The Benefits of Study Abroad on the Fluency of Learners of French as a Second Language

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Abstract

This study addresses possible benefits of study abroad on second language fluency. Specifically, we compare the use of disfluencies as an indicator of in-class second language proficiency among American students of French who had studied abroad in France for 6 months with that of similar students who had not studied abroad. Despite numerous past studies, the field of second language acquisition has not yet conclusively demonstrated a "linear pattern of development" (Jensen & Howard, 2014) in proficiency among learners on study abroad. Data were collected post-sojourn in three informal small-group discussions with six undergraduate students enrolled in an intermediate French course at a U.S. liberal arts college in 2014. The data were analyzed for the use of filled pauses, silent pauses, and self-repairs. Despite project limitations that call for extended research on the topic, overall results suggest that study abroad decreases learners' post-sojourn use of all three types of disfluencies, especially grammatical self-correction.

Résumé

Cette étude examine les avantages possibles de l'étude à l'étranger sur la maîtrise d'une langue seconde. Plus spécifiquement, nous comparons l'usage des traits de la « non-maîtrise » comme indice de la compétence langagière dans la classe de langue seconde auprès de deux groupes d'étudiants américains du français. Le premier groupe a passé une période d'étude de 6 mois en France, tandis que le second groupe n'a pas fait de séjour d'études à l'étranger. Malgré de nombreuses études antérieures, le champ d'études de l'acquisition de langue seconde n'a pas encore démontré de façon conclusive une
« constante de développement linéaire » (Jensen et Howard, 2014) dans la compétence auprès des apprenants en séjour d'études à l'étranger. Des données « après-séjour » ont été recueillies de trois petits groupes de discussion informels composés de six étudiants de premier cycle inscrits à un cours de français intermédiaire à une université de lettres et sciences sociales et humaines en 2014. Les données ont été analysées pour l'usage des marqueurs de pause, les pauses muettes et les corrections. Malgré les limites de ce projet, les résultats dans l'ensemble suggèrent que l'étude à l'étranger diminue l'usage de chaque type de traits de la « non-maîtrise » étudié par les apprenants « après-séjour », en particulier la correction grammaticale.

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Introduction

The effects of study abroad (SA) and their link to second language (L2) proficiency have long been a point of debate in L2 acquisition research. As claimed by Freed (1995, 1998), the field has seen two different principal research paths. First, while limited in both scope and number, quantitative studies have focused on the discrete linguistic benefits while on SA (see Cubillos & Ilvento, 2013; Kinginger, 2009). Second, researchers have investigated the effect of SA on the motivation of L2 learning, principally in the areas of integrative and instrumental motivation for improving L2 fluency (e.g., Allen, 2010a, 2010b; Allen & Dupuy 2013; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2013; Hernández, 2010; Peng, 2007). The current research, which is a pilot study, is aligned with the first path in L2 acquisition research in relation to SA in that it investigates the potential linguistic benefits of SA and, especially, the possible change in disfluency use post-sojourn. Here, we examine the benefits of French-language SA by focusing on the use of certain disfluencies in the L2 speech of two groups of American university students, one group of post-sojourn students and another group who had not experienced SA.

While limited in number, studies have shown that even short stays abroad can prove beneficial to improving L2 fluency (especially in terms of lexical and basic grammatical acquisition), though Llanes (2011) suggested that longer stays naturally result in the student or sojourner making more impactful gains in sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge/competence. However, other studies have suggested that improvements in fluency are not simply a question of length of stay; that the issue is much more nuanced and complex than initially believed (see Collentine, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Gautier & Chevrot, 2012; Hernández, 2010; Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2007; Kinginger, 2009; Taguchi, 2011). For example, Jensen and Howard (2014) remarked that studies "have pointed to the relatively limited grammatical gains made during SA" (p. 32) and that "there is no linear pattern of development across all learners, as there is considerable individual variation in the development of both complexity and accuracy during [SA], with some learners evidencing progress while others do not" (p. 57; see also Cubillos & Ilvento, 2013; Kinginger, 2008). Indeed, it is perhaps all initiated from individual motivation, leading to increased opportunities for contact with the target language that result in a greater development of the L2 (see Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011). Overall, current discussion in the field points to the complexity of the effects of SA on L2 acquisition and overall L2 fluency, for the variability in SA outcomes is typically explained through (a) initial abilities or pre-departure proficiency, (b) length of stay, (c) individual differences, and (d) host contextual factors (see Mitchell, McManus, & Tracey-Ventura, 2015; Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011). Yet, despite the vast amount of literature on SA and L2 acquisition, "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 . . . participants" (Mitchell et al., 2015, p. 134).

But what is understood by the "fluency" that might be well served by SA? Many of the aforementioned studies do not provide a clear definition of the term. Yet the field does distinguish two notions of fluency, one broad, one narrow. The broad sense of fluency

means speaking an L2 with error-free grammar, an advanced vocabulary, and a native-like pronunciation, whereas narrow fluency is viewed as a component of language proficiency where the frequency of hesitation in speech is also assessed (Bosker, Pinget, Quené, Sanders, & de Jong, 2012). Fluency in the narrow sense does not necessarily mean speaking freely without interruptions; disfluencies are inevitable given that speech is a motor activity.

