

Chapter 6

Placement type and language learning during residence abroad

Rosamond Mitchell*, Kevin McManus**
and Nicole Tracy-Ventura***

*University of Southampton, UK, **University of York, UK,

***University of South Florida

The “year abroad” is a longstanding component of British university degree programmes in languages. As noted by other commentators (Coleman, 1997 and this volume; Collentine, 2009), the British “year abroad” is typically undertaken by language majors with several years’ prior language study and a relatively advanced proficiency level in their target language(s). It is a common requirement for programme completion, to spend two academic semesters abroad. However students can have considerable latitude in how the time abroad is spent, and assessment by the home institution is relatively “light touch”, typically involving e.g. a substantial project or long essay. Today, languages students typically undertake one of three placement types: as English language teaching assistants, on other forms of work placement, or as Erasmus exchange students following relevant academic programmes at a partner university. Numbers of U.K. languages students undertaking the classic university student exchange version of the year abroad are relatively stable at around 7,500 per year, a much smaller number than incoming international students at U.K. universities, though numbers undertaking teaching assistantships and other work placements have risen (British Academy & University Council for Modern Languages, 2012; King, Findlay, & Ahrens, 2010).

The linguistic benefits of the year abroad have been tracked in various research studies (Coleman, 1996, 1997; Ife, 2000; Klapper & Rees, 2012; Meara, 1994; Willis, Doble, Sankaraya, & Smithers, 1977). In general, this research indicates that while learners make considerable progress in their target L2, the variability which is characteristic of residence abroad programmes more widely (Kinginger, 2008) affects this group as well (on this see especially Klapper & Rees, 2012).

The research project “Social Networks, Target Language Interaction and Second Language Acquisition During the Year Abroad: A longitudinal study” (the LANGSNAP project: <http://langsnap.soton.ac.uk>) was planned to provide fuller evidence on L2 acquisition during the year abroad, including documenting devel-

opment on a range of language domains, and connecting progress in L2 to a range of individual, social and contextual variables. (See Mitchell, 2014 for an overview.) The project tracked a cohort of 56 students majoring in French or Spanish, before, during and after spending their year abroad in France, Spain or Mexico during the academic year 2011-12. This chapter reports one aspect of the findings of this project: the experience of the French L2 participants ($n=29$) of different placement types in France, and how placement type related to aspects of their target language development.

1. Literature review: Placement types and language learning

Four explanations are typically offered to explain the variable L2 learning outcomes of residence abroad (RA): a) predeparture proficiency; b) length of stay; c) individual differences; and d) contextual factors. Concerning predeparture proficiency, there is mixed evidence. Several researchers from North American contexts, where students often study abroad as novices, have argued that a minimum proficiency level is needed for learners to benefit quickly from RA (e.g., Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; DeKeyser, 2010; Lafford, 2006; Lafford & Collentine, 2006). However others (e.g. Llanes & Muñoz, 2009) have shown significant benefits even for early learners on short stays abroad. The LANGSNAP participants were all advanced learners with 8-10 years' prior language learning experience; a set of L2 pre-tests provided baseline information on their oral and written capabilities.

A limited number of studies have examined the impact of length of stay on language development, and these are reviewed by Llanes (2011). These studies show that participants can benefit even from very short stays abroad, but that on aspects of language from vocabulary and grammar to pragmatic and sociolinguistic features, the longer the stay abroad, the greater the impact. The LANGSNAP participants were all committed to a two-semester stay abroad, so length-of-stay comparisons were not possible between groups.

Concerning the possible role of individual differences, research has started to uncover how social-psychological and sociolinguistic factors concerning attitudes, willingness to communicate, and intercultural awareness (Kinginger, 2008), can impact on language learning success while abroad, as well as cognitive styles (Hokanson, 2000) and psycholinguistic factors such as working memory (Lord, 2006; O'Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, & Collentine, 2007) and cognitive processing abilities (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). Affective variables (motivation, anxiety, personality) have been widely studied and several qualitative studies (e.g. Jackson, 2008, 2010; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005) have documented how personal dispositions can influence learners' amount of interaction with native

speakers, and thus indirectly the availability of interactive learning opportunities. The LANGSNAP project adopted both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to individual learner differences. Firstly, the study documented learners' personality factors through use of a Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009), and traced language use patterns and social networking patterns of participants through specially developed questionnaires. Additionally, regular semistructured interviews explored individuals' language use, social networking, motivation, and intercultural understanding.

Concerning contextual factors, a considerable number of studies have compared learning during study abroad with learning by comparable groups at home, not always to the advantage of the former, though in general it has been shown that oral fluency develops more strongly while abroad. (See for example Isabelli-García, 2010; Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz and Halter, 2004, who found that home immersion students outperformed SA students, and reviews and discussion e.g. in Lafford, 2006; Collentine, 2009; Llanes, 2011.) However, given the compulsory nature of residence abroad on British degree programmes, meaningful at-home comparison groups are not available, and the most interesting questions concern contextual factors within the RA experience which may affect development.

Sojourners' place of residence has been an important focus in past research, partly because of the use of homestays on many American study abroad programmes. In a large scale quantitative RA study, Rivers (1998) compared the proficiency gains of L2 Russian learners living with a host family or in a dormitory, and claimed that contrary to expectations, homestay had a positive impact on reading only. Later quantitative studies (Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz & Halter, 2004) also failed to show clear influences for place of residence on learning gains. Qualitative accounts of life with host families have suggested possible explanations, demonstrating greatly varying interpersonal relationships and roles established with host family members (e.g. (Cook, 2008; Kinginger, this volume; Jackson, 2010; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Wilkinson, 2002). The LANGSNAP methodology did include systematic collection of information from participants about place of residence/co-habitants. In France, shared accommodation with other international students or assistants was considerably more common than homestays or flats shared with French-speaking flatmates, regardless of placement type, and this fact seems to have depressed somewhat the opportunities of the French L2 participants for interaction with fluent French speakers, compared with the Spanish L2 participants. This place of residence effect is seen in other studies, e.g. Papatsiba (2006), Klapper and Rees (2012). However no dominant impact of place of residence on language development has been detected, across the LANGSNAP dataset. Overall, the mixed results of place of residence studies suggest that intervening variables have greater importance.

