

# Individual Differences & Study Abroad: Four Profiles of Oral Proficiency Gain

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**Abstract**—Presented here is a model of second language learner profiles based on individual language learner aptitudes and their outcomes in oral proficiency gains. The data was collected on students (N = 39) who participated in the same study abroad experience during one semester abroad, yet demonstrate strikingly different outcomes in terms of individual aptitudes and their gains made in oral proficiency. Four case studies are outlined to highlight the differential outcomes based on language learner profiles and suggestions are made how to identify individuals with greater needs during the acquisition process to facilitate more gains. Study abroad directors, language departments, international study abroad programs and language instructors are all key players in the experience students have while abroad and can have an impact on both the language learning situation and the outcomes for participants. By being informed of students' language learning and personal aptitudes, both cognitive and affective, all these players can better help students make decisions and increase their potential for improved language skills.

**Index Terms**—study abroad, oral proficiency, individual differences, language aptitude, cognitive, affective

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a highly regarded myth, both academically and popularly, that going abroad to study a second language is the best and most ideal way to increase oral proficiency. Yet, many second language acquisition (SLA) scholars document a wide range of actual second language (L2) speaking abilities and a great disparity between students' improvements after a sojourn abroad (DeKeyser, 1991, 2010; Freed, 1995; Freed, Segalowitz & Dewey, 2004; Ginsberg, 1992; Isabelli-Garcia, 2010; Kinginger, 2009). Much of this variation can be attributed to individual differences such as: language learning aptitudes, memory capacity, prior language learning, motivation, language anxiety and the overall uniqueness of individuals as they engage in learning in different contexts of study. Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004) note that "interesting literature has emerged that explores various aspects of language learning abroad that offers a series of contradictory, sometimes surprising, and occasionally provocative findings about language gain for students who study abroad" (p. 276). So why are some language learners able to take more advantage of the study abroad experience and make greater oral proficiency gains during the same period of time than others?

Presented here is a model of second language learner profiles based on individual language learner aptitudes and their outcomes in oral proficiency gains. The data was collected on students who participated in the same study abroad (SA) experience during one semester abroad, yet demonstrate strikingly different outcomes in terms of individual aptitudes and their gains made in oral proficiency. The data analyzed is both quantitative and qualitative in nature and triangulates scores on well established data collection instruments, self-report data, open-ended survey responses and researcher observation. This investigation will address three questions: 1) what are some measures that might be used to identify individual differences in a study abroad context; 2) what are characteristic profiles of language learners abroad; 3) and, how can study abroad programs and directors assist learners to make greater linguistic gains while abroad?

### *Language learning aptitudes*

In a general sense an *aptitude* is a natural or acquired disposition for a particular purpose, or tendency to an action or effect, it can also be a general fitness or suitability to a specific situation or activity. In the SLA literature Robinson (2002) defines second language learning aptitude as, "the ability to succeed in learning a foreign language given adequate instruction and/or experience" (p. 268). There is good evidence that language learning aptitude is relevant to learning success under a variety of classroom and formal learning contexts (Ehrman, 1995; Wesche, 1981). Others have argued that language aptitude is relevant for learning success not only in formal classroom contexts, but also non-classroom L2 learning contexts as well. Gardner's socio-education model (Gardner, 1985) suggests that language aptitude is seen to have a direct influence on second language learning in formal classroom contexts and an indirect influence in informal contexts since "the voluntary nature of these contexts is such that individuals may avoid them if they wish" (Gardner, Day & McIntyre, 1992, p. 215). More specifically, Skehan (1998) says that language aptitude is even more important in informal contexts than in formal ones, because "in informal context it is up to the learner, without the assistance of linguistically organized input to bring structure to unstructured material" (p. 197). Finally, other researchers provide empirical support for the view that language aptitude is relevant for second language learning by adolescents and adults in naturalistic contexts (DeKeyser, 2000; Harley & Hart, 2002; Ross, Yoshinaga & Sasaki, 2002; Robinson, 2002). Fewer studies have focused on the impact of language aptitude for learners in the study abroad

context (some notable examples are: Brecht & Davidson, 1990, 1995; Carroll, 1967; Freed, 1995; Harley & Hart, 2002; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Sunderman & Kroll, 2009). Overall more empirical data is needed, particularly in the study abroad context, to better evaluate the importance of individual differences and language aptitude on the SLA for learners in all contexts.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Procedure

After receiving IRB approval and participant consent, a number of cognitive, affective and outcome measures were collected on all participants during a one semester study abroad experience to central Spain. Two measures of cognitive aptitude (MLAT, WM), one measure of affective aptitude were collected (WTC) and a pre/post test was administered to demonstrate gains in oral proficiency (pre-post COPI). The Computerized Oral Proficiency Instrument (COPI) tests were transcribed to calculate a measure of fluency (words per minute) and also calculated for a pre-post score. After all the pre- and post-SA data was collected, including cognitive and affective aptitude measures, outcome measures and self-report data, the researcher identified which students demonstrated high and low aptitude profiles and compared each group with the gains made in oral proficiency during the study abroad experience. The statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used to calculate all the statistics for this analysis and the significance level was set at .05.

