The role of study abroad programs in the development of possible L2 selves

El papel de programas de estudios en el extranjero en el desarrollo de imágenes futuras como hablante de una segunda lengua

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Resumen

El siguiente artículo examina cómo las experiencias en el extranjero pueden apoyar el desarrollo o la continua motivación por aprender una segunda lengua en contextos donde el aprendiz no está rodeado de la comunidad que la habla. Mediante el uso del concepto de imágenes posibles o futuras del yo, como fuertes motivadores de comportamiento, y de un análisis de las narrativas de los estudiantes, el estudio examina el papel de las experiencias en el extranjero en el desarrollo de dichas imágenes después de la experiencia, como también el de su influencia en el desarrollo de estrategias de aprendizaje una vez que los estudiantes regresan a sus países de origen.

Palabras clave: motivación en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua; imágenes futuras como hablante de una segunda lengua; estudios en el extranjero; estrategias de aprendizaje de una segunda lengua.

Abstract

The following study looks at how abroad experiences could enhance language-learning motivation in contexts where the target community is not as accessible. Using possible selves -an aspect of the self-concept that represents ideas of expected selves in the future and which are considered to be powerful motivators for language learning- and through the analysis of students' narratives, this study looked at the role of study abroad in the development of these possible selves after the experience, as well as their effect in the development of language learning strategies once back.

Keywords: Language Learning Motivation; Possible L2 Selves; Study Abroad; Language Learning Strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

The field of language learning has promoted study abroad as one of the best opportunities to build, use, and improve foreign language skills outside the classroom (Wilkinson, 2002). Much of the research done in the area of language learning focuses on how the experience of studying abroad increases students' cognitive knowledge of the language and how it improves the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Yet, relatively little is known about how this experience might have influenced the way students learn, their second language goals, and their motivation for further language learning once back from their abroad experience.

The following study broadens the field of language learning motivation research by looking at how abroad experiences could enhance language-learning motivation in contexts where the target community is not as accessible. Using possible selves -an aspect of the self-concept that represents ideas of expected selves in the future and which are considered to be powerful motivators for language learning- and through the analysis of students' narratives, this study looked at the role of study abroad in the development of these possible selves after the experience, as well as their effect in language learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Study abroad and language learning motivation

2.1.1. Research on study abroad (SA) impact on language learning.

Research on the influence of study abroad in language acquisition is based on studies that measure the development of language abilities such as oral proficiency, sociolinguistic skills and literacy skills, among others (Freed, 1998). One can find a fair amount of research that corroborates the impact of study abroad on language acquisition (Davidson, 2010; Freed, 1995; Huebner, 1992; Lafford, 1995; Lisking-Gasparro & Urdaneta, 1995). Their results show significant gains in listening, reading and speaking after study abroad. More recent studies have focused on specific linguistic features such as the use of fillers, modifiers, formulae and compensation strategies, and have used diverse conceptual frameworks (Isabelli, 2001; Marqués-Pascual, 2011).

Even though these studies prove the linguistic advantages of study abroad experiences, little is known about specific qualitative changes in students' language learning processes after the experience. One study that is worth mentioning because it is an attempt to explain possible causes of language attrition is Jiménez-Jiménez's (2004) research on the linguistic and psychological dimensions of second language attrition during and after a study abroad experience. This study suggests that a higher level of participation in Spanish mediated activities translates into an enhanced ability to maintain self-regulation. It also shows that over time, those who did not maintain contact with Spanish upon returning to the US had considerable problems maintaining self-regulation during linguistic performance.

The present study expands this body of research by using the self and motivational theories as ways of looking at the types of involvement in the development of language learning strategies after the experience abroad. In the next section, I address a more qualitative body of research that delves into more personal accounts about the impact of the study abroad on future goals and world perceptions that can be relevant to my topic of how these experiences could shape future projections of the student's L2 self.

2.2. The Possible Selves Construct

To move beyond motivational and attitudinal questionnaires and to personalize motivation, researchers have examined the individual's psychosocial and sociocultural development as important factors in one's motivation (Syed, 2002). Social cognitive research has focused on one's idea of oneself in the future and suggests that people expect likely outcomes of prospective actions; they set goals for themselves and plan courses of actions to achieve hoped futures.