The three types of placement undertaken by the LANGSNAP participants (teaching assistantship, work placement, university exchange) have been available to British students of languages over many years. Teaching assistant exchange programmes with France date from 1904 (British Council, 2005), and this was the most popular placement type until the 1980s, when the Erasmus programme began providing funding for student exchanges (Teichler, 2004). By the time of Coleman's major survey (Coleman, 1996), over half the 12,000 or so British students then estimated to be spending a year abroad were undertaking student exchanges. Teaching assistantships were the next most popular option, and other types of work placement were relatively rare. The overall figure of British students of languages undertaking study abroad through the Erasmus scheme declined to 7,000 or so in the early 2000s, and has not risen much since (King, Findlay & Ahrens, 2010). Numbers of British students going abroad have increased overall since 2007, but it seems likely that many of these are non-language majors and therefore beyond the concerns of this chapter.

All three placement types undertaken by language students have been investigated in previous studies. The Erasmus-funded student exchange has been evaluated regularly by Teichler and associates, e.g. Teichler (2004; this volume), and the Erasmus experience of language majors from a variety of countries has been examined in more language-focused studies (e.g. Barron, 2006; Coleman, 1996; Ife, 2000; Klapper & Rees, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2006; Regan, Lemée, & Howard, 2009; Tragant, 2012). These studies report generally high levels of participant satisfaction, including a positive sense of personal growth, and intercultural development. Concerning language learning, studies report generally positive outcomes especially regarding oral fluency and receptive skills (though less so for grammar, even when receiving in-country instruction: Ife, 2000). However, these accounts also report some difficulties of local social integration, with Tragant's Spanish participants (for example) reporting "little contact outside the university environment" during their sojourn in England (2012, p. 176). Similarly, over half of Papatsiba's French L1 sojourners abroad reported "weak interaction with natives" (2006, p. 118). These students reported the early formation of an international "Erasmus community", and continuing solidarity between co-nationals; only one-third of participants in this study fully embraced and explored cultural difference (p. 128). The use of English as a lingua franca among international students is also seen as a factor limiting target language use by U.K. students (Ife, 2000). The language teaching assistantship has also been quite extensively researched (e.g. Alred, 1990; Alred & Byram, 2002, 2006; Ehrenreich, 2006; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), though these studies focused primarily on the professional and/or intercultural development of participants. The early interview survey of Alred and Byram (Alred, 1990) reported an increased sense of maturity for all participants, together with an increased "rel-

ativisation” of native identity for some. The extent to which they were treated as professionals within host schools was crucial for their overall sense of integration/marginality. Interestingly, Alred and Byram (2002) re-interviewed a number of their original participants 10 years on, and were able to trace lasting effects in terms of intercultural competence (as described also in Coleman, this volume).

Work placements have traditionally attracted fewest U.K. languages students, though they have increased in popularity since receiving Erasmus funding (King, Findlay & Ahrens, 2010). The early study of Willis, Doble, Sankarayya and Smithers (1977) involved 80 students on work placements abroad, comparing their development with a smaller group of university exchange students. In this study the work placement group significantly outperformed the university group, on linguistic, intercultural and personal development measures. These researchers attributed these results to opportunities to use the target language “in a wider variety of social contexts” (p. 44), and also their “relative isolation” from co-nationals. (Of course, due to internet access and electronic communication, such “relative isolation” from English-speaking family and friends is impossible today.) The 1990s study by Meara (1994) drew on a questionnaire survey with 586 year abroad participants (301 on student exchange, 129 teaching assistants, and 81 workplace interns). The whole cohort viewed the experience favourably and reported growth on the usual dimensions (L2 speaking and listening, intercultural skills and personal development). However, Meara notes that the student exchange group had lower self-rated mean scores for language improvement, than either of the other two groups.

This brief survey of research on placement types draws attention to some possible sources of variability in the development of year abroad students’ linguistic proficiency. Exchange students are likely to be engaged socially in international Erasmus communities, with English the most easily available lingua franca; they are generally reported as having varying success in forming close relations with local peers. Teaching assistants may be better integrated in their local school, but where their professional role is not taken seriously they risk marginalisation and social isolation. Past research on work placements suggests that they may be the most favourable environment in principle, in terms of target language use and a clear social role. However, studies on language development within work placements are few, and pre-date e.g. widespread internet use. Overall the literature is fragmented, with small and dissimilar groups under study in different empirical projects, and frequent reliance on retrospective self-report for information on language development.

The LANGSNAP dataset allows for an in-depth review of placement types and their different characteristics/ contributions to language development. Placements were undertaken simultaneously, under similar conditions of contact with the home institution. Measurement of language proficiency took place for all

participants before, during and after residence abroad, and all participants were visited and interviewed on three occasions during their sojourn. Language use patterns and social networking were captured systematically through questionnaires, again administered during in-sojourn visits. Thus the LANGSNAP project allows the following questions to be addressed:

What are learners' perceptions of the impact of placement type (student exchange, teaching assistantship, work internship) on language use and development?

Do differences in placement type impact on language development?

2. Methodology

2.1. *Participants*

Participants were 29 advanced level university learners of French, spending Year 3 (two semesters) of a four-year degree programme (BA) in France. All were majoring in French, either as sole subject, or in combination with one or more other subjects (mostly other languages). All attended the same institution, which insisted on the year abroad being spent in a single placement. For this placement, they had chosen between teaching assistantship ($n=15$), university exchange ($n=8$) and work placement ($n=6$). The mean time spent abroad in France was 9.5 months (range: 7-12 months). Participants' mean age was 20.5 (range: 19-25 years) and the mean length of time previously spent studying French was 10.5 years (range: 6-20 years).

2.2. *Instruments*

Oral interviews conducted in French were used to collect qualitative information on learners' rationale for choosing a particular placement scheme and its perceived impact on language development. Quantitative data on the French language development of students taking part in the different placement schemes were derived through analysis of an elicited imitation task, a picture-based oral narrative and the same set of French-medium oral interviews.