Indeed, disfluencies would be especially useful for investigating proficiency because they "display metalinguistic information to listeners about a speaker's confidence [and] inform listeners about a speaker's planning difficulties" (Bortfield, Leon, Bloom, Schober, & Brennan, 2001, p. 128). From a linguistic perspective, disfluency is defined as a "series of words, initial parts of words, or unattached fragments which do not contribute meaning to the ongoing flow of language" (Fiestas, Bedore, Peña, & Nagy, 2005). This definition naturally contrasts with Fiestas et. al.'s (2005) description of fluency as speech that is produced with ease and without complication. When the disfluencies are removed, the remaining utterance constitutes a meaningful, communicative unit. They are considered a predictable and normal part of speech, yet are produced when an individual is attempting to express an idea that is not fully formed, in content and/or in structure (Leadholm & Miller, 1995; Loban, 1976). Disfluencies can impact speech in one of two ways: they "can affect the production of sounds used in communication (the speech system), or they can affect the organization of words and grammatical structures to convey meaning (the language system)" (Fiestas et al., 2005, p. 731). By comparing disfluencies in the L2 speech of SA students (after their return to their home classroom) and non-SA students, we hope to indicate some effects of SA on L2 proficiency in regard to the uses of specific types of disfluencies associated with linguistic confidence.

According to research that has focused primarily on intermediate- and advanced-level learners (e.g., Freed, 1995; Lennon, 1990; Llanes, 2011; O'Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, & Collentine, 2007), *filled pauses*, *silent pauses*, and *self-corrections* have generally been found to significantly decrease through an SA experience of 6 months. However, an almost equal number of studies have found that SA did not decrease the rate of certain disfluencies, such as those referred to in D'Amico (2012) regarding filled and silent pauses.

Types of Disfluency

Filled and Silent Pauses

Two temporal features linked to (L2) disfluency, filled and silent pauses, closely relate to the process of L2 learning through speech planning (of a subsequent linguistic element or idea). A central part of quantitative research in speech fluency, pauses in speech act as an indicator of L2 proficiency yet also as one of fluency's greatest impediments (D'Amico, 2012). Furthermore, they occur in response to an overloading of the linguistic production system, fulfilling one of three functions: physiological, communicative, or cognitive (Cenoz, 1998). As Bilá and Džambová (2011) explained:

> A pause is the external manifestation of some of the cognitive processes
> involved in speech production in that pauses provide extra time for planning
> and programming the final production (Zellner, 1994). Therefore, when

producing a comparatively complex utterance a speaker tends to think a long time before providing a response. (p. 24)

Filled pauses, or nonlinguistic vocalizations that interrupt the flow of speech, occur between words or at the beginning of utterances (e.g., *um*, *uh*). An example of filled pauses in an utterance was provided by Rose (2008):

A: Would you like to go to the movies?
B: Uh . . . no, thanks. . . . (p. 55)

While interrupting the flow of speech, a filled pause does not allow for interruptions by the listener, suggesting an affective, floor-holding function. In Cenoz's (1998) study of Spanish speakers of L2 English, almost 75% of filled pauses were identified as *planning pauses*. Planning pauses are neither lexically- nor morphologically-oriented but indicate a planning process occurring most often between clauses, equally earning them the term *juncture pauses*. Results of Cenoz's study further revealed that it was the more advanced/higher proficiency learners who used more filled pauses, but as they occurred primarily at a juncture point—such as in between clauses—they did not subtract from the comprehension or general flow of learners' utterances.

Obviously, filled pauses do not necessarily occur only at sentence or idea junctures. *Non-juncture pauses*, further known as *hesitation pauses*, include the other two types of disfluencies to be examined in the present study: silent pauses and self-corrections. While all L2 learners use filled pauses as a planning method, hesitation pauses are even more frequent in L2 oral production, which Cenoz (1998) treated as an indication "that L2 learners face a large number of planning and execution problems" (p. 7). As written language is segmented by means of punctuation, so is oral language by silent pauses (Bilá & Džambová, 2011). According to Cenoz, silent pauses "correspond to silent periods between vocalizations (including breath pauses)" (p. 2), such as in the following example in her work where the length of the pause in milliseconds is indicated by the symbol #: "another animal of the #1760 of the wood" (p. 2).

As with filled pauses, silent pauses correspond to the cognitive difficulty of the linguistic task at hand. According to Viola and Madureira (2008), silent pauses have three functions: respiratory (taking a breath), discursive (planning and structuring), and expressive (affective and emotive). In Bilá and Džambová's (2011) study of pauses in the speech of first language (L1) and L2 speakers of English and German, it was found that the majority of silent pauses by all speakers fulfilled a discursive function, suggesting yet again that L2 learners pause in their utterances primarily for the purpose of planning out a complex idea due to their uncertainty and/or insufficient language competence.