One self-construct that is spearheading this trend is Markus and Nurius's (1986) possible self. They define "Possible selves" as individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming. They explain that an individual is free to create a variety of possible selves but only those linked to the individual's particular socio-cultural and historical contexts and social experiences are the most significant and the most likely to occur.

Some studies have explored possible selves as self-regulators in professional domains and academic achievement (Inglehart et al., 1989; Leondari et al., 1998) study. Their assumption was that envisioning a desired end-state produces information processing favoring the desired state and, as a consequence, the action seems more likely and people are able to construct more efficient plans. Other studies confirmed the influence of possible selves in students' self-regulation in order to attain academic and professional outcomes (Lee & Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry & Hart- Johnson's, 2004 and 2006). They found out that when Academic Possible Selves (APSs) are linked with strategies to achieve them, students were successful in moving toward APSs goals.

Other studies address the importance of balance among one's possible selves. For instance, Norman and Aaron's (2003) study examined the motivational impact of hope for and feared possible selves in the attainment or avoidance of possible selves. Their findings show that motivation to attain or avoid an important possible self was significantly predicted by its availability (when a possible self can easily be pictured or constructed), its accessibility (when a possible self can be brought into awareness) and the extent to which its attainment or avoidance is perceived as under one's control (the degree to which individuals believe their behaviors can influence the attainment or avoidance of a possible self).

In an attempt to expand the PS[1] construct into adult learning and adult education, Rossiter (2007) designed a study to gain deeper understanding of the impact of educational helping relationships on adult students' range of possible selves. The investigator reported that educational helping relationships can be the source of new positive possible selves for adult students through comments or suggestions for possible futures. Rossiter (2007) considers the possible selves perspective as an unfolding story in which the development and elaboration of possible selves is a process of self-storying that could help us understand adult learner motivation and persistence.

The cited literature on possible selves affirms that having a sense for the future is conducive to attainment of valued future outcomes. Furthermore, the presence of elaborate and vivid possible selves can energize people's efforts to achieve desired objectives.

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[1] PS Possible Self or selves

2.2.1 Research on possible selves and language learning motivation and language learning.

The majority of the research using the self-construct has been done in the area of social work. Only recently is this approach being developed in other areas. In the area of language learning, Dörnyei (1994) spearheaded this new direction of research in language learning motivation as a response to the ongoing debate about Gardner's integrative motivation. It claims that the L2 learner "must be willing to identify with members of another ethno linguistic group and take on very subtle aspects of their behavior" in order to acquire a second language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p.135). Dörnyei (2005) stated that the integrative concept only applied to contexts of second language learning where the target community surrounds the students. Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) claimed that the integrative concept would be "better explained as an internal process of identification within the person's self-concept, rather than identification with an external reference group" (Dörnyei, 2009, p.3). Dörnyei (2009) offers a model, L2 Motivational Self-System, that defines the main source of language learning' motivation as the successful engagement with the actual language learning process rather than with internally or externally generated self-images. He says that the Ideal L2 Self is an effective motivator if the learner has a desired future self-image that is elaborate and vivid, and is perceived as plausible and in harmony with the expectations of the learner's family, peers and other elements of the social environment. Furthermore, the Ideal L2 Self must be regularly activated in the learner's working concept and accompanied by relevant and effective procedural strategies that act as roadmaps towards the goal. Finally, this Ideal L2 Self must contain elaborate information about the negative consequences of not achieving the desired end-state.

Over the past three years, a number of quantitative studies have been developed to specifically test and validate the L2 Motivational Self-System in various cultural environments (Ryan, 2009; Segalowitz et al.,2009; and Yashima, 2009). Taguchi, Magid and Papi (2009) designed a comparative motivational study in order to validate Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System in three Asian contexts: Japan, China and Iran. They hypothesized that if learners have a strong ideal L2 self, this will be reflected in their positive attitudes toward language learning and they will exhibit greater efforts to learn that target language. Their results indicate that the ideal L2 self achieved a better explanatory

power toward learners' intended efforts that integrativeness did in the three different cultural contexts. One significant cross cultural difference was that in the Japanese model, the impact from attitudes to L2 culture and community on the ideal L2 self is nearly twice as large as from instrumentality-promotion, where as in the Chinese and the Iranian data the contribution of the two aspects is roughly equal.