Elicited imitation (EI) is a technique requiring the learner to listen to an L2 oral stimulus and then repeat it as accurately as possible. EI has been proposed for a considerable time as a valid and reliable general measure of L2 oral proficiency, which taps implicit knowledge; the underlying rationale is that learners can only accurately imitate sentences that they have both parsed and comprehended (Bley-Vroman & Chaudron, 1994). Using as a model the English sentences from Ortega, Iwashita, Rabie and Norris (1999), a French EI test was specially created for the

LANGSNAP project (Tracy-Ventura, McManus, Norris & Ortega, 2014), and used alongside a similar test in Spanish designed by Ortega (2000), not reported here. The EI Test was administered on computer and took just over nine minutes to complete. It included 30 test sentences in French, spoken by a native speaker and ranging from 7 to 19 syllables in length. These sentence stimuli were presented in order from lowest to highest number of syllables, and the participants' attempted imitations were recorded for later analysis. (For full details and discussion see Tracy-Ventura et al., 2014.)

The picture-based oral narrative ("Cat Story") was originally created in Spanish by Domínguez, Tracy-Ventura, Arche, Mitchell and Myles (2013); a parallel French version was created for the LANGSNAP project. The story contains 36 images organized over 13 pages. Participants had a few minutes to look at the story and then retold it, while reviewing the pictures. Each retelling lasted approximately 7 minutes, and was audiorecorded.

L2 oral interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis between each participant and a native/near-native speaker, at all data collection points. The interview questions centred on living abroad, use of the L2, language development, social networks and daily routines. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, and was audiorecorded. The end-of-sojourn reflective interview, conducted in English at Visit 3, collected participants' retrospective reflections on their stay abroad. All interviewers were provided with specialized training and were given feedback on technique prior to beginning the fieldwork.

Use of the same French-medium interviews both as a source of French language data, and as a source of information about perceptions of the stay abroad, may be queried. In the case of the LANGSNAP interviews, participants were aware both that their French would be analysed, and that their interlocutors were representatives of the home institution; it was acknowledged that their self-presentation would be influenced accordingly. However, rich anecdotal accounts of daily life, and of personal relationships, were provided in these interviews, cross checked through an English medium interview administered at the end of the sojourn, as well as with project questionnaire findings (not analysed here). Overall the team were satisfied concerning the dependability of the accounts provided and the patterns which emerged from these.

2.3. Procedure

Data were collected over a period of 23 months, with six data collection points scheduled before, during and after RA. The Pretest took place in the UK (May 2011). Once abroad, participants were visited three times (November 2011, February 2012, and May 2012). Two posttests took place in the UK following participants' return (September 2012, January 2013). The EI task was conducted at

Pretest, Visit 2 and Posttest 1. The *Cat Story* narrative task was conducted at Pretest and again at Visit 3. The reflective interview in English was conducted at Visit 3. The L2 interviews were conducted every time. However, for the purposes of this chapter, analysis has concentrated on the L2 interviews conducted at Pretest, at Visit 2, and at Posttest.

2.4. Analysis

All audio data were orthographically transcribed using the CHAT transcription system (CHILDES: MacWhinney, 2000). For the qualitative analyses reported here, relevant interview transcripts were analysed thematically with partial support from QSR NVivo 10.

To provide a rounded picture of developing French proficiency, three quantitative analyses of the French production data were conducted: general oral proficiency (EI Test), lexical diversity in L2 oral interviews and oral fluency (in picture-based narratives). Firstly, learners' individual utterance repetitions on the EI Test were scored based on a five-point scoring rubric (0–4). The maximum score possible for the test is 120 (30 x 4). Two raters coded half the EI data together and agreed on scores through discussion; the other half of the data was coded independently. Secondly, lexical diversity was analysed for the L2 interviews at Pretest, Visit 2 and Posttest 1 using D (an index developed by McKee, Malvern and Richards, 2000, that estimates lexical diversity for an individual, while taking text length into account), as calculated via the CLAN program (MacWhinney, 2000). Thirdly, the *Cat Story* at Pretest and at Visit 3 was used to estimate learners' rate of speech, operationalized as the number of pruned syllables produced per minute (see Lennon, 1990). This measure involves removal of any repetitions, false starts, or L1 use prior to syllable counting and analysis, so that only L2 speech in addition to the length of pauses are taken into account (in contrast to unpruned speech rate, for example, which measures everything uttered). For a full discussion of task types and different operationalizations of fluency, see Segalowitz (2010) and de Jong, Steinel, Florijn, Schoonen, and Hulstijn (2012).

We assessed the distribution of scores on all dependent variables. Shapiro Wilks tests showed normal distribution ($p > .05$) in all cases. For this reason, parametric tests have been conducted throughout. To compare changes in scores over time, plus differences between the three placement groups, while taking account of differences between the groups at pre-test, mixed ANCOVA was selected as the most appropriate test for change in overall proficiency (as measured through EI) and for change in lexical knowledge (as measured through D). Regular ANCOVA was appropriate to measure change in fluency. Checks showed that the data did not violate any assumptions of ANCOVA (linearity, homogeneity of regression slope, homogeneity of variance etc.).

3. Results a): Perceptions of language use and development

The first analysis examined participants' perceptions of the impact of placement type on social networking, language use and language development.

3.1. Placements and language use abroad: Participants' expectations

The Pretest interview provided insights into participants' reasons for choosing different placement types. Among those planning to be teaching assistants, a majority (8/15) were considering teaching as a possible future career. Those undertaking work placements were also keen to experience professional life, and/or felt that this role would enhance their future employment prospects. Several in both these groups said they wanted a change from university study, and some also valued the prospect of earning some money while abroad. Half of the participants undertaking a student exchange mentioned the availability of formal instruction in French plus other languages as a positive inducement (though university was to some extent the "default" option, and several mentioned dislike of teaching and/or the difficulty of getting work placements as supplementary reasons for their choice). All of the participants had high general expectations for opportunities to hear and speak French during their year abroad. However the group most likely to mention immersion in a French environment as a specific reason for placement choice, were those undertaking work placements (3/6). Those taking up assistantships were most aware that they were being recruited for their English language skills, and that there could be some tensions between their English teaching role and their own desire to improve their French.