### B. Participants

The participants included in this investigation represent a fairly homogenous group of L2 language learners. The participants for this project were adult, second language learners of Spanish at the university level who participated in a study abroad program during the spring semester to central Spain. For the aptitude profile model presented below the high and low aptitude groups, as well as the outcome measures, are based on data from all the participants ( $N = 39$ ) in a larger study that addressed primarily oral proficiency gains. However, the following case studies ( $N = 4$ ) examine four specific students from this group who exemplify most clearly the profile characteristics. Specifically, the researcher chose four female students, with very similar ages, prior language experience and pre-SA COPI scores to compare and detail the profile scheme.

Prior to this investigation all subjects took a minimum of four semesters of university Spanish. English is their first language, and Spanish their second language; any heritage speakers of Spanish or speakers of other languages were excluded from this analysis. They averaged 6.6 years of academic Spanish study, including elementary through university courses. All participants were between the ages of 18-25 (mean = 20.1 years); there were 10 male subjects and 29 female subjects. The participants attended Spanish language and culture classes at the local university five days a week, for five hours a day. Students could enroll in a variety of courses and programs, including Spanish language study, international studies, business or economics. They lived with host families and were also involved in extra-curricular activities and cultural excursions designed expressly to provide further language learning and practice opportunities. Through the intensive language study, home-stay experience, and extra-curricular activities students were exposed to a considerably greater amount of native Spanish language use than in their home institutions in the United States.

### C. Cognitive Aptitude Measures

Two measures of cognitive aptitude were employed in this study. First, the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) which is a commercially-available assessment instrument that measures a person's probable ability, or aptitude, to learn a second language. The MLAT was chosen for this project as a measure of global language proficiency since it has been the standard in the field for over 70 years and has proven to be a highly reliable measure of language learning aptitude. According to the test designers (Carroll & Sapon, 1959), the MLAT ( $k = 146$ ) is made up of five subtests: 1) number learning ( $k = 15$ ), 2) phonetic script ( $k = 15$ ), 3) spelling clues ( $k = 50$ ), 4) words in sentences ( $k = 45$ ), 5) paired associates ( $k = 24$ ) and has shown consistent reliability at Cohen's Kappa .90 or above with various populations. Secondly, phonological working memory span test (Mackey & Goo, 2007) data was collected. This test was a nonword repetition task comprised of 16 pairs of non-words of varying lengths. Students listened to a narrator and immediately repeated the answer back, which was recorded for later scoring. In order to acquire a reliable score for this test, since it has not been normed, an inter-rater reliability protocol was used. First two native English speaking raters scored the tests and a moderate Kappa score of  $K = .73$ ,  $p < .001$  was calculated. Next, a third rater scored 66% of the data particularly the subjects where raters 1 and 2 disagreed. Following Fleiss (1981) a single measure intraclass correlation (also called ICC) analysis to measure the reliability of the three ratings. The ICC correlation coefficient was  $\rho = .99$ ,  $p < .001$  indicating a high level of reliability between the three raters and evidence of the validity of the WM data for this study.

### D. Affective Aptitude Measures

The Willingness to communicate (WTC) scale is a 20-item, probability-estimate scale (McCroskey, 1992) and is made up of 12 scored questions and eight fillers. The scale was designed as a direct measure of the subject's predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication. At the end of the experience students

completed a questionnaire in English, with open-ended questions about their experience to document their reflections on their own goals and accomplishments during the program. Finally, personal interviews between the students, language instructors, peers and host families, and researcher were conducted, and observation field notes were taken throughout the language learning experience.

#### E. Outcome Measures

The Computerized Oral Proficiency Instrument (COPI, 2009) was administered pre and post-SA to measure change (gains) in participants' Spanish speaking abilities during the study abroad experience. The COPI is a computer-based, semi-adaptive test of Modern Standard Spanish oral proficiency intended for use with native-English-speaking students. Performance on the COPI is rated according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Speaking (Revised 1999). The trained raters rated each student on the pre- and post-SA COPI tests and awarded each individual a score, that was then used to calculate the gains (post test – pre test) in oral proficiency during the study abroad experience. In addition to the numerical coding of the COPI ratings, detailed linguistic transcriptions were made of the pre- and post-SA COPI tests in order to measure the fluency of the oral samples by calculating words per minute of each task and the whole test (following Segalowitz & Freed, 2004).