Another quantitative study that tried to provide empirical support for the theory of the L2 Motivational Self System was Csizér and Kormos' (2009) study. They compared how the motivational and attitudinal dispositions of secondary school pupils and university students differed. Their findings show that both in the case of secondary school and university students, motivated learning behavior was partly determined by the ideal L2 self, that is, the extent to which students could imagine themselves as competent language users in the future. They also found that other important determinants of language learning effort was the dimension of language learning experiences, the effect of which was found to be stronger than that of the ideal L2 self in the case of secondary school students, while for university students the ideal L2 self and language learning experiences played an equally important role. Their findings show that the ought-to L2[2] self seemed to be marginal, as its contribution to shaping students' learning behavior was weak and reached the level of significance only for the university student population. Furthermore, their study shows that how students see themselves as future language users might change with age, and therefore the impact of future self-images on motivated learning might also vary.

There are a few qualitative studies in the area of possible selves and language learning. One such study is Kim's (2009), which explored the nature and interrelationship between ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self by analyzing two adult Korean English as second language (ESL) students' L2 learning experiences. Joon and Woo were males in their mid- 20's who travelled to Toronto for the purpose of learning English. According to the data, Joon's goals for learning English were to get a job in Korea and to socialize with members of L2 communities. His communication in L2 contexts was diverse. Woo's goal for learning English was to work at a steel company in South Korea in the future. Kim found that instrumentality, or pragmatic orientations, in learning an L2 can be merged into

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[2] Higgins (1987) defines ought self as a representation of attributes that one believes one must possess such as the obligation or commitment to graduate or to complete their language major or minor.

either the ideal L2 self or the ought-to L2 self, depending on the degree of internationalization. Additionally, the learner's ideal L2 self needs to be aligned to the learner's life experiences in a variety of communities in order to support a positive, competent, and promotion-based future L2 self-image.

The Possible Selves construct in language learning is a new development, and there is still a need for more research. The majority of the studies in possible L2 selves and language learning are quantitative, and their population is mainly high school students. Very few studies include university students and adult learners. So far, none of the studies have been carried out with American students and in a combination of settings such as different countries. The present study helps expand this body of research by incorporating several elements that have not been considered before such as the impact of study abroad programs in the development of ideal L2 selves, having American university students as a population, and the development of a qualitative study that could help expand the pieces of research already done in this area.

In sum, on one hand, most of the research on study abroad and language learning has concentrated on measuring linguistic and cultural gains. On the other hand, the research on language learning motivation emphasizes the need to be part of the target language culture in order to be successful at learning the target language. Motivating oneself to maintain the linguistic and cultural gains acquired abroad is equally important to the acquisition of these gains mainly in foreign language contexts. Using possible selves, an aspect of the self-concept that represents how one can be in the future, this study examined the role of study abroad in the development of these possible selves during and after the experience and their effect in language learning.

This study explored the following question within the field of language learning motivation to determine how students develop possible L2[3] selves:

What is the nature of the effect of moving from a study-abroad to a non-study abroad context in the development of possible L2 selves and the students' approaches to language learning?

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[3] L2 means second or foreign language.

3. METHODS

This study consisted of individual open-ended interviews during the first two weeks of the semester once they came from their abroad sojourn and a focus group towards the end of the semester. The participants in the study were twenty undergraduate students in their second, third and fourth year of college who studied abroad in a non-English speaking country for a month, a semester, or a year during the Winter, Spring, and Summer 2008 semesters and then returned to their undergraduate institution to continue pursuing their degrees in the Fall 2008 semester. These participants accepted the invitation sent to 100 students that were returning from their abroad sojourn. Some (but not all) of the students were majoring in the second language and most (but not all) enrolled in a course in the language they studied after they returned from their abroad experience. The following table (table 1) shows background information about the participants.