3.1. Social networks and language use abroad: The actuality

Before departure, the student exchange group had reported high expectations of making French student friends on campus. The actuality was rather different, and by the time of Visit 2, most members of this group were reporting other Erasmus students (some British, some of other nationalities) as their most regular social contacts, i.e. the people they spent time with in the evenings, or travelled round with at weekends. Within these friendship groups, English predominated, though some examples of French-speaking international networks and/or individual contacts were reported. (For example, participant 108 spoke French all year with a Japanese exchange student.) One participant (128) reported positive efforts to befriend French students in her hall of residence at the start of the year (she organised a picnic, she left her room door open ...), but these had fizzled out by the time of Visit 2. While a few found a romantic partner (a French boyfriend was reported by participant 107), it was not easy to

find close same-sex friends. Some students reported positive daytime contact with classmates; for example, participant 126 reported regularly lunching with French friends from her Italian class. Participant 104 reported making friends with fellow music students, and 121 reported getting help with academic work from classmates. Organised tandem exchanges were reported by several students as a way of accessing French conversation opportunities, though of course reciprocal English conversation was entailed. Three students reported real success in penetrating French-speaking networks off campus, one of them (unusually for a student) through his host family (104), another through serious participation in an athletics club (108), and the third through her interest in local folk music which took her to folk nights and festivals as well as to student associations and music lessons (129). As for their university teachers, students mostly reported more distant relations than applied in the home university. Some language teachers were reported to be helpful with study advice, but two students perceived their lecturers in content classes (French literature, history) to have a negative attitude to Erasmus students. Students attending music classes (104, 129) were the most positive about French-medium content instruction.

The teaching assistant group ($n=15$) were aware before departure that the schools they would be working in might be problematic as a source of friends, compared with a university placement, because of age and status issues. In practice a majority of this group reported other assistants, with whom they often shared accommodation, as their main local social contacts (10/15). These mixed-nationality peer networks were most likely to be predominantly English-using during leisure time, though some French-using examples were reported (e.g. participant 106 spoke French routinely with a German language assistant). The social relations established with teachers in the assigned schools varied considerably. Several reported teachers as important social contacts (e.g. helping with banking problems: 101), a majority reported feeling welcome in staffrooms and at lunchtimes, with six assistants mentioning these as important locations for French conversation, and three also reported well-developed friendships with individual teachers. Teachers were also described as offering professional support (e.g. with lesson planning or with discipline problems). On the other hand, a minority reported loneliness and problems with integration in the school.

As noted earlier, the teaching assistant group had of course been recruited because of their English language skills, and were mostly expected to interact in English during class time. Interaction with teachers out of class was reported to be predominantly French-medium (and there were primary schools where no-one spoke much English), but a minority based in secondary schools reported teachers' preference to practise their own English. Participant 117 described differing practice in two schools:

In one of the schools the teachers were quite keen on speaking English, because sort of having an English person there helped them, and then in the other school my teachers were like “well we’re going to speak to you in French, because we know you are here to learn French, so we will speak French unless you mind in which case we can speak English to you”, and I said “no, speak French to me and if I don’t understand we can work around it”, and that really helped, having people that sort of only spoke to me in French. (117)

Outside the professional relationships of the school, some assistants reported organised activities likely to lead to interaction in French (a choir, exercise classes and a languages cafe, or a tandem exchange). A distinctive activity open to this group was provision of private English tutoring, to school students, and two participants reported developing friendly relations with the families of tutored children, which were carried on through French.

Like the teaching assistant group, the interns on work placement had mainly been recruited by their host organisations because of their English language skills. Two of them worked as administrators in an international business school, and the others worked in internationally oriented commercial companies. Typical work tasks included dealing with email correspondence in English and/or French, answering the phone (mostly in French), and undertaking translation and interpreting. For example, 124 reported a varied if low level administrative routine using a range of language skills:

I answer the phone, I do translations, and I take the minutes in the meetings. I organise deliveries for parcels and for equipment, I make hotel reservations and train reservations for staff travel, and lots of other tasks, the tasks that other people don’t want to do. (124, Visit 1)

Individuals also undertook general personal assistant duties, or staffed a library desk. One intern was hired specifically as an in-house English teacher, and found that this role led to a largely English-speaking relationship with colleagues. However the rest reported using mostly French in face to face office talk, and almost all (5/6) reported very good social relations with colleagues at work, taking part in group lunches and coffee breaks every day. Outside work, the living arrangements and main social networks of this group were diverse (one lived with French relatives, four others with international interns or students, while just one claimed that her “main friends” were French). Two female interns had found French boyfriends.

3.3. *Participants' perceptions of language development abroad*

The university based participants typically attended formal language classes where they studied topics such as translation, grammar and writing, gave formal presentations, learned French essay-writing style and were exposed to more academic/formal registers in French. They wrote some coursework (not always successfully) and took language examinations. A minority mentioned informal correction by peers as contributing to their learning. Clearly therefore this group were investing regular effort in learning standard French. However, almost all of them identified oral fluency, vocabulary, and listening comprehension as the areas in which they noticed most personal improvement; only one student believed her writing had improved most. Almost all (7/8) commented in some way on register issues. Most claimed that their informal everyday French had improved more than more formal speech styles. For example, both 107 and 129 said they had ongoing problems with selection of *tu/vous* address forms. Ongoing problems were also reported in managing service encounters with strangers (using medical services, for 108; reporting a fraud to police, for 107). Few students mentioned academic registers specifically; of those who did, 104 and 108 felt they now could discuss e.g. topics in history or politics with confidence, partly as a result of extensive reading (104). However 121's lack of self-confidence with academic French led her to drop out of a history module.

The teaching assistants expressed even more strongly that "the main focus was really oral and just going for it" (115). In this group, 11/15 talked about speaking and listening comprehension as the main areas in which they had developed. Two assistants mentioned mastering the *tu/vous* distinction (e.g. when speaking to the head teacher), and three others referred to the need to develop professional skills in spoken French (e.g. giving explanations to school students; giving pastoral advice). A few also reported progress in understanding children's vernacular speech. This group very generally reported experiencing informal correction, by teacher mentors, fellow assistants and even their pupils. The only writing task mentioned by any participants in this group was their project for the home university (a 5,000 word research report).