Self-Corrections

The third type of disfluency under examination in this pilot study is another form of non-juncture or hesitation pause: self-corrections (also referred to interchangeably as *self-repairs*). We understand self-corrections as a method of monitoring one's own speech production. This disfluency, found in the speech of all L2 learners, is considered any instance wherein a participant utters a word or phrase that disrupts the flow of natural speech as they revise what they said in an attempt to modify the utterance (monitoring)

[Genç, Mavaşoğlu, & Bada, 2010]. Repairing the utterance provides the speaker the opportunity to maintain control of the conversation, or "hold the floor" (Genç et al., 2010, p. 221). This type of hesitation phenomenon reveals (self-perceived) areas of linguistic difficulty and attitudes for each learner as they "talk through" their troubles or objective (Simpson, Eisenchlas, & Haugh, 2013, p. 145). While debated by Simpson et al. (2013), other studies have suggested that correctly repairing these utterances, while still considered a type of disfluency, leads to an increased level of proficiency, as D'Amico (2012) discovered in her study of English L1 participants of a short-term SA in Spain, where 92% of all repairs made during post-SA program interviews were correct.

There are three types of self-corrections, which we illustrate with the following examples. The first type is grammatical revision where speakers revise the syntax of their utterance, as illustrated in the following example by Genç et al. (2010) where the speaker revises the use of the definite article *la* for the partitive article *de la*:

> *Dans la forêt, il y a l . . . la paix . . . de la paix.*
> In the forest, there is t . . . the peace . . . peace. (p. 222)

The second type of self-correction is lexical in nature, where a speaker revises vocabulary errors, for instance, by replacing the term with one that conveys the intended message of the speaker. Many studies have examined, through a variety of ways and contexts, the acquisition of vocabulary from SA experiences (see the list provided in Llanes, 2011). The consensus is a simple one: SA is beneficial to the lexical improvement/growth of L2 learners. Here, we illustrate an example of a lexical self-correction in the use of the expression "make mistakes" (Housen & Pierrard 2005), which studies have shown to be a very common form of self-correction: "But we are human beings, we are made of flesh and blood and just do . . . make mistakes . . . " (p. 391).

Finally, the third type of self-repair corrects phonological errors, which can have close connections with lexical self-repairs. Again, we use Housen and Pierrard (2005) to illustrate this third and final type of self-repair. Here, the precision of the vowel in the word "fruits" is correctly altered: "Dry fruits ([fru:its]) . . . fruits ([fru:ts]), for example, or fresh vegetables . . ." (p. 391).

As stated by Müller (2011), there is a void in both qualitative and quantitative research addressing the role of SA in the pronunciation patterns of L2 learners, despite the generalization that time spent abroad in L2 immersion naturally brings about native-like pronunciation. What available research there is, however, has suggested that "a semester abroad does not play a role when it comes to improving the participants' pronunciation patterns" (Llanes, 2011, p. 194) but that, as Müller stated, "beliefs about pronunciation are differently related to other beliefs (particularly about grammar and vocabulary), each with various effects on the conceptualization of speaking and other skills" (p. 294). Thus, pronunciation needs to be included alongside lexical and syntactical studies in SA research in order to better understand the impact of SA in the wider realm of fluency in the L2.

Methodology

The goal of this study is to explore and compare how students who studied abroad during their undergraduate program use the disfluencies described above when back in the same L2 classroom with students who had not been abroad in order to discover a positive

effect on fluency from SA. In recreating an environment in which students are accustomed to seeing each other (the L2 classroom), we provided our participants the opportunity to participate at will in a series of short discussions appropriate for their learning level in the hope of testing the varying degrees and uses of the disfluencies so commonly found in the L2 classroom, yet also shown to decrease after a 6-month SA. The (manner of) use of these disfluencies by SA and non-SA students could act as an indicator of where L2 curriculum could focus its attention in the future in order to make more impactful gains in L2 acquisition by individuals who never have the opportunity to undertake an SA program while in school.

Participants

In selecting our participants, we aimed to capture a typical sample of students in a U.S. undergraduate L2 class. Students with divergent L2 learning profiles are frequently enrolled in the same core courses of language programs. These include students who have studied an L2 at public school, those who began studying an L2 upon entering university, those who have studied an L2 abroad, and those who have not. The six participants in our study, two males and four females, ranging between 19 and 22 years of age, and all L1 speakers of English, had begun to study French from 3 to 10 years prior to our data collection, with two having studied abroad for approximately 6 months as part of their undergraduate program; the remaining four had not. At the time of the data collection, the participants were enrolled in an upper-intermediate, Francophone civilization course at a liberal arts university in the US Northwest. The course was a 3-credit requirement for all French majors, whose aim was to bring students to the equivalent of B2 ("vantage" or "upper intermediate") level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2016) by introducing them to French Canadian culture and civilization through a variety of historical, modern, and linguistic perspectives, assessed through various forms of written and oral assignments. Although this group has a small number of participants, their range of L2 classroom experience with or without SA makes them typical of upper-intermediate American university students of French. A summary of the participants' basic background information is provided in Table 1. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1
Participants' Background Information

Participant	Study Abroad	Gender	Age in Years	Number of Years Since Starting to Learn French
Naomi		F	21	9.5
Natasha		F	19	6
Nathan	No	M	20	3
Nick		M	19	5
Sara		F	22	7
Stephanie	Yes (6 months)	F	21	9

Data Collection

Following ethics approval, the researchers conducted three open-ended, small group interviews with the participants in French: two groups of two participants who had not studied abroad (henceforth, NSA) and one group consisting of two participants who had studied abroad (henceforth, SA). Participation in the group interviews was voluntary. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed that they were taking part in a pilot study that was being conducted as a project in an advanced seminar course in the same French program and, if interested, specific details could be provided after the interview. The interviews were conducted outside of regular class hours in the middle of the winter 2014 academic term. They ranged over 30 minutes and took place in a classroom similar to the undergraduates' normal classroom. All participants were familiar and friendly with each other, but the extent of their social network was not factored into this study.