Table 1: Participants

Name	Age	Study Abroad Program	Years of language study	Previous abroad experiences	Years at the university	Language major or minor
Carol	19	France, Nice 5 weeks	4 years	Dominican Republic Mexico 1 week	3 years	French Minor
Christine	20	France, Nice 5 weeks	4 years	No	3 years	French Minor
Emily	22	Mexico for 5 weeks	2 years	No	3 years	Spanish Minor.
Erika	26	Costa Rica Homestay 9 weeks	10 years	Mexico 2 weeks	21/2 years	Spanish Major
Gena	21	France, Nice 5 weeks	10 years	No	4 years	French Minor
Isabelle	21	Sevilla- 1 month	9 years	No	4 years	Spanish Major
Jane	22	Honduras Language Class	8 years	Mexico- mission Trip 3 days Guatemala 1	5 years	Spanish Minor

		3 months		week		
Jill	22	Mexico for 5 weeks	5 years	Germany 10 days	2 years	Spanish Minor
Joy	21	Mexico for 5 weeks	7 years	No	4 years	Spanish Major
Katie	19	Mexico for 5 weeks	8 years	Mexico for 1 week.	1 year	Spanish Major
Kelsey	19	Mexico for 5 weeks	5 years	Europe 2 weeks	1 year	Spanish Major
Margarita	22	Bilbao Spain 1 ½ months	8 years	Nicaragua 1 month	6 years	Spanish Major
María Romero	22	Nicaragua Internship 2 months	5 years	France 1 week	4 years	None
Paula	20	Mexico for 5 weeks	2 years	England 1 month	31/2 years	Spanish Minor
Rachel	19	Spain-Malaga 6 weeks	5 years	Mexico for mission work 2 weeks twice	1 year	Spanish Minor
Sarah	19	Mexico for 5 weeks	7 years	No	2 years	Spanish Major
Siena	18	Italy Florence 2 months	1 semester	Italy 12 weeks	2 years	None
Stephanie	20	Mexico for 5 weeks	8 years	Mexico 1 week	4 years	Spanish Minor
Steve	22	Mexico for 5 weeks	2-3 years	Mexico 1 week	5 years	Spanish Major
Victoria	21	Internship Program in Paris for 31/2 months	10 years	No	4 years	French Major

Data were collected from these study abroad students for a period of one semester after they returned to their home institution. This data collection period was divided into two main phases. Phase 1 took place right after students came back from their trip abroad

and involved open-ended face to face interviews of approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length with participants about their expectations before going abroad, their experience and to determine the existence of possible L2 self images after the abroad sojourn. Phase 2 took place at the end of the second month and beginning of the third month of the semester. This second phase consisted of a follow up focus group to find information about the development of the participants' motivation to engage in language learning, the development of their actual L2 self, and a visualization of a possible L2 self. The researcher recorded and took notes while conducting the interviews. Subsequently, the researcher color-coded the students' answers in order to identify common themes.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the nature of the effect of moving from a study abroad context to a non-study abroad context in the development of these possible L2 selves and language learning strategies. From interviews with twenty college students, it was found that first; these students had available possible L2 selves and clear goals to attain those selves before going abroad. Second, once back at their home university, the subjects searched for opportunities in which their possible L2 selves could become more accessible (Villalobos-Buehner, 2009). These findings are discussed in terms of what we know about possible selves and language motivation.

4.1. Goal Setting and L2 Self –Availability

Before going abroad, the 20 study participants had evident expectations of what they wanted to get out of their experience such as acquiring fluency and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, the purposes of this study's participants were "multi-determined" (Lens, 2001). That is, several types of goals fueled the motivation of students in this study.