All workplace interns mentioned one or more aspect of spoken language as having improved during work experience: Pronunciation, listening comprehension, and overall fluency. After early challenges, most reported achieving effective performance at work; just one intern reported ongoing language difficulties, which affected her professional performance. Improved telephone skills were mentioned by three interns. In addition, most interns mentioned vocabulary development explicitly, including listening for and assimilating appropriate business expressions. The most distinctive aspect of language improvement for this particular group, however, concerned writing. Four interns mentioned

improved ability to carry out email correspondence in French, and form-filling, minute-taking and translation were also spoken about as tasks contributing to writing development. For example, 128 undertook book reviews and some high-profile translations for her team:

The director of the whole [organisation] asked me to translate her biography for the magazines, for [Newspaper] and all that, and that made me feel - I was really pleased, but I was really stressed as it was up to me to do it, afterwards my boss just asked, "you're sure?" and off it went. (128, Visit 3)

Like the students at university, the interns reported monitoring and correction of their French by work colleagues, especially when writing (something they generally appreciated, though they valued becoming increasingly independent writers as the year progressed).

3.4. Section conclusion: Interactions between placement type, social networking and target language use

As shown above, participants on all types of placement formed multilingual networks when abroad, and continued to use English alongside French as part of their everyday experience. On all placement types, living arrangements varied, but only a minority shared accommodation with French speakers only. On all placement types, a rich environment of French input was available. However for all participants, the more accessible social networks typically involved bilingual or multilingual speakers, with whom they had to negotiate language choices as a dimension of building social relationships.

As teaching assistants and on work placement, English was seen as key to their role, whether undertaking English instruction, or carrying out office duties such as translations and email correspondence. This positive view of English was reinforced, for example, by families' willingness to hire language assistants as private English tutors for their children. In these settings, participants' English abilities were also attractive to professional colleagues during leisure time, e.g. when school-teachers and professional colleagues seized the chance to practise their English. On the other hand these professional settings frequently offered access to French-using social environments (the school staffroom, or workplace restaurant, alongside classrooms and offices), and chances to interact with at least some French monolinguals (e.g. primary school teachers without much English, secondary school students). Away from the work setting, a small minority of teaching assistants reported socialising primarily with French speakers, whereas 4/6 interns said they did so (two with French boyfriends). It seemed that teaching assistants' primary social network was among other assistants who were of course international, and where English often

served as *lingua franca*. In this they resembled the student participants, who as we have seen found it relatively hard to make/sustain French-using networks when away from the daytime campus, and spent their leisure time predominantly with other Erasmus students. Again, the exceptions were those with a French boyfriend, those living with French speakers, and those who embedded themselves in some sort of organised leisure activity (music, sport). When on campus, student participants found it easier to develop some level of social relations with French classmates. Again however, several traded on their English abilities in order to ‘earn’ French conversation opportunities with peers, by taking part in tandem language exchanges.

Opportunities for language development did vary in detail by setting. Obviously the university based group had extensive access to formal instruction in French. The interns on work placement were expected to write emails and other texts in appropriate registers, and gained practical experience of translation and sometimes interpreting, as well as engaging in various kinds of professional spoken discourse. The teaching assistants reported very little focus on writing, but had to deal with different registers in spoken French. Yet as we have seen, students from all groups mainly stressed common themes of accent, vocabulary and overall oral proficiency as the domains where learning had been most noticeable to them.

4. Results b): The actuality of language development

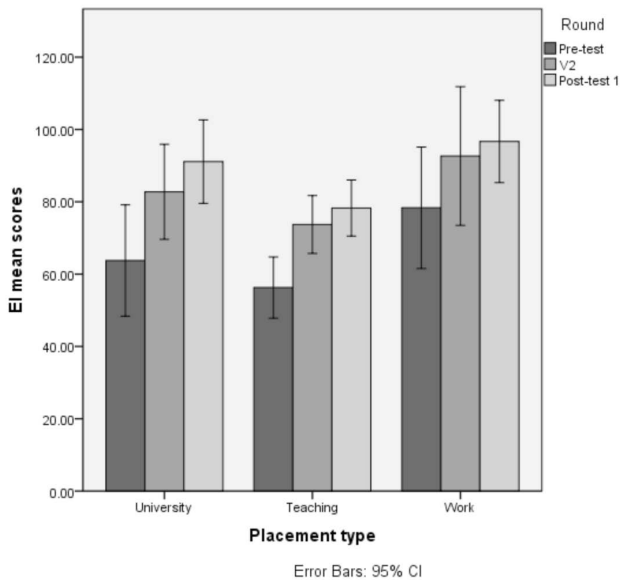
The second analysis examined participants’ performance on three different measures of language development at Pretest, during Visit 2 or 3 abroad, and at Post-test 1. Group size is clearly a limitation to these analyses, with 15, 8 and 6 participants in the university, assistantship and internship groups respectively. Another limitation is that all of the measures presented relate to aspects of oral proficiency (the EI Test, lexical diversity and fluency). Clearly it would be useful in future to examine proficiency in writing, given the participants’ rather different accounts of writing opportunities when abroad. It is worth noting as well that the analyses aimed at getting an overview of linguistic development rather than a precise account of change between the discrete points in time “beginning” and “end” of the RA period. We acknowledge that all potential change (both attrition and development) may not be fully captured by these three data collection points.

4.1. L2 oral proficiency

Figure 1 shows participants’ EI Test performance. The descriptive evidence shows a trend toward improvement over time for all three groups, alongside some differences between groups. To test whether the differences in time and group were sig-

nificant a mixed analysis of covariance (mixed ANCOVA) was conducted, with EI scores at Pretest as the covariate to control for individual differences prior to RA; its high reliability met a key ANCOVA assumption (Cronbach alpha = 0.92). The between-groups independent variable was placement type (teaching, university, work) and the within-groups independent variable was time. The dependent variable was the EI score. The interaction between placement and time was not significant, $F(2, 25) = 1.29$, $p = .29$. There was a statistically significant main effect for time, $F(2, 25) = 8.92$, $p = .006$, and the effect size was very large (partial eta squared = .26). Pairwise comparisons showed that the mean scores at V2 ($M = 80.46$, $SD = 1.74$) and at Post-1 ($M = 86.72$, $SD = 1.85$) were significantly different ($p < .001$). The main effect for placement did not reach statistical significance however: $F(2, 25) = 1.26$, $p = .30$. In summary, therefore, these results indicate that, in contrast with time, differences in placement type did not significantly impact on the development of oral proficiency.

