging Asian American students who are preparing to go abroad to talk with other Asian Americans who have studied abroad. Such communication may help the students develop realistic expectations for their study abroad experiences. This is important because Beausoleil (2008) found that HL students often have expectations about their time abroad that do not match the realities of living in the host country.

### **The role of the study abroad office**

The findings indicate that there is room for study abroad offices to develop and promote study abroad programs that are geared toward HL learners, to improve the advising sessions pre-departure (especially with regard to helping students choose a destination), and to increase re-entry support after HL learners return to the United States.

None of the participants reported choosing a study abroad program because it was advertised as being designed for heritage seekers or HL learners. Study abroad personnel should consider HL learners when developing new programs and when promoting the programs that already exist. Heritage language learners constitute a key group of students who are often interested in traveling abroad, but who have unique requirements and desires. Study abroad offices need to make explicit the programs that are best for HL

learners. This includes programs that involve an internship component requiring foreign language proficiency or advanced level language courses.

Study abroad personnel should also provide additional assistance when HL students choose their study abroad destinations. Advisors should discuss with students whether they want to study their HL in the country their families came from or in another country where their HL is spoken, if that opportunity exists. In that conversation students need to be given time to think about the concept of “foreignness” and what that means to them, and whether they would like to be immersed in difference or familiarity while abroad. During data analysis, I noticed a few interesting similarities among the stories of the students who shared common backgrounds. Of my seven Spanish-speaking participants, only two of them, Louis and Pablo Diego, decided to study abroad in the country where they or their family had come from. The other five participants did not have any familial connections to the country where they chose to study. These five participants, however, still traveled to learn their HL abroad. They cited many reasons for choosing to go to a country that their family was not from, most commonly explaining that they wanted to gain more Spanish proficiency but also wanted to travel to places where they likely would not go in the future. Many of the participants felt that they would have ample opportunities later to return to their heritage country, so they took advantage of their semesters abroad to travel to some place different, and where they would be more outside of their comfort zones.

Louis and Pablo Diego spoke instead of wanting to spend time with extended family while abroad. Pablo Diego especially wanted to focus on learning more about his own culture by studying in Mexico. Jaime justified his choice to study Spanish in Spain by stating that Spain provides the root of Mexican culture (through religion, dance, etc.), so he felt he was still able to connect with his Mexican heritage by going to Spain. All of the participants felt some sort of connection to the cultures where they studied, despite how similar or different the countries were to their parents’ and grandparents’ homelands.

Two of the six Asian participants were not entirely sure what languages were spoken in the countries in which they chose to study abroad, even though they claimed that they wanted to improve their HL. Kate tried to learn Mandarin in Singapore and Amy hoped to learn Mandarin in Hong Kong. Neither location is an ideal destination for Mandarin language learning, as the participants discovered after they had already made their plans to travel and had spent time there. Perhaps language learning was not these participants' highest priority, but they were both disappointed that they had gained less exposure to their heritage languages than they had hoped. This is another example of the importance of careful advising when students are in the process of deciding where to study abroad. Also, assumptions should not be made that because students are of a certain heritage that they will know exactly where their HL is spoken in the world. HL learners themselves would benefit from reflecting more purposefully on what they want to get out of their study abroad experiences and how much they want to prioritize language learning before they select specific programs or destinations. Foreign language professors should look for opportunities to speak with HL learners about their goals for language learning and study abroad, if applicable, as well.

Finally, additional support for re-entry would benefit HL learners. Providing information about reverse culture shock either just before or right after returning to the United States is critical. This is because not only are there often changes in the study abroad participants' families and friends while they are out of the country to readjust to, but changes in themselves and their priorities can also cause stress as they return to their American homes and universities (Casteen, 2006). In the case of HL learners, re-entry support should involve opportunity for reflection, assessment of growth in language proficiency and whether expectations were met, goals for future language learning, and advice about appropriate language classes in which to enroll if they choose to continue formal language education. Additionally, topics involving identity and ethnicity, such as

how others perceived them while abroad and their thoughts on integrating the various parts of themselves should be discussed.

### **Variation in background and experiences of participants**

This study highlights the variability that exists among the backgrounds and experiences of HL learners. Many of the participants do not fit into neat categories and it would be difficult to analyze their backgrounds using quantitative methods. I restricted the pool of potential participants by excluding students who felt equally comfortable in both English and their HL as well as students who were not exposed to their second language in the home setting before learning it in school. Still, the range of participants' proficiencies in their heritage languages was large, spanning from those who felt they could understand the language only in some situations to those who felt comfortable speaking and writing in all but formal settings. I was surprised by how many of the participants were not fully of one ethnicity. For example, Leigh is half Mexican and half Polish, Gabrielle is half Lebanese and half Ecuadorian, and Lucy is American with Canadian, Haitian, and Creole connections. Some participants studied in their heritage country, for example Olga who spent the summer in Korea and Louis who studied in Guatemala. Other students immersed themselves in very different cultures while studying their HL, such as Lucy who studied in Mali and Leigh who traveled to Argentina. The reactions of the participants' parents to the students' plans to study abroad also varied. Jordan spoke of her parents expecting her to go back to Eritrea at some point, whereas Anne's parents were upset that she wanted to "waste" her time by living in China and learning Chinese.