The interviews resembled discussions and were semistructured in nature. Aligning our method of L2 solicitation with the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) format (Hernández, 2010), we began with warm-up questions and prompts that allowed the participants to speak freely and easily about topics concerning themselves as students and young adults, such as the courses in which they were currently enrolled and their impressions of the courses. This helped the students to feel comfortable as the L2 skills required at this point were of a novice-to-intermediate level. Broader prompts and questions followed in order to push for more intermediate and advanced linguistic structures and vocabulary that matched the desired proficiency level of the course, such as asking the participants to discuss their plans for the next five years. The participants were encouraged to support their statements through explanations and examples, allowing them to hold the floor and demonstrate their level of fluency. The discussions did not include any questions or prompts that would require students to respond with a *superior* ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) level, according to Hernández's (2010) SOPI format. The interviews were digitally recorded.

We transcribed the entirety of each interview, all non-lexical fillers, vocalizations, and overlapping speech using Express Scribe and following both the protocol used by the University of Washington (n.d.) and the one designed by Keppie (2008). We also performed a word count and coded the transcriptions to identify three types of disfluencies examined in this study—filled pauses, silent pauses, and self-corrections—which were then calculated in terms of ratio in relation to the word count/number of utterances. Finally, we analyzed each example of self-correction to determine the linguistic category to which it belonged: grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation.

Findings and Discussion

The data analysis revealed some thought-provoking trends, at times contrasting those of previous studies, but overall supporting the theory that SA experiences lead to a decrease in the use of the three types of disfluencies examined in the present study, in particular grammatical self-corrections. Prior to a more detailed discussion of the results, Table 2 provides a breakdown of the overall results of the use of the three types of disfluencies (filled pauses, silent pauses, self-corrections).

Table 2
Disfluencies Per Participant

Participant	Study Abroad	Utter-ances[a]	Filled Pauses		Silent Pauses		Self-Corrections	
			Number	Ratio[b]	Number	Ratio	Number	Ratio
Naomi		1118	66	1:16	17	1:66	13	1:86
Natasha		1992	111	1:17	106	1:19	24	1:83
Nathan	No	852	74	1:11	56	1:15	19	1:45
Nick		568	103	1:5	10	1:57	14	1:42
Total		4530	354	1:12	189	1:24	70	1:65
Sara		2073	119	1:16	19	1:10	21	1:99
Stephanie	Yes	1055	51	1:20	5	1:211	1	1:1055
Total		3128	170	1:17	24	1:130	22	1:142

[a]Total utterances spoken. [b]Ratio of pauses to total utterances spoken.

Filled Pauses

       All six participants in the current study used filled pauses in their group interviews, such as Nathan, who, we believe, meant to use the term *humour* (humour) rather than *humeur* (mood) but did not self-correct this lexical/minimal pair error. Yet, he used a filled pause as he searched to complete his thought, in this case, how to properly say "sense of humour" in French:

       *Son (..) son **uh** sens d'humeur **uh** son son humeur je ça me plaît beaucoup.*[*1]

       [His (..) his **uh** sense of mood **uh** his his mood I I really like that.]*

Contrary to Cenoz's (1998) results, however, it was found that three out of the four participants who had not studied abroad (each with fewer years of L2 experience than Naomi, the NSA participant who had started to learn French 9 years before) largely used filled pauses more frequently than did the SA participants. Nevertheless, this trend in the data supports prior findings by Lennon (1990), Freed (1995), and O'Brien et al. (2007), who found that 6 months of SA improved (decreased) the rate of filled pauses by participants after studying abroad. Furthermore, these filled pauses produced by Natasha, Nathan, and Nick were identified not as juncture pauses, but rather as lexical or morphological in nature. In the following example, provided by Nick, we see that 60% of the vocalizations in a single sentence consisted of filled pauses as he searched for proper conjugations, even leaving the sentence fragmented as, in the end, it lacked a verb in the subordinate clause:[2]

       *Mes amis **uh** a pensé **uh uh** que **um** je **uh** fou.**
       [My friends **uh** thought **uh uh** that **um** I **uh** crazy.*]

Utterances by Naomi (NSA) and Sara and Stephanie (both SA) produced the fewest filled pauses, producing in fact more juncture pauses, serving less frequently an obtrusive role in the speaker's fluency. This observation supports the conclusion put forth by Cenoz (1998) that juncture pauses are more commonly found in the speech of L2 learners of a higher proficiency level. In fact, only 6.4% of Stephanie's total utterance count was identified as filled pauses. Furthermore, while performing a cognitive function, the pauses did not deter from a long, fluid, and confident sentence. Out of a 38-word count, two words consisted of actual filled pauses. Despite her use of "uh," and a few minor grammatical mistakes, the sentences remained fluid (as opposed to fragmented) and easy to understand. These pauses occurred at juncture points, demonstrating the function of disfluencies as a natural feature of L2 speech, even among more advanced L2 learners:

> *Oui. C'est un peu le même pour moi **uh** j'ai pris les cours de français au lycée et je l'aimais beaucoup et donc **uh** j'ai décidé à continuer et j'aimais les cours à Western et les profs aussi.**

> [Yes. It's a bit the same for me **uh** I took the French classes in high school and I like it a lot and so **uh** I decided at continue and I liked the classes at Western and the professors also.*]

Silent Pauses

The three NSA participants with the fewest years of L2 classroom experience (Natasha, Nathan, and Nick, each with 6 years or fewer) produced the most silent pauses (see Table 2), complementing the studies by Cenoz (1998), Bilá and Džambová (2011), Lennon (1990), Freed (1995), and O'Brien et al. (2007). For example, Nathan silently paused once per 15 utterances. In the following turn, which contains 27 utterances (some of which are filled pauses), Natasha pauses seven times, particularly when working discursively through the complexity of the French numbering system (each period between parentheses represents a single second):

> *Uh je suive um **(..)** l'anglais **(..)** quatre **(.)** mille **(.)** trente-six et uh **(.)** trois cent huit oui donc il est la **(..)** uh littérature américaine dans le dix-septième siècle et **(..)** oui.**

> [Uh I'm taking um **(..)** English **(..)** four **(.)** thousand **(.)** thirty-six and uh **(.)** three hundred eight yes so it is the **(..)** uh American literature in the seventeenth century and **(..)** yes.]

In contrast, Sara and Stephanie produced a ratio of very few pauses. Yet when they did pause, it was clearly a process used to search for the correct vocabulary term that closely resembles its English equivalent, such as is illustrated in the following example from Sara who struggled, though successfully, with the cognate "managerial economics":

> *Il y a **(..)** je prends les économiques **(…)** managériales **(..)** managériales ? Je ne sais pas le mot mais **(...)** c'est aussi **(..)** très très ennuyeux.*

[There are **(..)** I'm taking economics **(...)** managerial **(..)** managerial? I don't know the word but **(…)** it's also **(..)** really really boring.]

Self-Corrections

The bulk of our discussion focuses on the third type of disfluency examined in the current study. Overall, 92 self-corrections were identified in the transcripts and the NSA group corrected themselves more than three times as frequently than did either Sara and Stephanie. As summarized in Table 3, which is dedicated to the specific findings regarding the three linguistic categories of self-corrections (grammatical, lexical, phonological), the majority of all self-corrections were found to be in the form of grammatical revisions (68%), complementing the findings by McCormick, O'Neill, and Siskin (2008), whose study found that while all levels of learners of English as a second language primarily self-corrected in grammar, this trend decreased as the level of acquisition increased. Curiously, only one type of self-correction per utterance was found in our data, meaning, for example, that participants never self-corrected both their grammar and their vocabulary in a single utterance.

Table 3
Number of Self-Corrections by Linguistic Category, Per Participant and Group

Participant	Study Abroad	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Total # of Corrections
Naomi		8	5	0	13
Natasha	No	17	5	2	24
Nathan		14	5	0	19
Nick		8	2	4	14
Total		47	17	6	70
Sara		15	1	5	21
Stephanie	Yes	1	0	0	1
Total		16	1	5	22
Total	Combined	63	18	11	92

Grammatical Self-Corrections

While this pilot study is invalid as a statistical analysis, it is worth noting that the NSA participants produced almost three times as many grammatical self-repairs as did Sara and Stephanie combined. It should be noted that, although Sara did produce 15 times more grammatical self-repairs than Stephanie, she also spoke much more frequently, producing 1,018 more utterances than Stephanie, naturally providing herself with more opportunities to make and correct mistakes. (She also makes more phonological self-corrections than Stephanie, but not to the same degree; Sara was obviously conscious of syntax and gender during the course of these group discussions). Given the difficulty French language learners face with the concept of gender, it was not surprising to discover that the most common type of grammatical self-correction involved a concept that is ardently taught at the novice-

intermediate level, determiners, which made up 34 of 63 total self-corrections identified in the data. Most corrections of determiners were predominantly focused on gender, rather than number or definiteness, as is illustrated in the following examples (taken from the transcripts of Natasha and Naomi, respectively). In the second example, Naomi began by omitting the article entirely, as one would in English ("I visited France"), and then self-corrected by adding the masculine definite article, before self-correcting once more by properly changing it to the feminine definite article.[3]

> *J'ai mangé comme **un une** (.) petite morceau de ce chose.**
> [I ate like a a (.) small piece of this thing.]

> *Uh j'ai visité **France le France [mais] la France.***
> [Uh I visited France France [but] France.]*

On the other end of the spectrum of accuracy, Stephanie never self-corrected herself with regard to the use of articles, nor did she need to, for she consistently utilized them correctly (such as ***la** loi de l'environnement* [environmental law], ***la** culture* [culture], ***ce** trimestre* [this trimester], and ***le** seul cours* [the only course]). The fact that Stephanie, who had studied abroad for 6 months, neither needed to reflect on her choice of articles nor paused before using them, suggests a firm grasp of novice/intermediate-level grammatical fluency.