Figure 1. Development of oral proficiency over time (EI mean scores by placement group)

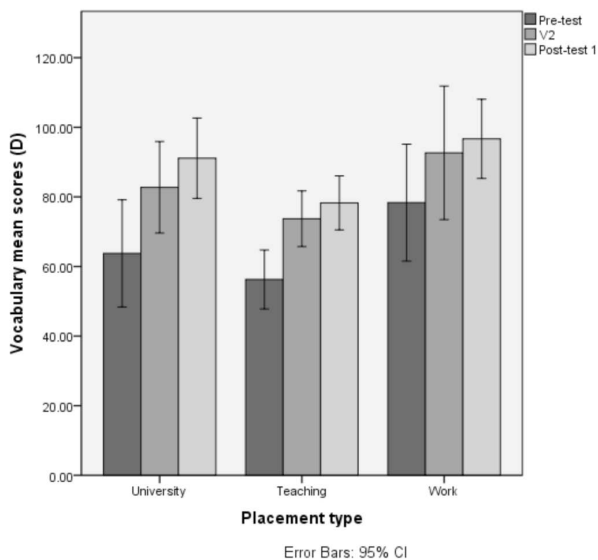


4.2. Lexical diversity

Figure 2 shows participants' lexical diversity scores (group means) as measured by D in the oral interview at the same assessment points (Pretest, Visit 2, Posttest 1); the trend is one of improvement over time in lexical diversity for all three groups. Similar to the results presented on oral proficiency, a mixed analysis of covariance

(ANCOVA) was conducted to assess the influence of placement type on changes in lexical diversity (as measured by D), using the Pretest D scores as the covariate to control for individual differences prior to RA. The between-group independent variable was placement type (teaching, university, work) and the within-group variable was time. The dependent variable was the D score. The interaction between placement and time was not significant, $F(2, 25) = .68, p = .51$. Although the main effect for time did not quite reach statistical significance, $F(2, 25) = 3.29, p = .08$, it did show a medium effect size (partial eta squared = .11). The lack of statistical significance could be due to the small sample size. There was no main effect for placement type: $F(2, 25) = .06, p = .94$. In summary, therefore, these results indicate that differences in placement type did not significantly impact on lexical diversity.

Figure 2. Development of lexical diversity over time (D mean scores by placement group)

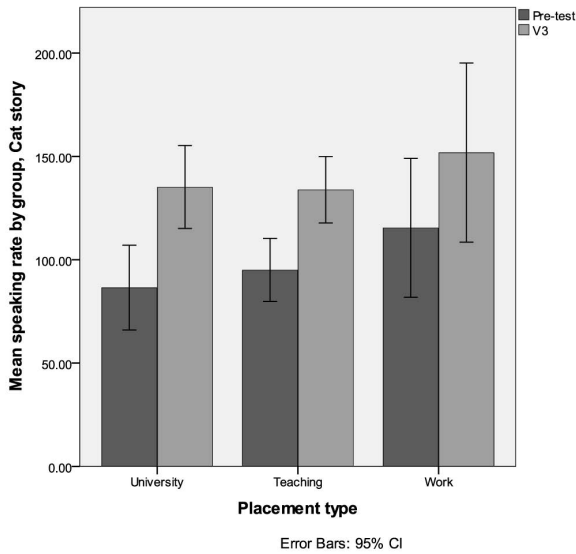


4.3. Fluency

Figure 3 shows participants' fluency scores (speaking rate) in the spoken narrative used at the Pretest and at Visit 3 (*Cat Story*). Once again, the comparison of the three placement types shows improvement over time in speaking rate for all three groups. An ANCOVA was conducted to assess the influence of placement type on changes in fluency over time, using fluency scores at Pretest as the covariate to control for individual differences prior to RA. The independent variable was placement type (teaching, university, work). The dependent vari-

able was fluency score at V3. After adjusting for the pretest fluency scores, the difference between Visit 3 scores was not significant, $F(2, 24) = .26$, $p=.78$. In summary, therefore, these results indicate that differences in placement type did not significantly impact on speaking rate.

Figure 3. Development of fluency over time (mean speaking rates by placement group, *Cat Story*)



5. Discussion

This chapter set out to explore the possible contribution of placement type to language use and development, in the context of an academic year spent in France by British university students. Three different placement types were involved: studying French and/or other subjects at a partner university, working as a (paid) teaching assistant in one or more French primary or secondary schools, or undertaking a working internship in a French institution. Students made their placement choices for a variety of reasons, academic, professional or instrumental, and were aware before departure of the language learning opportunities available in principle in each setting, but also had some awareness of the placement-specific social challenges they might face.

To answer Research Question 1, we analysed the extensive interviews conducted with participants before and during their stay abroad. These interviews paint a rich picture of language use across all three types of placement. All had access in principle to a rich French medium experience, with extensive input avail-

able in university classrooms, schools and office environments. All environments offered mentors or instructors in some form, who were aware of the participants' need to use and learn French, and usually provided support for this. University-based participants attended formal language classes; workplace interns had their work monitored and corrected by colleagues, and teaching assistants were involved in staffroom discussions in French. However, in all three environments, participants' English language abilities were also seen as a valued asset. Teaching assistants and interns had been specifically recruited because of these abilities, and were expected to teach/use English as part of their professional role; these groups are described by Coleman as "intercultural mediators" (1997, p. 4). Participants attending university also found that English was a type of social capital which could earn them French conversational partners through tandem arrangements. In all settings, participants also encountered bilingual/multilingual speakers who were keen to practise their English informally with them, and had to develop strategies to manage these relationships. There was little between-group difference in living arrangements, and in leisure time activities. Thus, most members of all three groups lived with British or international peers, and only a minority lived with French-dominant speakers. Similar patterns obtained for leisure time activities; just a minority within each placement type formed close friendships and/or romantic partnerships with French speakers. Service encounters with strangers might involve French or English, to an unpredictable extent.