Another aspect of variation in the data relates to the participants' identities and specifically, whether the participants positioned themselves as having American identities, non-American identities, or a combination of both. Throughout the data collection period, the HL learners in this study repeatedly crossed back and forth between languages and the identities that they conveyed. Gabrielle is the only participant who

claimed consistently throughout her interviews, emails, and blog entries that she did not identify herself as an American in any way. The ways in which the other participants talked about themselves shifted between being more or less American and more or less of another national background or culture. Phinney et al. (2001) described the complicated nature of identity formation when students such as HL learners have undergone the dual socialization of being raised in their heritage culture and language at home and also in American culture and English at school.

Regardless of their actual levels of proficiency, context affected the degree to which the participants felt fluent in their HL. Context, in this case, refers to many factors, including the countries in which the participants studied and the attitudes and habits of those around them. For example, some students spoke of feeling less fluent in their HL while abroad and immersed, and of feeling more fluent in their HL in the United States. Others, however, felt more fluent in their HL while abroad. The attitudes of the participants' friends toward language learners also influenced the participants' self-perceptions of proficiency. Their parents' willingness, or lack thereof, to speak with them in their HL as adults made a difference as well. Thus, the participants' experiences learning their HL both in the U.S. and abroad were colored by not only their *actual* proficiency in the HL or the grades they received in class, but also by the proficiency that they *felt* they had in varying contexts, regardless of whether their actual proficiency had changed. This could be partially explained by Kuntz's (1999) claim that learners' beliefs about language learning change over time, which could certainly affect how the participants felt about their proficiency and their prospects for reaching their language acquisition goals. It might be helpful when HL learners are choosing what level of language class to enroll in for them to recognize how their environment may impact how they feel about their relative levels of proficiency. Several of the participants registered for language classes that were too low for their level before, during, and after studying abroad. This may be due in part to factors external to their actual language proficiency.

When evaluating research on HL learning, it is essential to be aware of the broad range of experiences and mix of backgrounds that HL learners may have. Professors and study abroad advisors need to keep this variety in mind when advising students about their study abroad options or when teaching HL learners in the classroom.

### **Study abroad and HL immersion**

It is important to investigate what students believe about language learning because beliefs influence attitudes, expectations, and ultimately language acquisition (Wilkinson, 1998). The participants in my study discussed a variety of beliefs they held about language learning, many of which were in line with what previous research on all language learners has found; they discussed the importance of the role of innate ability, practice, interaction, accent, and teachers' beliefs about language learning. However, one area in which the HL participants in this study differed from the language learners in Mendelson's (2004) study with regard to beliefs about language learning has to do with self-assessment of proficiency level. Mendelson found that his participants tended to over-estimate their L2 proficiency to a substantial degree both before and after their time abroad, whereas some of the participants of my study were more inclined to underestimate their HL proficiency. It is not clear, however, whether any of Mendelson's participants were also HL learners, or if HL status is what may have caused the discrepancy in findings. In my study, the belief that their language proficiency was lower than it actually was resulted in some participants enrolling in classes that were too basic for their level. At least one of the participants subsequently became bored, felt out of place, and dropped the class without enrolling in a higher level. Mendelson also addressed the issue of the importance of being immersed in language while abroad, a topic that was repeatedly discussed by the participants of my study.

Mendelson (2004) explored the existence of a series of myths about learning language abroad, and the importance of ensuring that students who go abroad are aware that their beliefs about language learning determine their expectations and can result in

disappointments when those expectations are not met. Two of the myths discussed in her article were particularly relevant to the participants in this study. Those myths are that “study abroad ensures miraculous linguistic gains” and “increased non-classroom interaction in the target language is inevitable during a stay abroad” (p. 44). Many of the participants were indeed surprised that they did not become as fluent as they had hoped after spending several months abroad, and were disappointed that they had difficulty making friends with locals in their destination.