TABLE I.  
NUMERIC SCORING OF ACTFL PROFICIENCY LEVELS

| ACTFL Level       | Numeric Score |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Novice Low        | .5            |
| Novice            | 1             |
| Novice High       | 1.5           |
| Intermediate Low  | 1.8           |
| Intermediate      | 2             |
| Intermediate High | 2.5           |
| Advanced Low      | 2.8           |
| Advanced          | 3             |
| Advanced High     | 3.5           |
| Superior          | 4             |

Inter-rater reliability protocols were used to establish the reliability of the data for analysis, following best practices in the field. 50% of the pre- and post-SA COPI scores were double-rated by two trained raters; the Cohen's Kappa score between the two scores was  $K = .63$  ( $p < .001$ ). This initial analysis included all the sublevels (Novice Low to Superior) on the ACTFL scale. Following Landis & Koch (1977) this high Kappa statistic demonstrates substantial agreement between the raters. However, in much of the SLA and other social science literature the expected norm for Kappa agreement is  $K \leq .80$ . The researcher took a closer look at the two raters' scores to ascertain where discrepancies occurred and found that the two raters differed on 30% of the cases, and in all instances there was a difference in only one sublevel – for example, between Novice Mid and Novice High or Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid. Conducting a second inter-rater reliability analysis on the major levels of the ACTFL scale; the Cohen's Kappa agreement was  $K = .79$  ( $p < .001$ ) coming much closer to the  $K = .80$  norm generally sought in SLA literature and demonstrating the reliability of the data.

#### F. Analysis

For each aptitude measure high aptitude and low aptitude groups were determined by using the standard error of the mean (SE); students were excluded who fell between one SE above or below the mean for each measure. In this way a clear high and low cut-off scores were established and ensured that no student was erroneously classified as high or low if they fell near the mean. For example, the mean score on the MLAT was 125.10 (out of 149), with a standard error of 3.14 for the group. Therefore, any student that scored  $\leq 121.96$  was considered in the low MLAT group and those scoring  $\geq 128.24$  were in the high MLAT group. For the aptitude profile outlined below only three aptitude measures are included in order to not confound the scheme with too many variables, the measures including are: global language aptitude (MLAT), working memory (WM) and willingness-to-communicate (WTC).

A similar method was used to determine students who fell into the group of higher COPI gains compared to lower COPI gains in oral proficiency. COPI gain was calculated by subtracting the pre-SA COPI score from the post-SA COPI score (see Table 1). The mean COPI gain was .86 and the SE was .06; this is approximately two sub-level on the ACTFL scale, for example moving from a Novice level (1) to an Intermediate-Low (1.8) from pre to post-SA. This is especially relevant when a student moves from one major level to another, for example from Novice to Intermediate or Intermediate to Advanced levels on the ACTFL scale.

### III. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

#### A. Aptitude Profile Model

In creating the aptitude profiles for students we can begin with a 2x2 matrix of possible outcomes with high/low aptitude groups and high/low proficiency gains (see Table 4 below). For demonstration purposes the case studies below represent the most extreme examples where high aptitude indicates a student placed into the high group on all three

aptitude measures (MLAT, WM, WTC) and low aptitude designates that they scored in the low aptitude group on all three measures. Many students actually display a combination of aptitudes, being high in some areas but lower in others. Yet, in this way we can observe more specifically which factors may have the greatest impact on oral proficiency gains in the study abroad context. Likewise, in the model here higher oral proficiency gain is near one whole major level increase on the ACTFL scale, and less oral proficiency gain is improvement by less than two sub-levels on the ACTFL scale. Of the 39 subjects in the larger study only two students made no improvements whatsoever, and the great majority of students made significant gains in their oral proficiency during the study abroad experience. What we want to explore here is why some students make more gain than others, particularly as is related to their aptitude strengths and weaknesses.

TABLE II.  
DATA COLLECTION DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS (N = 39)

| Test         | Scale        | Mean   | SD    | SE   |
|--------------|--------------|--------|-------|------|
| MLAT         | 149          | 125.10 | 19.58 | 3.14 |
| WM           | 32           | 22.72  | 7.27  | 1.16 |
| WTC          | 100          | 68.63  | 15.14 | 2.42 |
| Pre-SA COPI  | 4            | 1.99   | .50   | .08  |
| Post-SA COPI | 4            | 2.85   | .29   | .05  |
| COPI Gain    | post (-) pre | 0.86   | .40   | .06  |

TABLE III.  
APTITUDE HIGH & LOW SCALES

| Test      | Low group | High group |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| MLAT      | ≤ 121.96  | ≥ 128.24   |
| WM        | ≤ 21.56   | ≥ 23.88    |
| WTC       | ≤ 66.21   | ≥ 71.05    |
| COPI gain | ≤ .80     | ≥ .92      |

As Table 4 demonstrates, there are four distinct profiles possible for students based on their high/low aptitude profiles and more or less oral proficiency gains. It is easy to expect that a student who has higher aptitudes (type A) will make greater gains in oral proficiency; likewise we might expect a student with lower overall aptitudes (type D) to make less gain during the same experience. However, there remains the question why do some students with higher aptitudes (type B) make less gain, and why do other students with less aptitudes (type C) make more gains? Through the following case studies we will look at other affective variables that may contribute to this phenomenon in addition to cognitive aptitude, such as motivation, language anxiety and a discourse analysis of language samples produced by individual students. We can find a few clues to how individual differences and aptitude profiles can help or hinder students during a study abroad experience and help predict the oral proficiency gains made by diverse students.