All participants were thus negotiating a bilingual/multilingual existence while in France. The degree to which French vs English was predominant varied partly because of very local circumstances (e.g. whether or not teachers in a host school spoke English), partly because of participants' individual characteristics and agency (e.g. how far they persisted with French usage, and/or sought French-using interlocutors, in mixed-language situations). This variability did not seem closely tied to placement type.

Concerning perceptions of language development, the participants in all placement types agreed in stressing oral proficiency, typically mentioning improvements in listening comprehension, in accent, in vocabulary, in fluency, and/or in spoken politeness. The only noticeable inter-group difference concerned reports on writing. University students and interns had regular opportunities to write in French, and the interns in particular mentioned writing as an important aspect of their development; on the other hand, writing did not feature at all in the accounts of the teaching assistants.

Regarding our second research question, relating to the impact of placement type on language development, the findings can be briefly summarised. Three domains were analysed: Overall French proficiency (as indicated through EI), oral fluency (as measured by speaking rate in the *Cat Story* narrative), and lexical diversity (as measured by D in oral interviews). The interns group was at some initial

advantage over the other two groups, but all three groups progressed similarly while abroad, making significant gains on all dimensions investigated. Given the rather different experiences of the three groups with respect to writing, it is a limitation that data on students' writing performance has not yet been analysed. Overall however, it seems that placement type by itself does not significantly affect key aspects of students' linguistic progress. That is to say, every placement type offers in principle a rich exposure to French and interactional opportunities; the extent to which participants made use of these did vary, but this variation seems to relate mainly to factors other than placement structures.

6. Conclusion

The quantitative findings from the research reported in this chapter confirm the overall positive linguistic benefits of residence abroad for advanced language learners noted in many other studies, at least in the oral domain. Regarding possible placement effects, the workplace interns started at some linguistic advantage over their peers. However, all groups made similar progress, indicating that placement type was not a major influence on development in spoken French.

The qualitative findings provide insights into aspects of the RA experience shared by all participants, which seem to outweigh the structural differences of placement type. All placements offered access, in principle, to a rich French-using environment. But as English speakers, our LANGSNAP participants possessed linguistic capital which many of their interlocutors in France were keen to access, so as to develop their own English resources. English is well established as a common Erasmus lingua franca among students from different linguistic backgrounds, even in environments where English L1 students are rare (Kalocsai, 2011). Internet communication also offers unlimited opportunity to sustain home social networks and relationships, which are mostly established English monolingual zones. Thus it is unsurprising that our participants found themselves negotiating bilingual and multilingual language practices, nor that the new social networks established abroad were rarely French-medium-dominant. Some individuals exploited personal talents such as music or sport, to establish strong French network ties; other individuals achieved this through local mentors (e.g. teachers, relatives, French housemates, or boyfriends), and some through personal decision making (e.g. to actively avoid other British students, to persist in speaking French in all service encounters). But regardless of placement type, most developed "mixed" networks and practices, where French and English alternated (with occasional use of other languages) with little variation through the year.

This chapter thus reaches similar conclusions to those of previous work on contextual factors, e.g. work on the homestay and its mixed impact on language learning. It seems that more refined analysis of students' personal motivations and characteristics, multilingual language practices, and emerging social relations is needed, if we are to begin to explain variation in the L2 development of RA participants. Other chapters in the volume make progress on various aspects of this project, and we expect that further LANGSNAP analyses will also contribute in due course to this "social turn" in study/ residence abroad research.

Acknowledgements. The research reported in this chapter was funded by Grant RES-062-23-2996 from the Economic and Social Research Council. The authors are grateful for the contributions of the co-Investigators Laurence Richard and Patricia Romero de Mills, other members of the research team, and not least the LANGSNAP participants.

References

- Alred, G. (1990). *Residence abroad and the cultural perceptions of students of foreign languages in higher education: ESRC end of award report, R000231196*. Swindon: Economic and Social Research Council.
- Alred, G., & Byram, M. (2002). Becoming an intercultural mediator: A longitudinal study of residence abroad. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 23, 339-352.
- Alred, G., & Byram, M. (2006). British students in France: 10 years on. In M. Byram & A. Weng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 210-230). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Barron, A. (2006). Learning to say 'you' in German: the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in a study abroad context. In M. A. DuFon & E. Churchill (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 59-88). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bley-Vroman, R. and Chaudron, C. (1994). Elicited imitation as a measure of second-language competence. In E.E. Tarone, S.M. Gass & A.D. Cohen (Eds.) *Research methodology in second language acquisition* (pp. 245-261). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bowden, H.W. (2007) *Proficiency and second-language neurocognition: A study of Spanish as a first and second language*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Washington, DC : Georgetown University.
- Brecht, R.D., Davidson, D.E., & Ginsberg, R.B. (1995). Predictors of foreign language gain during study abroad. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp. 37-66). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- British Academy (2012). *Valuing the year abroad: A British Academy–UCML position statement*. Retrieved from http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Valuing_The_Year_Abroad.cfm
- British Council (2005). *Breaking the barriers: 100 years of the language assistants programme 1905-2005*. London: British Council.