Having an extra connection to the language, and often culture, of the country where they spent their time abroad did not make the participants immune to a common study abroad experience: spending time mostly with English speakers. The tendency to spend the majority of time with other people from the United States or interacting in English, despite a sincere desire to learn the language of the host country, is a common phenomenon among people from this country who study abroad (Collentine & Freed, 2004). Only three participants in this study seemed to have been able to immerse themselves in groups in which English was not the main language being used. Olga spent her first month in Korea working in a Korean company and thus had little choice but to use Korean the majority of the time. After her internship ended and she started classes, however, she found that it was more difficult to find Koreans to socialize with. Gabrielle did not get along well with the Americans in her study abroad program, so she felt more comfortable befriending Costa Ricans and speaking in Spanish with them during the majority of her trip. And Peter was able to spend most of his time speaking Mandarin because part of his program entailed spending time with Taiwanese student ambassadors. Even Pablo Diego, who clearly identified more with Mexicans and Mexican culture than with being an American and American culture by the end of his trip, reported not finding it easy to speak mostly Spanish and to spend time with Mexicans while he was in Mexico. Instead he spent time with Americans in his program and dorm and only spoke Spanish when necessary. An implication that follows from this finding is that even HL

learners who strongly identify with their heritage culture would benefit from having strategies to help them stay in the target language and to make friends with locals while abroad. Study abroad personnel or language professors should present these strategies or encourage students to brainstorm strategies in advance of their trips. In addition, more study abroad programs should consider making use of student ambassadors, like the ones Phillip encountered, to help the sojourners be even more immersed in the language while enjoying their free time with peers. Also, HL learners who wish to be as immersed as possible in their HL while abroad may want to consider finding an internship or volunteer work. This way they will have an opportunity to be required to use their HL outside of the classroom in an environment that is more conducive to learning than short interactions with locals in restaurants or stores only.

### **Heritage language as a resource**

Many of the participants, especially (though not exclusively) those who were more fluent in the language, used their HL proficiency as a resource to access other opportunities in the countries in which they studied. Louis, Jordan, Lucy, and April all used their HL proficiency to study different aspects of health and healthcare during their time abroad. Gabrielle used her Spanish proficiency to learn about growing tropical fruits and vegetables so that she could better supplement her raw food vegan diet. Olga and Anne were able to learn more about economics, business, and politics by traveling to Asia and using their Korean and Mandarin fluency. Although some of the participants focused mainly on learning the language, the students mentioned above certainly used their language proficiency to their advantage to access additional experiences that would not have been available to them if they were monolingual or not comfortable in the cultures in which they were living. Also, not all of the participants were involved in an official study abroad program, and not all of them sought credit for their learning while abroad. Louis and Jordan, especially, spent a great deal of their own time investigating possibilities and making contacts for their summers abroad. Study abroad offices should

provide targeted support for HL learners like these who want to spend time in their heritage country but not focus on language learning or coursework.

#### **IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In light of my preliminary study with Curtis, in which he discussed feeling frustrated about many of his HL learning experiences, I was surprised by how many of the participants reported having had overall very positive feelings and experiences with HL learning in this country throughout their lifetime. These reports are not in line with Martinez's (2003) claim that HL learners have an internalized feeling of inferiority about their HL, or with Haugen's (1956) pessimistic determination that HL learners have a "linguistic self-hate." A few of the participants felt embarrassed or guilty for not speaking either English or their HL fluently enough at different points in time, but I heard many more positive stories than negative ones. I wonder if this is because the people who have had more positive experiences with their HL and negotiating their identities in general are more likely to want to study abroad in a place where they can learn their HL than those who had more negative experiences. Or perhaps Curtis' struggles with identity and language learning were not representative of HL learners in general. Also, these students were self-selected in that they had volunteered to participate in this study, indicating a certain level of confidence even before the first interview. Clearly, all of the participants felt that improving their HL proficiency would be advantageous to them, and that it was worthwhile to work their HL into their study abroad plans. For further research, it would be helpful to evaluate what reasons HL speakers give for going abroad but specifically not choosing a country where their HL is spoken. Qualitative data about this could provide additional insight into the complexities of being a HL learner and the decisions that people make about the degree to which they want to develop or focus on that part of their identity.

Several of the participants mentioned that it was helpful for them to receive the email reflection prompts while they were abroad. They explained that this forced them to

stop and think about those specific aspects of their experiences. Additionally, some of the participants expressed gratitude that I was willing to listen to them talk about their time abroad with more patience than most of their friends and family. Casteen (2006) discussed the importance of incorporating structured reflection time into the re-entry support provided by study abroad offices to all returnees. This opportunity for reflection would likely prove especially helpful for HL learners because of the additional complexities of their identities, and should be provided throughout the trip instead of only during re-entry. Future studies should be designed to determine how opportunities for reflection could be incorporated into study abroad programs for those interested.

More investigation is needed regarding the most helpful ways to guide students (especially HL students) as they choose study abroad destinations and programs. Although I did not see any formal research on the topic, I did find a few questionnaires that were posted on university study abroad websites to help students think through their options.