One might expect more intermediate/advanced aspects of French grammar (such as prepositions and pronouns) to be self-corrected much less frequently than gender. Self-corrections of prepositions, generally seen as a complex component of the French grammar system that require a firm understanding of (relative) pronouns, were found in the data, though infrequently. However, out of eight self-corrections of prepositions, seven were produced by NSA participants, and all of the seven were followed by a geographical location. This concept breaks cleanly from the structure of English, which is not gendered and uses the prepositions *in* and *to* universally, regardless of the geographic location. The "geographical location + preposition lesson" is usually introduced within the first year of L2 French study, thus considered a more novice-level structure. Therefore, we believe that it is likely because of the comparative complexity of French prepositions in relation to geographical locations, and the focus they had undoubtedly received on the concept of gender in their learning, that several NSA participants focused on self-correcting their preposition use during their group interview. Here, NSA participant Nathan illustrates such an example of self-correcting the use of a preposition as it relates to the location mentioned, France:

> *Um mais uh (.) je voudrais bien (.) aller **à la** France uh **en** France.*
> [Um but uh (.) I would really like (.) to go **at** France uh **to** France.]

In contrast, at many points in the conversation, both SA participants correctly produced prepositions followed by names of countries or states, without self-correcting, once again indicating a level of fluency that, if assessed, would undoubtedly place them at the B2 level. The following example by Stephanie illustrates her accuracy in choosing the correct preposition without any use of disfluency:

*Mais il y a un hôtel **en** Allemagne et c'est mon nom donc je veux visiter là.**
[But there is a hotel **in** Germany and it's my name so I want to visit there.*]

Another area of grammatical complexity (for a wide range of L2 French learners) that related to grammatical self-corrections in our data, though even more infrequently than the self-correction of prepositions, involved the choice of pronouns (four of 63). In one instance, illustrated below, NSA participant Nick (with 5 years of French L2 classroom experience) failed to correctly employ indirect and direct object pronouns to say, "He doesn't help me":

*Non, uh il **n'aide** pas uh uh il ne il **ne me l'aide** pas.**
[No, uh he doesn't **help** uh uh he **doesn't help me it**.]*

While his use of *me* (to me) and the contracted form of *le* ("it") demonstrate that he was familiar with the French rules of direct and indirect object pronouns (typically the first types of pronouns to be introduced in L2 French classrooms), he hypercorrected himself by including the direct object pronoun (*le*, contracted to *l'* before a vowel) even though there was no direct object to replace in the sentence.

In the American L2 classroom, lower proficiency level French courses focus on direct and indirect object pronouns more intensely than on relative pronouns, which often take on a higher focus in intermediate- and advanced-level courses, where direct and indirect pronouns are focused on more as a revision concept. It is in this more complicated aspect of pronoun structure that Sara, in the example provided below, self-corrects by replacing the incorrect relative pronoun *qui* with the contracted version of *que* (mandatory in French, thus demonstrating her acquired grammatical skills), as the self-correction to this contraction allows her to complete her thought process through a more natural flow:

*Il y a beau beaucoup de langues **qui** uh **qu'**il peut parler.*
[There are a lot a lot of languages **who** uh **that** he can speak.]

In another instance, Natasha made a similar, albeit more complicated mistake than Sara (SA), incorrectly employing *qui*. Natasha, however, did not self-correct her misuse of the pronoun:

*Le (..) femme **qui** je travaille pour est uh elle (.) elle est canadien.**
[The (..) woman **who** I work for is uh she (.) she is Canadian.*][4]

As we illustrated, though, Sara was ultimately able to correctly produce the relative pronoun contraction of *que* through self-correction, while Natasha incorrectly employed *qui* without attempting a repair. What we do not know was whether or not Natasha was aware of needing to use the preposition *pour*. Her chosen structure is a direct influence of English (even though "who I work for" is also grammatically incorrect, strictly speaking). Each participant uses other types of disfluencies in their sentences. This suggests that they are both working through the production of their speech, despite demonstrating differences of grammatical accuracy and knowledge, while enrolled in the same L2 French course where all students are theoretically expected to have similar levels of grammatical accuracy in their oral speech.

This analysis of self-corrections, while ever brief, also provides a series of trends that demand a closer, more in-depth inspection that takes into account other factors such as student motivation. The desire for grammar accuracy obviously contributed to the majority of self-repairs made by all participants, including those who had studied abroad (completely diverging from the conclusion put forth by Simpson et al., 2013). Moreover, it would appear that the types of grammatical repairs correlate with the grammatical confidence of the L2 learner. Most NSA self-repairs focused on lower-proficiency level structures, such as gender, prepositions of place, and direct/indirect object pronouns (i.e., concepts that the participants knew they should be able to use fluently). If NSA participants were aware of making more complex errors, they were less inclined to attempt a repair and focused more intently on the communication of their message. On the other hand, SA self-repairs indicated a clear grasp of and confidence in these lower-level structures, as they focused on more complicated structures (such as relative pronouns and structures that differ greatly from English), suggesting the benefit of SA on novice/intermediate-level grammatical accuracy.[5]

Other Findings Related to Self-Corrections

Our data also revealed interesting patterns whose full treatment are beyond the scope of the present discussion but would surely be worth pursuing in future research. These patterns concern lexical and phonological self-corrections. Recalling that most self-corrections found in our data involved a grammatical repair, we are intrigued by the fact that when lexical or phonological repairs occurred, they never did so in the same utterance as each other or alongside a grammatical correction.