TABLE IV.  
APTITUDE & ORAL PROFICIENCY MATRIX

|                        | High Aptitude   | Low Aptitude  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| High Proficiency Gains | <b>A</b><br>MLAT score ≥ 128.24<br>WTC score ≥ 23.88<br>WM score ≥ 71.05<br>COPI gain ≥ .92 | <b>C</b><br>MLAT score ≤ 121.96<br>WTC score ≤ 21.56<br>WM score ≤ 66.21<br>COPI gain ≥ .92 |
| Low Proficiency Gains  | <b>B</b><br>MLAT score ≥ 128.24<br>WTC score ≥ 23.88<br>WM score ≥ 71.05<br>COPI gain ≤ .80 | <b>D</b><br>MLAT score ≤ 121.96<br>WTC score ≤ 21.56<br>WM score ≤ 66.21<br>COPI gain ≤ .80 |

### B. Four Case Studies

In order to demonstrate the different types of students and possible outcomes of a study abroad experience, following here are examples of four individuals who made varying degrees of improvement in their oral language skills and demonstrate the model proposed above. The model, specifically the high and low aptitude groups, is based on data from a larger study (N = 39) including the aptitude and oral proficiency data; while the case studies present data from only four individuals who exemplify the model. Each student is given a pseudonym here following IRB protocols. To best exhibit how aptitude interacts with oral proficiency gains and has an impact on students' experience abroad the researcher chose four individuals with very similar demographic backgrounds and excluded as many individual differences as possible. All four students examined here are female, between 19-20 years old, and who studied Spanish for an average of 7 years prior to the study abroad experience. All four individuals indicated that they are majoring in Spanish, and therefore had both academic and personal motivation to participate in the study abroad experience. In addition, in order to best demonstrate gains made by the students based primarily on aptitude profiles, they were chosen because they began at a similar pre-SA COPI level, either Intermediate low (1.8) or Intermediate (2). The majority of

the group in the larger study began at the Intermediate level (23 out of 39). While the demographic profiles of the four students are similar, the aptitude and proficiency profiles are different and express the four different profile types.

TABLE V.  
CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS (N = 4)

|                | Scale | Emily                                   | Laura                                  | Gina                                   | Danielle                              |
|----------------|-------|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Profile type   |       | A<br>High Aptitude/<br>High Prof. Gains | B<br>Low Aptitude/<br>High Prof. Gains | C<br>High Aptitude/<br>Low Prof. Gains | D<br>Low Aptitude/<br>Low Prof. Gains |
| Gender         |       | Female                                  | Female                                 | Female                                 | Female                                |
| Age            |       | 19                                      | 20                                     | 19                                     | 19                                    |
| Prior study    |       | 6 years                                 | 7 years                                | 7 years                                | 8 years                               |
| Academic major |       | Spanish                                 | Spanish                                | Spanish                                | Spanish                               |
| MLAT           | 149   | 132                                     | 112                                    | 137                                    | 98                                    |
| WM             | 32    | 26                                      | 10                                     | 29                                     | 16                                    |
| WTC            | 100   | 84                                      | 51                                     | 75                                     | 55                                    |
| Pre-SA COPI    | 0 – 4 | Intermediate<br>(2)                     | Intermediate-low<br>(1.8)              | Intermediate<br>(2)                    | Intermediate<br>(2)                   |
| Post-SA COPI   | 0 – 4 | Advanced-high<br>(3.5)                  | Advanced-low<br>(2.8)                  | Intermediate-high<br>(2.5)             | Intermediate-high<br>(2.5)            |
| COPI gain      |       | 1.5                                     | 1                                      | .5                                     | .5                                    |

### C. Proficiency Gains

First Emily (A type), exhibits high aptitude on all three aptitude tests and made impressive gains by moving from the Intermediate Mid (2.0) level at the beginning of the study to the Advanced High (3.5) level after four months of study abroad. These gains are equivalent to more than one whole level of oral proficiency (1.5 points) on the COPI scale. On the other end of the scale Danielle (D type) portrays less inherent language learning aptitudes and scored low on all three aptitude tests, both cognitive and affective. Following her lower aptitude profile she made significantly less gains moving up only one sub-level on the ACTFL scale from an Intermediate (2) to an Intermediate-high (2.5). She was not able to move forward from the intermediate to advanced levels after the same four months abroad. These results are expected for Emily and Danielle (types A and D): students with high aptitude tend to learn or gain more, while students with lower aptitude do not. However, Laura and Gina do not follow this pattern and demonstrated unexpected outcomes in their oral proficiency gains based solely on aptitude abilities.

Laura (B type) portrays a lower aptitude profile falling into the lower aptitude groups on global language learning aptitude phonological working memory and has less willingness to communicate in both her first and second languages. Laura scored lower on the pre-COPI than the other three participants beginning at the Intermediate-low level (1.8) and yet she, remarkably was able to make the jump to the advanced level and scored an Advanced-low (2.8) on the post-COPI test. Over four months she improved a whole level on the ACTFL scale and was able to demonstrate advanced level skills, even if she could not sustain them during the entire test. Conversely, Gina (C type) displayed a similar high aptitude profile as Emily (type A) but was not able to make the same types of gains in oral proficiency during the experience abroad. She began at the Intermediate (2) level but only moved up one sub-level to Intermediate-high (2.5) similar to Danielle. Based solely on her aptitude profile she should have made more gains and been able to move up at least to the Advanced-low level. More information and data is needed to explain this variation and why some students, despite their higher aptitude profile are still not able to make important gains in oral proficiency given a comparable language learning experience abroad.