Additional research is needed to model ethnic identity development with greater detail and to allow for more fluidity among levels. None of the models of ethnic identity development discussed in Chapter 2 (Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Kawaguchi, 2003; Brown & Smirles, 2003) quite fit the findings from my data. For example, Tse (1997) proposes a model that has four stages:

STAGE 1: Unawareness of ethnic identity and language minority status.

STAGE 2: Ambivalence toward/evasion of identification with minority culture and language. In this stage, the student prefers to identify with the majority culture and use the majority language.

STAGE 3: Ethnic emergence. Identity and ethnicity are explored; the student wants to learn more of their heritage language.

STAGE 4: Ethnic identity incorporation. The student has a positive attitude toward their heritage language, has come to terms with the level of proficiency they have, the one they can attain, and what is required by the group they either have or desire to have membership in.

At the time of data collection, the participants in my study were mostly in stages 3 or 4. They were exploring their ethnicity and identity by choosing to study abroad (stage 3), but even so, one participant still demonstrated some ambivalence toward identification with his heritage culture (stage 2). All of the participants had a positive attitude toward their HL (stage 4), but not all of them had come to terms with the level of proficiency that they have or can attain (also stage 4). While some of the participants have been able to “incorporate” their identities into something cohesive (stage 4), this might not be the only possible final stage in ethnic identity development. Olga, for example, had the characteristics of being at stage 4, yet she saw the Korean and American parts of herself as being completely separate and not at all incorporated with each other. This is similar to Reynolds & Pope’s (1991) third pattern of identity resolution: identification of multiple aspects of the self in a segmented fashion. Tse’s stage 2 claims that students identify with the majority culture, yet the definition of “majority culture” within the United States is not straightforward. Indeed, one of the participants said that she feels like she is the epitome of an American, precisely because of her mixed ethnicity. How the participants defined the majority culture and view themselves in relationship to that definition did not always fit with what researchers assume on the topic of ethnic identity development.

The model of cultural identity formation developed by Parra Cardona, Busby, and Wampler (2004) has some similarities with Tse’s model, including that both models end with integration or incorporation of the various aspects of a person’s identity.

**CATEGORY 1. Original culture identification:** Individuals might live in the United States but will consider themselves as nationals of their birth country. In this category, immigrants do not want to identify themselves with many elements of the host culture.

**CATEGORY 2. New country cultural identification:** Individuals consider themselves citizens of the new country and do not want to incorporate many elements of the original culture and might even reject it.

CATEGORY 3. Original cultural identification open to expand: Individuals in this category will continue to consider themselves as nationals of their birth country and will be open to incorporate elements of the host culture.

CATEGORY 4. New country cultural identification open to expand: Individuals consider themselves citizens of the new country and are willing to incorporate elements of a second culture.

CATEGORY 5. Integrated identification: This category includes individuals who have been able to incorporate elements from both cultures and whose identity is based on such integration.

The majority of the participants in this study were in categories 3, 4, or 5; they were exploring the various elements of the culture they studied abroad in, considering the culture of their parents and grandparents' families and the American culture they grew up in, and determining which elements they identified with and which elements they did not. The study abroad process was helpful to some of the participants in reaching, or at least approaching, category 5.

My data aligns with Jo's (2002) findings that her Korean American participants' actual interaction with language was complexly and heterogeneously experienced, especially in relation to the ethnic identity formation process. It would be more accurate to approach the idea of ethnic identity development as being a fluid set of continua rather than consisting of rigid stages. This fluidity in a model is especially necessary when looking at the case of learners who study abroad because negotiating identity in a different setting involves additional complexities.

#### **LIMITATIONS**

A limitation of the present study also leads to a recommendation for further research. Although I attempted to recruit participants from a wide variety of backgrounds, only two of the participants who actually completed the study (Jordan and Lucy) were not either Hispanic or Asian American. (The German American and Israeli American participants dropped out after the first interview.) In order to give an even more complete picture of what studying abroad might be like for HL learners more

generally, future studies on the topic should include heritage students who travel abroad to the Middle East, Russia, India, Brazil, and other parts of Europe, for example. In addition, the small number of participants from each heritage group is also a limitation of the study.

Another potential limitation with the present study is that the participants were all attending college in large, diverse cities in Texas. Students who live or attend college in less diverse areas of the country may have different experiences learning language and being immersed in their HL than the present participants. In addition, the universities the participants attended are top tier institutions. The participants are motivated, excel in learning, and have high expectations of what they can accomplish in many aspects of their lives. Their expectations of HL proficiency growth may therefore be different from those of students who attend community colleges or institutions with less status.