As illustrated in Table 3, lexical repairs made up 19.5% of all self-corrections (18 of 92). In the following example, our NSA participant, Natasha, initially mistook the term *sommeil* for *soleil*, a lexical error caused by minimal pair confusion as she was describing her reasons for wanting to travel outside of her home state:

> *J'adore le **sommeil** le non pas le sommeil le **soleil**.*
> [I love **sleep** no not sleep **sun**.]

Similar to the pattern found in the use of grammatical self-corrections, the SA participants used this type of disfluency less frequently than did the NSA participants. In fact, Stephanie did not produce any lexical self-repairs, while Sara self-corrected her use of vocabulary only once. This supports past research that has suggested that SA enriches learners' L2 lexicon, such as the study by Foster (2009), which concluded that SA participants used more accurate lexical choices as a result of living in the L2 environment. Nevertheless, as opposed to the grammatical self-repairs, where there appears to be an obvious distinction between NSA and SA participants in how they self-correct, the analysis did not reveal any suggestive patterns of this nature.

Pronunciation-related self-corrections (often accompanied by a rising intonation, a sociolinguistic indicator of uncertainty or questioning) were the least frequent of the three categories of self-repairs, making up approximately 20% (11 of 92), as is illustrated in the following example taken from Sara's transcript, where she demonstrates uncertainty of how to correctly pronounce the word "frog":

*Uh j'ai mangé les jambes de **grenille** [gʀənij] grenouille [gʀənuij] *?*
[Uh I ate **frog frog** legs?]

However, the SA participants self-corrected their pronunciation almost three times as frequently as the NSA participants (Table 2). While no suggestible patterns could be found in the data regarding phonological self-corrections either, the data did reveal an intriguing presence of self-repairs made as a result of the presence of cognates in the participants' utterances. This is not surprising, for L2 learners often use their L1 cognate awareness as a tool for manoeuvring through their L2 learning. Here, we provide two examples, both taken from Sara's transcript, where she was obviously focusing on the French phonological accuracy of the terms *d'est* (eastern) and *macaron* (macaroon). Sara uttered both these self-corrections with a rising intonation, indicating that she was indeed uncertain in her choice, as they were both so close to their English equivalents:

*Et aussi des pays uh (…) **d'est** [dɛs] **d'est** [dɛst]?*

[And also the uh **eastern eastern**? countries.]

*Et aussi uh il y avait uh un magasin de **maca** [maka] **macaroons** [makaʀun] **macarons** [makaʀɔ̃]?*

[And also uh there was uh a **maca macaroon macaroon** store?]

This observation could lead to a possible hypothesis for future study in that, while SA seemingly leads to a positive impact on intermediate-level L2 French grammatical proficiency, the exposure to native speech patterns and pronunciation consumes a greater part of an L2 learner's focus during speech once back in the home institution's classroom, thus producing more cognate-related phonological disfluencies among post-sojourn L2 learners than NSA learners of an L2. If this were found to be empirically true, then there would be credibility for a more intense focus on pronunciation and the relation between English and French to be made in novice/intermediate-level L2 French classrooms in the United States.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that there are some significant limitations to our pilot study, such as the lack of both pre- and post-sojourn measures more typically undertaken in studies on L2 acquisition (e.g., see Mitchell et al., 2015), an equal (and larger) pool of participants, and the varying degrees of home classroom L2 exposure among the participants. However, several worthwhile observations can be made and used for future expansion concerning the relation between SA and fluency in terms of grammatical accuracy. This study highlights the postulation that an SA experience (term-long or up to 6 months) strengthens the confidence and knowledge of French grammatical concepts at the novice and intermediate levels. Our observations further suggest that students who do not participate in SA rely more heavily on certain disfluencies than do post-sojourn students, complementing Cenoz (1998), who concluded:

the total number of pauses that occurred in the learners' oral production is not associated with low proficiency in the second language but it has been observed that subjects who presented lower proficiency used more strategies in combination with pauses. These findings could indicate that high proficiency learners may just need time to retrieve the right information while learners who present lower proficiency need to vocalize different options. (p. 8)

Our findings further complement those of Freed et al. (2004), who found that foreign immersion (not to be confused with at-home immersion programs) encourages more fluency in an L2 than formal education alone. In association with Bortfield et al.'s (2001) definition disfluencies (see our Introduction), the connections we have made here between our results and those of well-established studies suggest that living and studying in a Francophone country—in this pilot study, specifically, France—may equip L2 French students with greater linguistic knowledge and higher confidence in their speaking ability, as they return to their home institution with a lower rate of certain disfluency use in their L2. One would presume, therefore, that with this confidence, students with SA experience would find themselves at an advantage when back in their L2 North American classroom; they would be more willing to communicate (WTC, an L2 motivation-related topic undertaken by scholars such as Allen, 2010a, 2010b; Isabelli-García, 2006; Peng, 2007), allowing them to maintain gains in their proficiency goals, both those they hold individually as well as those held by their institution. If properly assessed, this WTC benefit could be highly marketed by the SA programs, hopefully encouraging American universities to further invest in developing more opportunities for SA experiences for all their L2 students.