### D. Fluency Analysis

An added measure we can compare is fluency on the oral proficiency measures to elucidate more what takes place from pre- to post-SA COPI for each student. Some patterns emerge when we compare Emily and Gina who both have high aptitudes for language learning but are different in their oral proficiency gains. Emily produced almost double the amount of speech compared to Laura on both the pre-SA COPI test (1797 words by Laura compared to only 733 by student Gina) and post-SA COPI tests (2052 words as compared to 1732 for Gina).

TABLE VI.  
CASE STUDY FLUENCY MEASURES

|                   | Emily |      | Laura |      | Gina |      | Danielle |      |
|-------------------|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|----------|------|
|                   | Pre   | Post | Pre   | Post | Pre  | Post | Pre      | Post |
| Total words       | 1797  | 2052 | 751   | 1301 | 733  | 1732 | 1379     | 1584 |
| Total time (min)  | 16    | 22   | 13    | 16   | 12   | 21   | 19       | 18   |
| Fluency (wds/min) | 112   | 93   | 58    | 81   | 61   | 82   | 73       | 88   |
| Fluency Gain      | -19   |      | 23    |      | 21   |      | 15       |      |

According to Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) language students must produce the L2 in order to improve and make significant gains in their language skills. Swain says:

To produce, learners need to do something. They need to create linguistic form and meaning, and in so doing, discover what they can and cannot do. Output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. Students' meaningful production of language – output – would thus seem to have a potentially significant role in language development. (Swain, 2000, p. 99)

Laura and Gina here are clear examples of Swain's hypothesis; with similar language aptitude abilities and language learning background, one of the key differences in their behavior and aptitude profiles is that Laura more actively produced the L2 and engaged in constructing meaning through output. We may deduce that Gina, despite her high aptitude profile, in part, did not make as much gain in her oral proficiency because she did not actively produce language in the L2 as often as necessary to improve her skills. Laura and Danielle both have lower aptitude profiles, but they also demonstrate a similar pattern in that Laura has a great increase in her output from pre- to post-SA COPI test, but Danielle only slightly increases her output. It is true that Danielle produced more words on the pre-SA COPI, but her overall fluency gain is still lower than Laura's. Despite Laura's lower aptitude profile, the fact that she produced more may have played a part in helping her make more oral proficiency gains during the study abroad experience than other lower-profile students.

### E. Discourse Analysis

Taking a closer look now at actual speech samples produced by the four students, Table 7 is a comparison table with the same tasks on both the pre- and post-SA COPI tests. The COPI test is self adaptive, and not all students took exactly the same tasks on both the pre and post-test; here we will examine one Intermediate level task for each subject which she did take on both the pre- and post-SA COPI. The topics are slightly different between subjects, but the level and the type of task is similar. For each task the student had the opportunity to speak for the same amount of time (up to three minutes) and could respond to the prompt in any way that she deemed appropriate.