Although using a qualitative, discourse analytic methodology in this study has many advantages, there are also some limitations inherent in the chosen approach. First, this study is not generalizable beyond the participants in the study. The findings cannot be broadly applied to HL learners in general. Second, the interpretive repertoires and subject positions employed by the participants do not constitute an exhaustive list of the options available to all HL learners when discussing language, language learning, study abroad, or their identity. What the study does show, however, are some of the possible ways of thinking and talking about these topics.

Finally, a few limitations exist that are related to who I am as a researcher and decisions I made during the research. The fact that I am not a HL learner myself likely influenced the conversations I had with the participants. I was able to connect with some of them because I was also a student at both universities they were attending, because I studied abroad, and because I lived on the U.S.-Mexico border. But I am a member of the majority culture and did not have to negotiate my ethnic identity when I was abroad in the same way that the participants did. In outlining this research project I initially had

wanted to conduct interviews with the participants' parents as well. Though that ultimately was not feasible, data from parent interviews would have strengthened the conclusions drawn from this study and supplemented the insight gained into why the participants used the repertoires they did. Member checking could have been used as an additional way to improve the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, I intended to conduct multiple focus groups so I could study the way HL learners spoke to each other about their experiences, but the first and only one I conducted was complicated to arrange and did not yield interesting or relevant enough data. Had I convened additional focus groups, however, the triangulation of the study may have been even stronger.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, study abroad experiences for HL learners are varied and complex. The narratives of the participants highlighted many possibilities that exist for HL learners who study abroad. It appears that, generally, the HL learner's experience abroad is likely to be positive despite some tensions and challenges. Studying abroad may offer HL learners a chance to use their HL as a resource to access other opportunities. It is possible that improving their proficiency is only a secondary goal, or that students are ambivalent about how much they want their HL proficiency to improve, or in what ways. In other instances, HL learners may be heavily invested in the trip with regard to identity and have high expectations for increasing their HL proficiency. Study abroad experiences can provide students a glimpse into their parents' and grandparents' lives before they came to the United States and can result in a closer relationship to family members, as indicated also in the qualitative data in a study conducted by Ng (2003). Heritage language learners may find it easy to connect to locals while abroad and speak the target language all the time, but it is more likely they will find it easier and more desirable to speak English and socialize with Americans. Complexities and variations exist in the ways that HL learners abroad are perceived by their host country, how much support they receive from their families regarding their trip, how much they identify with

American culture or their HL culture before, during, and after their trip, and to what extent they feel like they fit in while abroad. A small excerpt from Ching's blog emphasizes these complexities and is worth repeating:

I want to be Chinese.  
Only. I don't know if I could really ever be "Chinese."...Maybe I'm too Americanized. I don't know. I just know that I like the way I am. And I don't really fit in here. So how am I supposed to become Chinese?  
(Blog, 1/30/07)

This blog entry demonstrates the difficulty many HL learners experience as they try to integrate partially opposing parts of themselves. Some of the participants found that they could reconcile the various aspects of their identities as a result of studying their HL abroad, which also occurred in the study by McLaughlin (2001) on Mexican American HL learners who studied in Mexico. Others at least made progress toward this reconciliation.

This study demonstrated that HL learners, who already live in the borderlands between cultures in the United States and who cross geographical borders to study their HL while abroad, have complex and varied ways of talking about language, language learning, study abroad, and identity. Study abroad advisors, administrators, and teachers need to explore ways to make HL learners, their needs, and the intricacies of their situation more visible.

## Appendixes

### APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

*[The following is the main text that was used to introduce prospective participants to the study via email in the fall of 2007. Several versions of this email were used, depending on when the emails were sent and which school they were addressed to]:*

Hi! My name is Kirstin Engelhardt and I am a doctoral student in Education here at the University of Texas. My area of specialization is language learning and teaching. As part of my dissertation research, I am looking for participants who are planning to be abroad during the Spring 2008 semester. In particular, I am looking for students who are “heritage language learners” and who are going to study abroad in a country where their heritage language is spoken.

“Heritage language learners” are students who prefer English but who speak or at least understand another language because their parents or grandparents speak it natively. For example, a student may be eligible to participate if he/she identifies as Korean American and studies abroad in Korea, or is Mexican American and decides to study abroad in Chile, Mexico, Spain, or any other country where Spanish is spoken.

My research asks one main question: What is the study abroad experience like for American undergraduates who are heritage language learners?

*The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the motivations behind why heritage language learners decide to study their heritage language in a study abroad context, the expectations and experiences they have while abroad, their beliefs about language and language learning, and how they talk about themselves as they reflect on their experiences.*

Students who participate in the study will be interviewed before and after they go abroad, participate in a small focus group discussion, and complete four short reflections by email about their study abroad experience. The interviews and focus group will be audio recorded.