- Coleman, J.A. (1996). *Studying languages: A survey of British and European students*. London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research.
- Coleman, J.A. (1997). Residence abroad within language study. *Language Teaching*, 30, 1-20.
- Collentine, J. (2009). Study abroad research: findings, implications and future directions. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 218-233). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cook, H.M. (2008). *Socialising identities through speech style*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- De Jong, N.H., Steinel, M.P., Florijn, A., Schoonen, R. & Hulstijn, J H. (2012). Facets of speaking proficiency. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 34, 5-34.
- DeKeyser, R. (2010). Monitoring processes in Spanish as a second language during a study abroad program. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 80-92.
- Dewaele, J.-M., & van Oudenhoven, J. P. (2009). The effect of multilingualism/ multiculturalism on personality: No gain without pain for Third Culture Kids? *International Journal of Multiculturalism*, 6, 443-459.
- Dominguez, L., Tracy-Ventura, N., Arche, M.J., Mitchell, R. & Myles, F. (2013). The role of dynamic contrasts in the L2 acquisition of Spanish past tense morphology. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 16, 558-577.
- Ehrenreich, S. (2006). The assistant experience in retrospect and its educational and professional significance in teachers' biographies. In M. Byram & A. Weng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 186-209). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Freed, B.F., Dewey, D.P., Segalowitz, N. & Halter, R. (2004). The Language Contact Profile. *Studies In Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 349-356.
- Hokanson, S. (2000). Foreign language immersion homestays: Maximising the accommodation of cognitive styles. *Applied Language Learning*, 11, 239-264.
- Ife, A. (2000). Language learning and residence abroad: how self-directed are students? *Language Learning Journal*, 22, 30-37.
- Jackson, J. (2008). *Language, identity and study abroad: Sociocultural perspectives*. London: Equinox.
- Jackson, J. (2010). *Intercultural journeys: From study to residence abroad*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kalocsai, K. (2011). The show of interpersonal involvement and the building of rapport in an ELF community of practice. In A. Archibald, A. Cogo & J. Jenkins (Eds.), *Latest trends in English as a lingua franca research* (pp. 113-138). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- King, R., Findlay, A., & Ahrens, J. (2010). *International student mobility literature review: Report to HEFCE, and co-funded by the British Council, U.K. National Agency for Erasmus*. Higher Education Funding Council. Retrieved from http://www.british-council.org/hefce_bc_report2010.pdf
- Kinginger, C. (2008). Language learning in study abroad: Case histories of Americans in France. *Modern Language Journal*, 92, 1-124.
- Klapper, J., & Rees, J. (2012). University residence abroad for foreign language students: Analysing the linguistic benefits. *The Language Learning Journal*, 40, 335-358.

- Lafford, B.A. (2006). The effects of study abroad vs classroom contexts on Spanish SLA: Old assumptions, new insights and future research directions. In C. A. Klee & T. L. Face (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 7th conference on the acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as first and second languages*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Lafford, B.A., & Collentine, J. (2006). The effects of study abroad and classroom contexts on the acquisition of Spanish as a second language: From research to application. In B. A. Lafford & R. Salaberry (Eds.), *Spanish second language acquisition: From research findings to teaching applications* (pp. 103-126). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Lennon, P. (1990). Investigating fluency in EFL: A quantitative approach. *Language Learning*, 40, 387-417.
- Llanes, À. (2011). The many faces of study abroad: An update on the research on L2 gains emerged during a study abroad experience. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 8, 189-215.
- Llanes, À. & Muñoz, C. (2009). A short stay abroad: does it make a difference? *System*, 37, 353-365.
- Lord, G. (2006). Defining the indefinable: Study abroad and phonological memory abilities. In C.A. Klee & T.L. Face (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 7th conference on the acquisition of Spanish and Portuguese as first and second languages* (pp. 40-46). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- MacWhinney, B. (2000). *The CHILDES project: Tools for analyzing talk. Third Edition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McKee, G., Malvern D.D. and Richards, B.J. (2000). Measuring vocabulary diversity using dedicated software. *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 15, 323-37.
- Meara, P. (1994). The year abroad and its effects. *Language Learning Journal*, 10, 32-38.
- Mitchell, R. (2014). *Social networks, target language interaction and second language acquisition during the year abroad: a longitudinal study*. ESRC End of Award Report RES-062-23-2996. Swindon : Economic and Social Research Council.
- Murphy-Lejeune, E. (2002). *Student mobility and narrative in Europe: The new strangers*. New York: Routledge.
- O'Brien, I., Segalowitz, N., Freed, B., & Collentine, J. (2007). Phonological memory predicts second language oral fluency gains in adults. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 29, 557-581.
- Ortega, L., Iwashita, N., Rabie, S. and Norris, J.M. (1999) *A multilanguage comparison of measures of syntactic complexity*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, National Foreign Language Resource Center.
- Papatsiba, V. (2006). Study abroad and experiences of cultural distance and proximity: French Erasmus students. In M. Byram & A. Weng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 108-133). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Pellegrino Aveni, V. (2005). *Study abroad and second language use: Constructing the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Regan, V., Lemee, I., & Howard, M. (2009). *The acquisition of sociolinguistic competence in a study abroad context*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

- Rivers, W.P. (1998). Is being there enough? The effects of homestay placements on language gain during study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31, 492-500.
- Segalowitz, N. (2010). *The cognitive bases of second language fluency*. New York: Routledge.
- Segalowitz, N., & Freed, B. F. (2004). Context, contact, and cognition in oral fluency acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 173-199.
- Segalowitz, N., Freed, B.F., Collentine, J., Lafford, B.A., Lazar, N., & Diaz-Campos, M. (2004). Comparison of Spanish second language acquisition in two different learning contexts: Study abroad and the domestic classroom. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad*, 10, 1-18.
- Teichler, U. (2004). Temporary study abroad: The life of ERASMUS students. *European Journal of Education*, 39, 395-408.
- Tracy-Ventura, N., McManus, K., Norris, J. & Ortega, L. (2014). 'Repeat as much as you can': Elicited imitation as a measure of oral proficiency in French. In P. Leclercq, A. Edmonds & H Hilton (eds.), *Measuring L2 proficiency: Perspectives from SLA* (pp. 143-163). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Tragant, E. (2012). Change or stability in learners' perceptions as a result of study abroad. In C. Munoz (Ed.), *Intensive exposure experiences in second language learning* (pp. 161-190). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Wilkinson, S. (2002). The omnipresent classroom during summer study abroad: American students in conversation with their French hosts. *Modern Language Journal*, 86, 157-173.
- Willis, F.M., Doble, G., Sankarayya, U., & Smithers, A. (1977). *Residence abroad and the student of modern languages: A preliminary survey*. Bradford: University of Bradford Modern Languages Centre.