TABLE VII.  
COPI TASK COMPARISON PRE TO POST

|  | Pre-Study Abroad COPI   | Post-Study Abroad COPI   |
|--|---|--|
| Emily                                  | <u>TASK 30102</u> : (278 words/ 2.6 minutes)  | <u>TASK 30102</u> : (264 words / 2.87 minutes)   |
| A – High Aptitude/<br>High Prof. Gains | Um yo tengo que vivir afuera de la casa porque yo vivo casi una hora de mi universidad. Pero yo tengo amigos que viven muy cerca, muy cerca a la universidad que han decidido que no quieren vivir a la casa y hay ventajas por ejemplo...tienes más independencia cual es muy importante porque después de tenemos los dieciocho años en los Estados Unidos que dijimos que votar, votar, elegir el presidente y tenemos más independencia para hacer nuestras propias decisiones. Y que mas, hay más libertad si es importante puedes hacer lo que quieres, puedes, se puedes volver cuando quieres...y también si no quieres ir a la clase, no tienes que ir a la clase. Sin embargo hay que, hay que ir a los clases porque en los estados unidos los estudiantes pagar mucho, mucho dinero para ir a la universidad. Pero que son los desventajas, los ventajas son, son, son mucho ventajas. Pero los problemas vienen del dinero de person-personalmente y también hay una otra casa, otra cosa si vives en el dormitorio tienes que comer la misma comida de la cafetería, cada día, cada día, día después día y a veces esta aburrido, aburrido comer el mismo, la misma comida. Pero también cuesta mucho de vivir en los dormitorios por ejemplo cuesta a mi universidad...um...casi mas mas de cinco mil dólares y es un problema y también es que tienes que hacer tiene que lavar tus propias ropa pero si no es un problema, no ser un problema. Y también si si le gusta...pasar pasarle pasarle buen tiempo con tu familia no puedes hacer algo así cuando vives en la universidad en el dormitorio. | Pues, yo tengo que decir que hay muchas ventajas, ventajas que no vivas ah, a su casa. Lo más importante es que se puede aprender un sentido de independencia si siempre estás, si siempre, si siempre estuviera con mi familia, nunca aprender a como vivir, como, como un adulto, como una persona en el mundo real, so, o lo que sea. Pero, um, Si, las ventajas. La independencia, por cierto-seguramente. Numero uno. Y, pero luego, ah, cosas prácticas... por ejemplo, tendrás que aprender el método de pagar para la casa para la electricidad, para, la- para el agua, para... sacar la basura, um, para cocinar.. Aunque aunque sea difícil para aceptar, mi madre no siempre estará aquí conmigo para cocinar cualquier cosa que quiero, y necesitas aprender hacerlo, y es m- si no hay nadie allí si no hay nadie allí que pueda hacer nada para ti, luego tendrás que, por ti, luego tendrás que hacerlo aunque no, aunque no podemos. Y que mas, uh, se puede tener la oportunidad compartir espacio con gente que no son tu abuelita. Y vas a mejorar tus- tu capacidad social. Um, des-ah-desventajas, pues... los-las cosas que yo dicho, son los opuesto- son opuestos, ahora no, ahora hay más responsabilidad, hay que, hay que compartir por la-las medares de vivir, las medares de vivir. Necesitas un trabajo para pagar la casa, uh, para parcar, se puede ahorrar mucho dinero si vivo con mi familia, pero, pero no es un -el intercambio no es, no es igual. Independencia que estás si tienes los recursos, no s-no ser í mejor que el indepenencia- independencia. |

|          |  |  |
|----------|--|--|
| Laura    | <u>TASK 30103:</u> (93 words / 1.5 minutes)<br>Una de los ven-, um, -tajas de comer en un restaurante es que la comida es muy rica y hay un variedad que posiblemente que no tiene en su casa. Y tambi én, es divertido comer con amigos en un restaurante pero hay desventajas tambi én porque los restaurantes son m ás caros de...comer en su casa. Y tambi én, no...sabes cual son los ingredientes en...los restaurantes pero en su casa, todo el tiempo sabes los ingredientes. Otro ven-tajas de comer en un restaurante es que es m ás fácil y...probablemente uh...es m ás rápido de...coci-na en su casa. Um...um...   | <u>TASK 30103:</u> (192 words / 2.3 minutes)<br>Pues hay muchas ven-ventajeas y desventajas de comer en una restaurante. Cuandooo comes una restaurante necesitan pagar m ás pero no necesitan pasar tiempo cocinando yy hayy m ás variedad een laas restaurantes y pueden comer muchas cosas queee... no tiene een su casa pero muchas veces es mucho m ás caro yy no ees tan saaludable sii come en casa y para m íno puedo comer en muchos restaurantes porque tengo muchos alergias y por eso es muy dif íil para comer algo en una restaurante porque necesitoo hablar con eel- la gente para saber... todos los ingredientes y en la cocina hay un mezcla de todos los ingredientes y es posible quee mi comida va a tener algo que yo no puedo comer y eso es un desventaja para muchas personas para comer en una restaurante yy cuandooo cocina ee cocina en su casa puede cantrar-controlar la graza y todos los ingredientes yy por eso muchas veces es m ás sano comer en su casa. Porque todo es fresco yy en los restaurantes muchas veces es comida que est á congelado y despu éstaa aum est á cocinado en el harno yy eso no es muy sano.   |
| Gina     | <u>TASK 30403:</u> (53 words / 55 seconds)<br>Alberto, no es muy dif íil pedir una pizza por tel éfono. Primero um, te llamas la tienda y dices...que es tu nombre y su número de teléfono y despu éellos te pregunta qu étipo de pizza quieres y um...después ellos...ellos dicen cuánto cuesta y um...a qué hora la pizza uh...era recibido a su domicilio.  | <u>TASK 30403:</u> (140 words / 1.5 minutes)<br>Ah hola Alberto um, um, tambi én me, me, gusta uh, la pizza mucho entonces um, me alegro de, de que quieres uh, tener pizza. Um, bueno coger tu tel éfono y entre el- el numero y, um, y...y dílo, díles qu équ é quieres un, un pizza y lo uh, lo qu équieres en en el pizza y um, um, p ílees cuanto uh, cuanto te va a costar y, y ellos um van a a llevar el pizza a su casa si tu les les...si tu les da su...uh, si tu les da tu número de, de tel éfono y tu direcci ón de casa. Y despu éde eso ellos van a a tocar la puerta cuando la pizza esta aqu íy tu tu...les pagas y uh, y ya esta es un proceso muy, muy fácil y esta compa ña tiene pizza muy, muy buena.   |
| Danielle | <u>TASK 30202:</u> (208 words / 3.7 minutes)<br>Primero me gusta las universidades m ás grande porque tienen muchos diferentes clases con todos los temas como los negocios, a los artes...y clases de baila, clases de fotograf ía Todos que crees. Los univrsid-universidades grandes...y para mi, hay muchos diferentes tipos de personas en los universidades con diferen-tes...opiniones de pol íficos y es muy interesante para m í Pero las talles de las clases en las universidades grandes son muy, muy grandes como cien personas a quinientos personas y es muy, muy duro en...en la a ño primero de universidad a tener clases con muchos, muchos personas. Los universidades pequeña...hay muchos positivos tambi én. Los clases son con menos personas, con la media creo que es m ás o menos de veinte o veinte cinco personas en cada clase pero no hay muchas diferente clases en estes universidades y muchos de los universidades son religiosa y para m í no le gust, no me gusta este porque yo no soy religiosa. y... los pequeñas universidades no tienen la, diversidad que los universidades grandes tienen. P-pero para m íes muy bien que tu quieres...ir la universidad en los estados unidos porque educativo es muy importante y s-sí. Y para mi universidad es un experiencia bueno y crees, creo que túte gusta cada universidad que crees. | <u>TASK 30202:</u> (238 words / 2.7 minutes)<br>Uh. Para m í Uh yo creo que si asistir una universidad es un bue- prefecto apci ón pero los- las universidades peque ñas y las universidades grandes tenen su propios ventaja y desventajas. Um en es mi experentia a asistir a estudiar en un universidad muy muy grande con m ás de cuarenta mil estudiantes en la universidad. Y me gusta es.te porque tiene muchos apiones para tomar um temas dee clases de cualquier temas le gusta. Por ejemplo hay clases um como tenis y que le enseña sobre vino o las peli- pol íficas del mundo oo arte contempor ánea, ekc étera. Y en universidades m ás peque ñitas este no es un apci ón, no tienen la misma calidad dee... la misma um. misa- um opciones para ese clases. Pero en las universidades grandes las clases tienen cien o quinientos persona en cada lectura y ese es un poquito extra ño porque no tienen la contacto con el prof-esor como en las escuelas secundarias. Y en universidades peque ñitas tienen ese contacto personal porque solamente hay veinte o veinticinco personas en cada clase. Yy tambi én mi universidad tienen más oportunidades para um para... uh actividades culturales. Por ejemplo para ir al cinee o ir un um concierto ekcetra y um muchas universidades peque ñitas no tienen la publicidad para hacer eses actividades. Y pero en general es solamente un diferencia de opini ón porque yo tengo muchas amigas que estudia en un universidad peque ñita y le gustan much íma. |