If you think you fit the criteria for this study and are interested in participating, please fill out the Participant Information form on-line at the following address:  
<http://www.hostedsurvey.com/takesurvey.asp?c=UTPartic215142>

You do NOT need to be going abroad through the Study Abroad office to participate in the study, nor do you need to be taking classes for credit while abroad. Please feel free to forward this message on to friends you know who might be interested in the study. If you have questions, you may reach me by email ([kir@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:kir@mail.utexas.edu)) or at 208-319-0154. Thanks for your time!

## Participant Information Sheet

(Information solicited online through [www.hostedsurvey.com](http://www.hostedsurvey.com))

### PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Birth date (month/year):

Place of Birth (City and State or Country):

Major(s):

Minor(s):

Classification:

Estimated Graduation Date:

Number of years you have attended school outside of English speaking countries:

Do you consider English to be your dominant language? (Is it the language you are most comfortable speaking in most situations?)

### HERITAGE LANGUAGE INFORMATION:

If you know more than one heritage language, please answer the questions below for the heritage language that you plan on studying while you are abroad.

Do you speak or understand a heritage language (a non-English language that your parents or grandparents speak to you or with each other)?

Which heritage language do you speak or understand?

Describe how well you feel you know your heritage language on a scale of 1-5 for the categories below:

*(1=beginner (completely non-native), 2= some understanding and/or communication occurs, 3=full understanding in most situations, generally able to communicate what you want, 4= near native proficiency in home setting, not comfortable in more formal situations such as debates, classrooms, public speaking, 5= native proficiency in all situations)*

Listening:

Reading:

Speaking:

Writing:

Culture:

What country or countries did your relatives who speak this heritage language come from?

How many years of high school level language classes in your heritage language did you take? If other, please explain:

What is the highest level or most recent class you took in your heritage language at college?

If you have not studied your heritage language in college, what level of language class do you think you would start in if you were to enroll?

If applicable, indicate below other heritage languages that you understand or speak. Otherwise, you may share additional relevant information:

STUDY ABROAD INFORMATION:

Have you decided to study abroad some time in the next year or so?

How long will you be abroad?

What country or countries will you be going to?

Will you be studying (one of) your heritage language(s) while abroad?

What semester(s) will you be abroad?

Spring '07

Summer '07

Fall '07

Spring '08

While you are abroad, are you going to be sending out mass emails and/or maintaining a blog so you can inform your family and friends of your experiences?

If so, are you willing to share those mass emails or blog entries as part of the research? (You may request that any email or blog entry be deleted from my record at any time)

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Email address:

Alternative email address:

Cell phone:

Parent/Guardian phone number:

Phone number at school:

Address at school:

Permanent address:

Additional Comments??

If you have questions, you can reach me at [kir@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:kir@mail.utexas.edu), or 208-319-0154.

Thanks for being interested in participating in the study.

I will respond soon to let you know if you have been selected. ☺

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM AND LIST OF REQUIREMENTS

**Title:** Study Abroad and Heritage Language Learning: Identity and Ideology  
IRB PROTOCOL # 2006-08-0008

**Conducted By:** Kirstin Engelhardt, M.S.Ed.

Of University of Texas at Austin: Foreign Language Education Telephone: 208-319-0154  
Email: kir@mail.utexas.edu

**Faculty Sponsor:** Zsuzsanna Abrams, Ph.D.

Of University of Texas at Austin: Germanic Studies Telephone: 512-232-6374  
Email: zsabrams@mail.utexas.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

**The purpose of this study** is to gain an in-depth understanding of the motivations behind why heritage language learners decide to study their heritage language in a study abroad context, the expectations and experiences they have while abroad, their beliefs about language and language learning, and how they talk about themselves as they reflect on their experiences. There will be approximately twelve to fifteen participants in this qualitative study.

**If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:**

- One 60-90 minute, audiotaped interview before you leave the United States to study abroad
- One 60-90 minute, audiotaped interview ideally within six weeks after you return to the United States from abroad
- One 60-90 minute, audiotaped focus group discussion with 2-4 other participants in the study after you return to the United States from abroad
- Three short, written reflections to be completed and sent to the researcher via email while you are abroad within one week of receiving each prompt from the researcher.
- One short, written reflection to be completed and sent to the researcher via email approximately three months after you return to the United States from abroad.
- Only if you already plan on doing so, send mass emails to friends/family while you are abroad and include the researcher on your mass email list, and/or keep a weblog for friends/family while you are abroad and give permission for the researcher to read your blog entries. Only blog entries and mass emails that are related to the topics of study abroad, language, language learning, ethnic/racial identity, and other issues relevant to the topic of this research will be used as data. You may request that a specific blog entry or email be ignored for the purposes of this study at any time. Any responses you receive from friends/family will not be included in this study.