For the participants, the goals for their study abroad experience were directly related to their language ability and their vision of themselves as fluent speakers of the language. For instance, Erika stated that she considered going abroad a necessity if she wanted to improve her fluency in a second language. Katie also affirmed that if she wanted to advance in her target language ability, she needed to go overseas. Most students were able to picture themselves as speakers of their target language before their trip and consider their abroad sojourn an opportunity to get closer to that vision of themselves as fluent language

speakers. However, one of the participants, Victoria, had an available "negative self" or feared self before going abroad, namely, a negative outcome that the individual should seek to avoid (Ryan, 2006):

> I studied the language but I'm terrible at languages and I'm terrible at English and I'm terrible at French. So I figure if I went back at least I would be a little bit better. I chose the internship because I think it's so much better to learn and be with the people. I know different people that went on different programs and they said it was so great we went with my friends. We talk all the time and they spoke English […]

Victoria's motivation, to change her actual feared self was the main reason to embark in her abroad sojourn. Her thoughts about what was likely allowed her to construct a possible L2 self that was different from the present one. Furthermore, she had a possible self and a feared self in the same domain (i.e., fluent language speaker), which according to Dörnyei (2001) and Oyserman and Markus (1990) is a powerful combination to keep us moving forcefully towards achieving one's goals. Others, however, did not have available language selves before going abroad but they had extrinsic goals that provided different purposes such as to be able to graduate faster and get college credits. This particular group of students had more available *ought selves* that influenced their motivation to go abroad.

Once at their destination, the students' possible L2 selves were more accessible. That is, they were surrounded by opportunities that would allow them to become closer to these selves. For instance, living with a local family required them to be users of the language in order to negotiate meaning in authentic situations such as lunchtime or during family celebrations. They were able to move from being language learners in a classroom to being language speakers in the target language community. According to Norman and Aron (2003), "the more easily the possible self can be brought into awareness, the more attention will be paid to it, and the more influence it will have on the individual's behavior" (p. 501). During interviews, the participants explained the importance of immersion in their goal to become fluent L2 speakers and that their experiences beyond the classroom were the most positive and beneficial for their learning. Most of the students were able to take their language learning experiences beyond the classroom and realized that their learning could be embedded in the context of everyday life. Carol, for instance, stated:

I felt for the first time I was able to speak French. It's one thing to be able to speak in French in class but to be able to live, exist…It takes an amount of ability in order to order food, to buy in a store. It takes a certain amount of effort .You don't need to be perfect but it was really gratifying just to be able to do that.

During their abroad sojourn, many of the participants invested much effort and resources in seeking out opportunities to become fluent speakers. Many used strategies such as the "No-English" rule or created situational vocabulary lists to expand their language learning experience while others embraced challenges such as "getting lost" as opportunities to attain their possible L2 selves:

[…] situations like that, not just sitting at home speaking Spanish to each other and to our mom but the situation you know like the bus, the taxi, even just going to restaurants and all those things forced us. […] It made me want to go out the next day and do something else where I was, you know, forced to really thinking and explained myself in a language that is not my first. (Stephanie)

Other participants, such as Kelsey, tried to avoid situations that could potentially take them away from their goal to become fluent such as not allowing the locals to speak to them in English:

Whenever I went out it seemed like anyone I'd talk to spoke English to me, which was kind of discouraging sometimes because I was like no I am trying to speak Spanish to you so stop trying to make things easier for me and for yourself. (Kelsey)

Kelsey explained how discouraged she felt about people trying to speak English to her. She was very conscious about the importance of expressing herself in Spanish at every moment in order to become fluent.

Once back at the home institution, the students articulated a noticeable representation of themselves in the future as fluent speakers and correct users of their target language. However, these L2 selves were not the only selves in some of the students' perceptions of their future. A number of participants had other possible selves available at the onset of the semester such as a working self, an academic self, and a mother self. These other selves were even more noticeable and available than their L2 selves. For example, when Rachel was asked about her future with regard to her Spanish ability, she immediately replied that she wanted to become a nurse and that ideally she would be able to work within a Spanish community so she could put those two goals together. Jill also

replied that she could see herself working in a non-nonprofit organization helping non-English speaking families get situated in new places. She stressed the importance of a type of social work in her future. This corroborates the principle that possible selves can be multidimensional and dynamic, i.e., they can change over time and the participants can face potential multiple goals (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Norman & Aron, 2003; Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Although all possible selves have the potential to influence current behavior, some are more likely to do so than others (Hoyle & Sherill, 2006). Furthermore, a possible self could lose its significance to the subject if it conflicts with other more relevant possible selves, lacks clear self-regulatory actions, or because it was difficult for this possible self to sustain self-regulatory effort (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). Carol's possible nursing self, for example, was more salient than her possible French self at the moment of the second interview. The latter was interfering with the former in that it was delaying her goal to become a nurse due to the extra amount of classes she needed to take in order to get her French minor. She admitted at that point that she just wanted to finish taking her French classes so she could concentrate on her nursing mayor and graduate.