In order to understand the differences between these four profiles another tool we can use is a closer discourse analysis of the language produced on the pre- and post-SA COPI tests. On both the pre- and post-SA tests Emily (type A) is much more accurate with gender agreement and verbal morphology than the other students, and when making mistakes she self-corrects to a more accurate form. She uses circumlocution when she does not know a word and does not repeat the same word while mentally searching for a term. On the post-SA test Emily makes marked improvement in vocabulary and accuracy. She also uses more difficult syntactic structures such as the present and past subjunctive, as well diversity of verbal forms such as present, future and conditional tenses. She additionally incorporates several dialectal words from the region of study. In contrast, Danielle (type D) makes many more mistakes with gender and verbal morphology agreement, even with high frequency words, and she also makes syntactic order errors. On the post-SA test Danielle makes fewer errors, but there are still many accuracy errors of the same type. Also she does not ever self-correct and repeats words over and over to buy mental time to continue her thought. There is no diversity of verbal forms on the pre- or post-SA tests and she speaks exclusively in the present tense, although could use other verb forms to express her opinion. While Danielle does produce more words in numbers than other students, most of the words are repeated and there is no lexical variety showing advancement in vocabulary, dialectal or regional words. Finally, the semantic content of the post-SA test is almost identical to the pre-SA test and yet Danielle is unable to sustain the

comparison between advantages and disadvantages in the task. This closer look at the actual kind of language produced demonstrates the disparity between not only how much individuals produce, but also to what extent they can accurately and adequately communicate their ideas in the second language. Given their aptitude profiles we would expect such disparities between Type A and Type D speech patterns.

What is more interesting is the comparison between Laura and Gina, who demonstrate unexpected outcomes given their aptitude profiles. On the pre-SA COPI both Laura and Gina are similar in that they use only the present tense, have many filler words or pauses and use more English cognates. On the post-SA COPI we see more divergence in their performance and despite Gina's higher aptitude profile, she produces less accurate speech and continues to use the same strategies to buy mental time as she thinks of the next word or phrase. There is a marked difference in Laura's performance on the post-SA COPI task; instead of repeating, or using filler words she elongates the words or draws out the final syllable to connect to the next thought. She self corrects more frequently and uses more difficult lexical items. The task does not require a wide variety of tenses or syntactic complexity, so she does not produce any subjunctive, conditional or future forms maintaining her speech in the present indicative tense, but she does improve the content of the passage and uses more authentic speech on the post-SA test. Here we see that despite Gina's potentially superior aptitude profile, she does not demonstrate significant increases in learning or oral proficiency Spanish skills. Through more produced output Laura is able to make more improvement and overcome her possible challenges.