**Total estimated time to participate** in study is 3 ½ to 5 ½ hours, largely depending on length of the interviews and focus group. It is the hope of the researcher that your participation lasts the duration of the study: before you go abroad, while you are abroad, and directly after you return from being abroad, so that a more complete picture of your experiences abroad can be obtained.

**Risks of being in the study**

- The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life, except that psychologically, you may not be comfortable discussing topics of race and ethnic identity or the progress you make in learning language while you are abroad. Your confidentiality is assured and pseudonyms will be used to minimize risks. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to review transcripts if you wish and request that specific sections be deleted.
- This study may involve risks that are currently unforeseeable. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the researcher, Kirstin Engelhardt, listed on the front page of this form.

**Benefits of being in the study**

- The opportunity to explore your thoughts on language learning, identity, and study abroad with the researcher may be helpful to you as you process your experiences.

**Compensation/Costs:**

- Upon completion of the final interview or focus group discussion (whichever is last), the participant will receive a \$20 gift card to a local bookstore as a token of appreciation.
- Participating in this study will not cost anything except any fees that must be paid to have Internet access while abroad for 30-45 minutes in order to complete and send the written reflections.

**Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:**

- All data will be coded so that your name is not attached to it, audio recordings and transcripts will be stored securely at the researcher's house, and any written document with your name on it will be destroyed after the research is complete. In addition, pseudonyms will be used for participants and the names of schools they have attended, as well as for any other names that, if revealed, may result in a loss of confidentiality.
- Interviews and focus group discussions will be audio recorded with a digital voice recorder. These recordings will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them. To make future analysis possible the researcher will retain the recordings. However, without your additional consent the recordings will be heard only for research purposes by the researcher and her associates.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and members of the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study please ask at any time. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researcher conducting the study. Her name, phone number, and e-mail address and those of her faculty advisor are at the top of this page. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact Lisa Leiden, Ph.D., Chair of The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, (512) 471-8871 or email: [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

*The researcher may wish to present some of the audio recordings from this study at scientific conventions or as demonstrations in classrooms. Please sign below if you are willing to allow her to do so with your audio recording.*

I hereby give permission for the audio recording made for this research study to also be used for educational purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## APPENDIX C: GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW #1

Brief introduction of myself, encouragement to share stories.

### General Background Info:

- Tell me about the immigration history of your family.
- How have you been exposed to your heritage language throughout your lifetime? How do you feel about this exposure?
- Where have you traveled?
- Describe your schooling.
- What other languages do you know?

### Questions Related to Study Abroad:

- When did you decide to study abroad? Why?
- What else did you have to consider in making your decision? (location, money, career preparation, timing, etc.)
- What do your parents/relatives think about your decision to go abroad? How did this influence your decision?
- What are your goals and expectations for your trip?
- Did you make use of the study abroad office in planning? What was that like? Did anyone else help you in planning?
- How do you talk about yourself when you are in the United States? What groups do you identify with? How do you describe your relationship to your heritage language? What does it mean to be who you are in the United States?
- Going into your trip, how do you feel about your proficiency in your heritage language? What are your language-related goals and how do you feel studying abroad might affect those?
- Is there anything else you want to share, or any questions you have?

Discuss the mass emails and/or weblog entries, which of these they plan to do, and remind them about completing the written email reflections.

## **APPENDIX D: GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW #2**

### Looking Back at Study Abroad Experience:

- Tell me more about [X issue] that you wrote about in your written email reflections (if anything stood out to me).
- Overall, what do you think about your study abroad experience? In what ways was it beneficial?
- What tensions did you experience while you were abroad, if any?
- Were your expectations of the experience met?
- Tell me about a time when you felt positively about your heritage language learning progress while you were abroad.
- What did it mean to you to be an X-American while you were in [HL country]? How does your proficiency in [HL] affect that? (X-Americans being Asian-Americans, Mexican-Americans, etc.)
- Are there common beliefs or opinions held by [the people in the country you studied in - Mexicans, Peruvians, Koreans, etc.] about X-Americans?
- How do you think others saw you when you were abroad? What did the [Mexicans, Peruvians, Koreans, etc.] think about you being there?
- What is your general attitude toward the culture and society of the country you were in?

### After Returning and Looking Forward:

- Is there anything that has surprised you since you returned to the States?
- What are your future plans or hopes regarding further developing your HL proficiency? What do you want to do with your own children when you have them as far as language exposure goes?
- Has your time abroad affected the way you interact with your parents or other family members?
- What advice would you give to someone else who is a heritage language learner who wants to go abroad? Anything you wish you had known before you left?

## APPENDIX E: EMAIL REFLECTION PROMPTS

### REFLECTION ONE:

Text of email after a greeting is given:

Here are the first questions to think about. Please respond to them within a week (by xx date). I am looking for a short response and concrete examples which illustrate your response if you can think of any. Please feel free to share other things you've been thinking about that are not related to the questions I've raised. You do not have to answer every aspect of the prompt, but please answer the last part about language learning. Thanks!