The study's data show that the students could be divided in four groups according to their PL2S salience level before, during, and after the abroad sojourn. One group represents those students with salient PL2 selves' images before going abroad and who were able to maintain those vivid PL2S images during their SA experience and after they return despite the challenges they faced. In this group, we find Steve who had a clear vision of himself as a fluent Spanish speaker before going abroad and who developed different strategies in order to increase accessibility during the SA and after he came back to his home institution. The second group represents those students with salient PL2 selves before and during the SA. However, when they returned to their home institution, they faced challenges that affected their motivation to attain their PL2 selves' and the relevance of those PL2Ss in the students' working self-concept. Erika, for instance, had a clear image of herself in the future as a fluent Spanish speaker before and during her abroad sojourn. However, when she came back, she found that her classes were not supporting that fluent image and that it was difficult to find other ways to move towards the achievement of her PL2 self. Her motivation in attaining her fluent PL2 self had dropped and there was a risk that her PL2S could vanish from her working self-concept. The third group represents those with a vague

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future image of themselves as accurate and fluent L2 speakers before going abroad. However, the students' experiences during their SA helped those vague images become more salient and that allowed them to create clear strategies to attain those salient images after they came back from their abroad sojourn. Emily, for instance decided to go abroad just for fun. However, when she experienced being surrounded by the language during her abroad sojourn, her PL2self became more salient. Once back, she implemented a series of strategies that allowed her PL2 self to be accessible.

The final group characterizes those students with vague PL2Ss before the abroad experience but they become more salient during their abroad sojourn. However, once back their motivation for language learning diminished. These students' PL2selves disappeared from their working self-concept and other more relevant PSs became salient. In this group we find Carol who decided to go abroad to get credits for her French minor as a way to finish it quickly so she could concentrate on her more relevant nursing self. At the moment of the focus group interview, she questioned her decision to pursue French due to the amount of time that her French classes were taking away from her nursing major. The following chart illustrates the different degrees of PL2 Ss salience and its impact in the subjects' motivation.

Table 2 Possible L2 Selves Levels of Salience

Students	Before the Abroad Experience		During the Abroad Experience		After the Abroad Experience	
1. Paula, Stephanie, Kelsey, Steve, Jane and Jill.		Reasons to go abroad: - To become an accurate and fluent speaker. -To experience and understand the culture. -To be better in the language.		Motivated actions -Looking for more language exposure. -Implementing rules such as the "No English allowed" rule. -Embracing challenges.	H I G H	Motivated actions -Looking for language use opportunities. –A stronger language speaker identity. –Creation of learning strategies. -Visions of other PSs together with PL2Ss in their future.
	H I G H		H I G	-Thinking of	L	-Frustration with lack of
2. Erika,						

Joy, and Sarah			H	errors as learning opportunities. –Identifying themselves as language speakers	O W	speaking opportunities in the classes. –Lack of learning strategies. –Dependent on language classes for their PL2S to be stronger. - PL2Ss vanishes from their working self concept.
3. Victoria, Katie, Christine, María, Emily, Siena, Gena, Rachel, Margarita, and Isabelle	L O W	-To get course credits. -For fun. -Being suggested by professors.			H I G H	IBIDEM
4. Carol					L O W	IBIDEM

Groups two and three are especially important because they can illustrate the influence of PL2Ss in language learning motivation. Erika, Joy and Sarah had salient PL2Ss before and during their abroad experience. However, when they came back they faced academic challenges that undermined the existence of that PL2 self in their working self-concept. Furthermore, they were not able to articulate clear strategies to get closer to their PL2Ss after their SA experience that would have allowed them to retain those PL2Ss in their working self-concept. Victoria's group, on the other hand, experienced how their

SA sojourns helped them develop salient PL2Ss and together with sets of clear strategies allowed them to face the different challenges when they returned to their home institution.