#### IV. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

One of the purposes of individual difference (ID) and aptitude research in second language acquisition is to identify better who are second language learners and how do they perform in varying contexts, conditions and language use situations. Much of the ID research has informed classroom instruction and will continue to aid instructors and educational institutions to adapt to the needs of students in order to provide better instruction and more efficient learning for students. Similarly, by helping students to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in language learning, they can better advocate for themselves and take advantage of their own skills while strengthening areas in need of growth. Yet, little research has been conducted in the study abroad context to see how individual differences impact learning, opportunity for L2 language use and discrepancy in language gains made by students while abroad. The present research project attempts to address some of these questions and in doing so demonstrates that similar learners abroad react differently to the experience abroad and as a result display diverse results in oral gains.

In answering the investigation questions this study shows that aptitude measures, both cognitive and affective, in addition to pre-SA oral proficiency testing can be helpful in identifying students who may need additional resources and support while abroad. The MLAT test can help institutions and instructors identify global language learning aptitudes and closely related would be using a working memory test to specifically identify students with higher or lower memory capacities for language learning. Affective measures such as a willingness to communicate survey can also be instructive in identifying students who naturally tend to produce more language in their first language, and may tend to also produce more in the L2. Conducting discourse analysis or fluency analysis of students' discourse can also be productive tools to help identify students who may have challenges in producing and therefore making gains in the second language.

Described here are four distinct profiles that we might find among the study abroad population. The Student A profile describes a student who demonstrates high cognitive and affective aptitudes and begins the study abroad experience with higher production of words and higher fluency rate. For students who fit this description higher oral proficiency gains can be predicted during SA due to both higher cognitive and affective aptitudes. For this type of student, it is suggested that the SA director and supporting institutions encourage Student A, like Emily, to use their aptitude strengths to produce as much in the target language as possible and continue what comes naturally for language learning.

The Student B profile portrays a student who displays lower cognitive but higher affective aptitudes, and begins the study abroad with a higher fluency rate. For students, like Laura who fit this profile higher oral proficiency gains during SA can be predicted due to the lower fluency rates and initial production on the pre-SA oral proficiency measure, but higher affective aptitudes, specifically higher motivation. In order to encourage and assist students with a B type profile instructors, SA directors and the supporting institutions can teach the student study skills and memory strategies to increase chances of improvement and compensate for a lower aptitude profile. Furthermore, the student can be encouraged to engage in L2 practice as much as possible and might be assisted in finding opportunities for oral and written practice in innovative and creative ways.

The Student C profile, like Gina, is a student who demonstrates high cognitive and affective aptitudes but begins the study abroad experience with a lower fluency rate or production of words. For this student lower oral proficiency gains during SA can be predicted due to lower pre-SA fluency levels and lower engagement in the L2, despite higher cognitive and affective aptitudes. For this type of student the SA director and supporting institutions could encourage Student C to use his or her L2 aptitude strengths to produce as much in the target language as possible. It could be suggested that the student try to seek opportunities to interact with native speakers on a regular basis, through activities such as volunteer work, language exchange partners, a sport or a club.

Finally, students with a D profile, like Danielle, are students who exhibit lower cognitive and affective aptitudes and begin the study abroad experience with a lower fluency rate and lower oral proficiency scores. This type of student will



have significantly lower motivation and/or higher language anxiety and may not engage in the L2 even for test taking purposes. Additionally, this student may display signs of using the L1 as a crutch and may often revert back to English instead of using other language learning devices (i.e. circumlocution). For this student lower oral proficiency gains during SA can be predicted due to both lower cognitive and affective aptitudes. Students with a D profile require more intervention both cognitively and personally in order to make gains in the study abroad experience. Language instructors, directors, the supporting institutions and even the host family should all be involved in supporting this student and encouraging language practice and development. Specifically, the student should be instructed in methods or techniques to reduce L2 anxiety, and positive experiences for the student should be arranged to help him/her produce in the L2. Moreover, the student can be taught study skills and memory strategies to compensate for a lower aptitude profile. As mentioned, more research is needed in this area to detail these student profiles and evaluate what methods and strategies are most effective to increase oral proficiency and compensate for lesser inherent language learning aptitudes.

Study abroad directors, language departments, international study abroad programs and language instructors are all key players in the experience students have while abroad. These individuals and organizations can have an impact on both the language learning situation and the outcomes for participants. By being informed of students' language learning and personal aptitudes, both cognitive and affective, all these players can better help students make decisions and increase their potential for improved language skills. By identifying students' needs at the beginning of the study abroad experience, they can offer advice, different programs and continued support during the study abroad experience—all of which may assist students toward better language growth. Further research needs to be conducted to evaluate what methods can be used to help students improve their oral proficiency gains based on their aptitudes, their own motivations and reasons for learning a second language and their individual differences. However, certain outcomes can be expected and many suggestions can be made for students of different aptitude profiles based on this investigation.

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