*What things have shocked or surprised you since your arrival?*

*Have there been any misunderstandings or miscommunications?*

*Have you had any triumphal or euphoric moments?*

*What hopes do you have for your time abroad now that you are actually there?*

Please reflect upon your language learning/acquisition at this point in your trip. How have you improved? In what areas do you need work? How do you feel about it?

### REFLECTION TWO:

Text of email after a greeting is given:

Here is the second set of questions to think about. Please respond to them within a week (by xx date). I am looking for a short response and concrete examples which illustrate your response if you can think of any. Please feel free to share other things you've been thinking about that are not related to the questions I've raised. You do not have to answer every aspect of the prompt, but please answer the last part about language learning. Thanks!

*What are you learning about yourself now that your trip is half over? How do you fit in where you are?*

Please reflect upon your language learning/acquisition at this point in your trip. How have you improved? In what areas do you need work? How do you feel about it?

### REFLECTION THREE:

Text of email after a greeting is given:

Here is the third set of questions to think about. Please respond to them within a week (by xx date). I am looking for a short response and concrete examples which illustrate your response if you can think of any. Please feel free to share other things you've been thinking about that are not related to the questions I've raised. You do not have to answer every aspect of the prompt, but please answer the last part about language learning. Thanks!

*Reflect upon your expectations for the trip. Were they met?*

*Are you pleased that you decided to go abroad?*

*What do you look forward to upon your return to the States? What will you miss?*

Please reflect upon your language learning/acquisition at this point in your trip. How have you improved? In what areas do you need work? How do you feel about it?

### REFLECTION FOUR:

Text of email after a greeting is given:

Here is your fourth and final written reflection prompt. Please respond to it within a week (by xx date). I am looking for a short response and concrete examples which illustrate that response if you can think of any. Please feel free to share other things you've been thinking about that are not related to the prompt. Thanks!

*Looking back, what stands out to you the most about your whole study abroad experience?*

Please reflect upon your language learning/acquisition as you reflect about your trip and as you may have had a chance to use what you've learned in the United States.

## APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS

Explain that the purpose of focus group discussions is that the participants get to lead the conversation in ways that are interesting and useful for themselves. I basically just want them to talk about what led them to study abroad, what it was like to be abroad, and how they are processing their trip now that they are back. My main question is what it is like for people to study abroad who have very real roots in other countries. Then, have students introduce themselves by giving a short explanation of who they are, what they study at the university, and where they studied abroad.

The following are prompts to get conversation started and keep it going if need be (more prompts will be added once I know the participants better and have started to analyze the other data to see where there are interesting issues to discuss):

- What was your favorite part about studying abroad?
- What was frustrating about your experience?
- Did you learn anything about yourself while abroad?
- How was your experience different from someone going abroad to a country where their second language was spoken as opposed to their heritage language?
- As a group, could you come up with a list of advice for someone in your position (HL learner) going abroad? What should they know? What did you wish you had known before you left?

## APPENDIX G: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATIONS

(Based on Edley's (2001) transcription conventions)

Punctuation will be inserted as is standard in writing, not necessarily to indicate types of pause and intonation as in conversation analysis.

[xx]	indecipherable language
:	drawn-out syllable (the more “:”, the more drawn out)
-	the word was cut short
<u>underline</u>	emphasis
(3)	pause in seconds (in this case of three seconds)

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## Vita

Kirstin Moreno was born in Ohio in 1979 to Tom and Joan Engelhardt. She attended Alexander High School in Laredo, Texas after moving to the border of Mexico in 1993. She studied abroad at the Universidad de Granada in Spain in 2000 and received a B.A. in Anthropology and Spanish from Rice University in Houston, Texas in 2002. She pursued a M.S.Ed. in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and graduated in 2003. She started her Ph.D. studies in Foreign Language Education at the University of Texas in 2003. After marrying Camilo Moreno and moving to Boise, Idaho, she received her secondary teaching certification in Spanish and ESL from Albertson College of Idaho in 2006. Kirstin has taught high school Spanish, a variety of ESL classes, and several education courses at Albertson College of Idaho as an adjunct professor. Kirstin currently works as a Secondary ELL Academic Coach for the Meridian School District in Meridian, Idaho and has one daughter.

### Publication:

Martinsen, Rob; Hanesch, Simone; & Engelhardt, Kirstin. (2006). Teacher research and student needs: A recipe for invention. In Schwarzer, Bloom, and Shono, (Eds.) *Research In Second Language Learning, Volume IV - Research as a Tool for Empowerment: Theory Informing Practice*, pp. 53-77.

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