One could also postulate that SA does have an effect on grammatical fluency, countering the posits made by Jensen and Howard (2014). First, in considering filled pauses, our data suggest that SA students use them primarily as juncture pauses (to properly plan their next clause or statement) whereas NSA students produce filled pauses predominantly for lexical or morphological planning. This NSA use of filled pauses does not necessarily suggest a lower proficiency but, rather, points to learners' need to vocalize their thought process and linguistic options, and a linguistic uncertainty. Among SA participants, in contrast, filled pauses were found primarily at juncture points in their utterances. Second, the NSA participants' use of silent pauses complements their use of filled pauses, as this study has attempted to demonstrate that NSA students produce more silent pauses for discursive, grammatical planning than do SA students. Customarily, the SA group in this study discursively used silent pauses as an indicator of their uncertainty of certain complex, composed expressions (closely resembling English). Thirdly, and perhaps most evidently, the number of self-repairs in the data clearly showed that all participants focused primarily on their grammatical accuracy, although the two SA participants self-corrected their grammar much less frequently than did those in the NSA group, as well as focused more on their phonological accuracy when not needing to repair a grammatical or lexical structure.

Disfluency does not necessarily equal evidence of a lack of L2 proficiency. This study has attempted to show that, while L2 learners who have not studied abroad may use more disfluencies than L2 learners who have studied abroad, different disfluencies have different purposes which are dependent upon the speaker's proficiency level. So, to an

extent, there is a linear pattern of development in grammatical accuracy. Thus, it appears that there are positive linguistic benefits of SA, but L2 learners should not expect to rid their speech of disfluencies after 6 months abroad. Rather, their use and purpose of disfluencies will change. To reiterate, disfluencies are a natural part of speech and should be embraced for what they can provide in terms of development so that language programs can strengthen their approach to L2 teaching and its outcomes, in particular for those who cannot afford to spend a significant amount of time studying abroad.

Finally, we realize the necessity of a more expanded study to positively ascertain if term-long SA experiences positively affect grammatical accuracy and improve proficiency, thus widely reducing grammar-related disfluencies in the L2. More valid research would involve both pre- and post-sojourn proficiency interviews with a much larger sample size that would allow for a valid, empirical analysis of the same three types of disfluencies examined here. Furthermore, a pre-sojourn context survey could be conducted to determine the participants' (linguistic) motivation for studying abroad, while a post-sojourn survey could identify their social network while abroad and after, in order to estimate the extent to which the L2 was and continues to be used outside the classroom. As well, it would be beneficial to have the students reflect on their own levels of proficiency after their return to the American L2 classroom and among other students who have not experienced SA. Unfortunately, such pre- and post-sojourn context interviews/surveys were not possible to conduct as part of the current study's methodology for, as previously stated, this project (as part of a senior undergraduate seminar) was designed and carried out in concurrence with the course from which the participants were solicited. Nevertheless, we believe that this study has succeeded in illustrating possible links between SA and the use of disfluencies in regard to grammatical accuracy.

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Notes

[1] For the entirety of the current study, an asterisk is used to signal an agrammatical sentence.

[2] We do note one juncture pause in this example.

[3] While we have no means of supporting the following posit, it is entirely possible that Naomi randomly selected the definite articles, as if going through a mental list, vocalizing perhaps a lack of confidence in her skills and L2 knowledge. An investigation of this nature would require a methodology that we were unfortunately unable to use for the current study.

[4] *Qui* [who] cannot precede a subject pronoun unless it directly follows a preposition, such as *pour* [for] or *avec* [with].

[5] As a relevant side note to be considered for future study regarding the link between self-correction and motivation, Kovač and Milatović (2013) discovered that native speakers of Croatian with a relatively high English L2 classroom exposure (8 to 9 years) put forth the

least amount of effort in grammatical self-correction, suggesting that for higher proficiency learners, accuracy is not necessarily part of a successful communication. Kovač and Milatović further noted that, when faced with a lexical dilemma, participants would more frequently use a communication strategy rather than creating a non-word in order to avoid ruining the fluidity of their utterance. Yet, as stated earlier, the impact of SA on L2 fluency is also said to vary on the individual level, making general assumptions difficult. Individual learners have different motivations in conversation based on their past experience in the target language: their focus may not be grammatical accuracy but rather a deepening of their intended message. In essence, self-correction is a resource for achieving individual goals: "The participants were able to choose not to self-repair in order to focus on something other than what their proficiency allowed them to do" (Simpson et al., 2013, p. 160). While Simpson et al. (2013) found no straightforward correlation between different Chinese L2 proficiency levels and the amount of self-repair, they suggested that since those of a higher proficiency tend to speak more out of a greater sense of confidence, they would naturally have the opportunity to self-correct more often than learners of a lower proficiency.

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