In sum, the participants were already highly motivated before their abroad sojourn with clear sets of goals and available images of themselves as fluent speakers of the language. Once at their location, they shaped myriad opportunities to work towards the development of their L2 selves by embracing experiential learning opportunities and by developing different strategies that could help them enhance their learning experiences and move closer to their L2 selves. For many participants this abroad language experience allowed them to visualize themselves as speakers of the language rather than just learners of the language.

4.2. L2 Self –Accessibility

Being abroad offered the students multiple moments for their L2 selves to emerge and become accessible to them. This accessibility motivated the students to invest many resources such as time and effort in their goal of becoming fluent and accurate speakers of the L2. After returning to the States, the participants were even more energized to continue working on their possible L2 selves-representations. Most of them had their own language goals to accomplish such as improving grammar, working towards fluency and maintaining their language gains. Moreover, these students exhibited different types of strategic learning behaviors[4] (Dörnyei, 2005) in order to make their possible L2Selves more accessible. Some participants like Steve had elaborated and well thought-out approaches to continue learning. For instance, he enrolled in four Spanish classes so he could have more "Spanish exposure" and therefore, get closer to being fluent:

To involve myself in many classes, I will have lots of opportunities to continue learning. I just come to class every day speaking Spanish and I go home and study Spanish, and I go to work and continue doing that and I continue to involve myself four days a week with that much Spanish. It's like keeping myself busy with Spanish to the point that I cannot speak English. That's the closest setting to Mexico, engulfing myself so much in Spanish that I don't have an opportunity to speak English. That's how I'm going to learn.

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[4] Dörnyei (2005) defines strategic learning, as a purposeful effort to select and then pursue learning procedures that the students believe will increase their individual learning effectiveness.

Steve understood the importance of language immersion in his goal to become a fluent speaker. Therefore, he tried to replicate his abroad experience by enrolling in many Spanish classes.

Rachel expressed excitement about her Spanish classes because she felt they were the only chance to continue using the target language. In order to have more opportunities to use her Spanish, she decided to choose Spanish courses that met three days rather than two. For Rachel and Steve, their language classes became one of the most vital resources in the goal to become closer to their possible L2 selves. Other participants were very proactive and began looking for opportunities for that self to continue being accessible even before classes started. Stephanie, Victoria, and Paula, for instance, contacted several friends who they knew were native speakers of their target language as soon as they arrived from their abroad sojourn. They asked their friends to meet once a week to help them practice their L2 language. Others used different means such as watching movies and listening to music in the target language to keep their gains.

From the possible selves' perspective, these students tried to reproduce the high level of L2 self accessibility in the United States that they experienced abroad because it allowed them to continue moving forward towards their goal of becoming fluent or at least keeping their gains in the target language. Others had less sophisticated strategies such as listening to music or watching videos only. One can infer that at this point, some students had greater accessible possible L2 selves than others and that these different levels of accessibility could influence their motivation towards the attainment of these possible selves later in their future. Furthermore, some students faced difficulties with the availability of resources and time to make their possible L2 selves accessible. For example, students whose target languages were French and Italian, expressed that where they lived, it was very difficult, "almost impossible," to find French and Italian native speakers. Nevertheless, some of them were able to find other ways to move forward with their language goals. Victoria became a French major after her abroad experience so she could have more exposure to the language. She also decided to volunteer as a translator at an institution that provided services for refugees. Gena, on the other hand, did not have time to become involved with speaking French. Her nursing classes were very demanding and she did not have opportunities to speak in French. She said, "I would be more likely to use

more French terms and phrases if I were around people who knew French." Even though Victoria and Gena both have possible French selves, Victoria's L2 possible self was more salient therefore; she was more invested in becoming fluent. On the other hand, Gena's nursing self was more relevant and accessible for her at that moment and that is why she was more devoted to its attainment.

In addition to holding positive images of the L2 self one looks forward to becoming, possible selves include concerns for the future and the self-images one fears or wishes to avoid (Lee & Oyserman, 2007). Some students expressed concerns about the possibility of regressing in their language abilities or moving farther away from their Possible L2 selves. They contemplated the possibility of losing fluency and grammatical accuracy due to circumstances such as lack of time, less possible L2 self-accessibility, and the presence of other stronger possible selves that might affect their motivation to pursue achieving these possible selves. However, some of the students including Victoria and Steve were able to strategize so they could continue moving forward to their ideal L2 selves. Others, like Gena and Joy, had other stronger and more relevant ideal selves than their possible L2 selves. Therefore, these other possible selves became more salient and their possible L2 selves less significant. For Gena, it was her nursing possible self and for Joy it was her working self:

Like I said I really want to have a job where I can speak Spanish but because of mostly money and some medical stuff I need to have health insurance so I have to take whatever I can get after graduation. So if that happen, I guess I have to find my own way to keep speaking Spanish but I am really afraid that I'm going to lose it. (Joy)

Joy's working self was more salient and relevant than her possible L2 self. Therefore, her feared self, i.e., not a Spanish speaker, became more available.

According to Lee and Oyserman (2007), "Balanced possible selves promotes attainment because linking a positive expected self to a feared self in the same domain pinpoints motivation to both work toward a positive future goal and to anticipate and strategize how to get around problems that may result in getting closer to one's feared possible self" (p.41). In Victoria and Steve's cases, one can infer that they had balanced possible selves. In Gena and Joy's cases, their possible and feared selves were not balanced. Therefore, other more relevant selves became more important to the expense of probably losing their possible L2 self.

To conclude, at the beginning of the semester back after being abroad, the participants had clear possible L2 selves they wanted to acquire. However, they realized that they needed to work harder after returning to campus on finding opportunities for that self to emerge and be more accessible. The most motivated students made use of elaborate strategies to continue in their process of becoming fluent and accurate in the target language. Others less motivated or whose possible L2 selves were less salient made use of more simplistic strategies such as listening to music in order to maintain their gains. Some participants faced challenges such as time and other more relevant selves that influenced their involvement and motivation to continue moving towards their ideal L2 selves. The majority of the students also had the presence of the feared self they did not want to become. However, the ones who were highly motivated were able to plan strategies that could help them move closer to their more ideal self. The participants who did not have a salient possible L2 self were not able to strategize as much about how to get closer to this L2 self.

5. CONCLUSION

This study supports the notion that abroad experiences enhance the opportunity for PL2Ss to become active, relevant, and salient in the students' working self-concept. These PL2Ss help situate the students as speakers rather than learners of the target language, which in turn helps them, use the language as a tool for self-expression. These selves could also provide a strong and meaningful reason to continue engaging in language-learning activities.

Furthermore, this study supported the notion that possible selves are complex, dynamic contextual and mutable. A person can have several active, relevant and salient selves at one point but only those that are accessible, relevant and significant to the participants' goals could remain in that individual's working-self concept. The other prominent possible selves will become less salient and could even disappear.

When moving from a study-abroad to a non-study-abroad context, students searched for more language use opportunities inside and outside of the classroom. However, some students not only faced a lack of access to these opportunities, but they also faced classroom environments that were not supportive of them as speakers or of their goal of

becoming fluent speakers of the target language. These classrooms emphasized strategies that viewed these students as English speakers and passive learners. Language classrooms need to support the development of these PL2Ss in order to avoid the possibility for these selves to disappear from the student's working self-concept, which in turn could result in language attrition. Language departments must take into account the needs of this group of students going abroad by offering more opportunities outside of class and by designing more interconnected classroom strategies with these students' goals. Their P2LSs need to be relevant and accessible so the students are able to continue developing their language gains. P2LSs are effective motivators as long as they remain relevant in the students' working-self concept.

The perspective of looking at motivation as evolving from social interactions with communities of practice, open an interesting ground for understanding the complexity of this construct. Future studies should document the development of these P2L selves in communicative language classrooms where the emphasis is on negotiation of meaning.

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