

Promoting oral proficiency gain in study abroad homestay placements

**Residence Abroad, Social Networks and Second Language Learning
Conference**

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Outline

- ▶ Overview of related research
- ▶ Methods
- ▶ Preliminary results
- ▶ Discussion and next steps

Research on the homestay experience

▶ **The homestay advantage?**

- Assumption: Students make great improvements in oral proficiency when living with a family due to increased target language input (Rivers, 1998)
- BUT student-host family interactions are not necessarily rich (Dewey, 2008; Mendelson, 2004; Schmidt-Reinhart & Knight, 2004; Wilkinson, 1998) and may not result in expected oral proficiency gains (Magnan & Back, 2007; Rivers, 1998; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004).

▶ **Research gap:**

- Research is needed on the benefits of in-program support to increase the quality of student interactions with native speakers (Cadd, 2012; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Du, 2013; Knight & Schmidt-Reinhart, 2010; Martinsen, 2010; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009).

Emerging strands in study abroad research

- ▶ Investigation of factors that influence language learning based on individual program elements and learner characteristics
- ▶ Qualitative analyses of the student experience
- ▶ Call for research using multiple and mixed research methods

(DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1998; Kinginger, 2011)

Research on study abroad language gains

- ▶ Differences in achievement can be attributed to individual and program variables (Davidson, 2010; Kinginger, 2011).
 - Time spent on target language activities
 - Motivation
 - Engagement with the host community

Recommendations:

- ▶ Programs should promote language learning in study abroad by encouraging participation in local communities (Kinger, 2011)
- ▶ Host families should be given ownership in the learning process to promote meaningful interaction (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010).

Purpose of the study

- ▶ To investigate whether and how training families to increase meaningful conversational exchange with hosted students contributes to student oral proficiency gains
- ▶ Three-year study funded by the U.S. Department of Education International Research and Studies Program, #P017A100027

Research questions

RQ1: What oral proficiency gains do study abroad participants in homestays attain after their host families are trained in strategies to increase meaningful conversational exchange?

RQ2: Is there a difference in oral proficiency outcomes of students whose families receive training and those whose families do not?

RQ3: What differences in linguistic features can be detected in student speech before and after the training?

RQ4: What do students and host families believe was effective about the training and the homestay experience?

Participants

- ▶ American college students studying in a semester language program
- ▶ Volunteer student and host family participants receive compensation

Language (study abroad location)	Experimental Group	Control Group	N
Spanish (Lima, Peru and Valparaíso, Chile)	30	20	50
Mandarin Chinese (Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai, China)	26	22	48
Russian (Saint Petersburg, Russia)	30	20	50
Total	86	82	148

Data collection

Materials	Date	
	Pre	Post
Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI)	Week 2	Week 15
Recorded student-host family conversations	Week 2-3	Week 14-15
Student and host family surveys	Week 3	Week 15

- ▶ Host family training occurs in Week 4
- ▶ Goal: Improve quality of communication between students and host families

Procedures: Host family training

- ▶ Group meeting
 - Conducted by study abroad program director
 - Includes one representative from each host family
- ▶ Strategies for encouraging students to elaborate
 - Ask to talk about an event in the near past
 - Avoid yes/no questions
 - Ask follow-up substance questions
- ▶ Discussion among participants
 - Reflect on past experiences with students
 - Brainstorm possible questions for students

- ▶ Tape-mediated oral proficiency assessment with 15 tasks (45 minutes)
- ▶ Analysis
 - Rating on ACTFL proficiency scale
 - Transcription of student task performances

Procedures: Surveys

▶ Student surveys

- Language and travel background
- Community engagement
- Target language use
- Evaluation of experience with host family

▶ Host family surveys

- Previous hosting experience
- Motivations for hosting
- Language practice with student
- Evaluation of training

▶ Analysis

- Comparison of responses from pre- to post- surveys
- Comparison of student and host family responses
- Coding of open-ended responses

Analysis: SOPIs

- ▶ Ratings on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Speaking converted numerically

Rating	Conversion
Novice Mid	0.3
Novice High	0.8
Intermediate Low	1.1
Intermediate Mid	1.3
Intermediate High	1.8
Advanced Low	2.1
Advanced Mid	2.3
Advanced High	2.8

(Dandonoli & Henning, 1990; Kenyon & Tschirner, 2000; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009)

Pre SOPIs

	Below NH	NH	IL	IM	IH	AL	AM	AH
Control	3	1	12	18	17	9	1	2
Experimental	5	5	31	23	12	9	0	1
Total	8	6	43	41	29	18	1	3

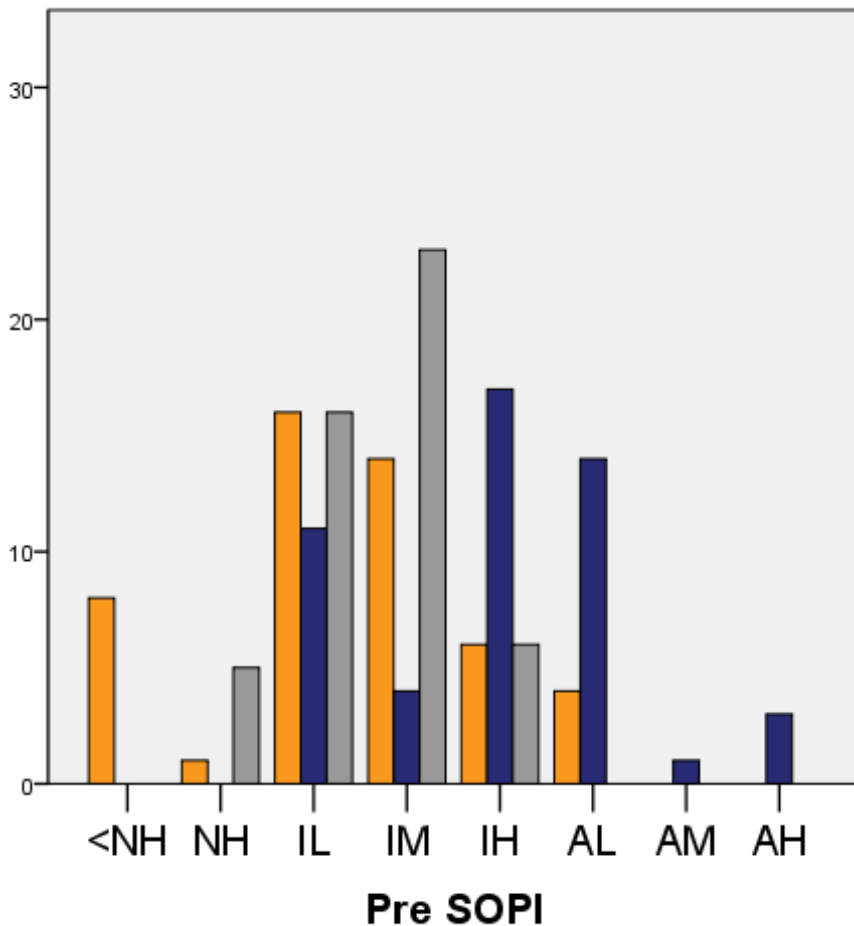
No significant difference between control and experimental groups.

Post SOPIs: Increases

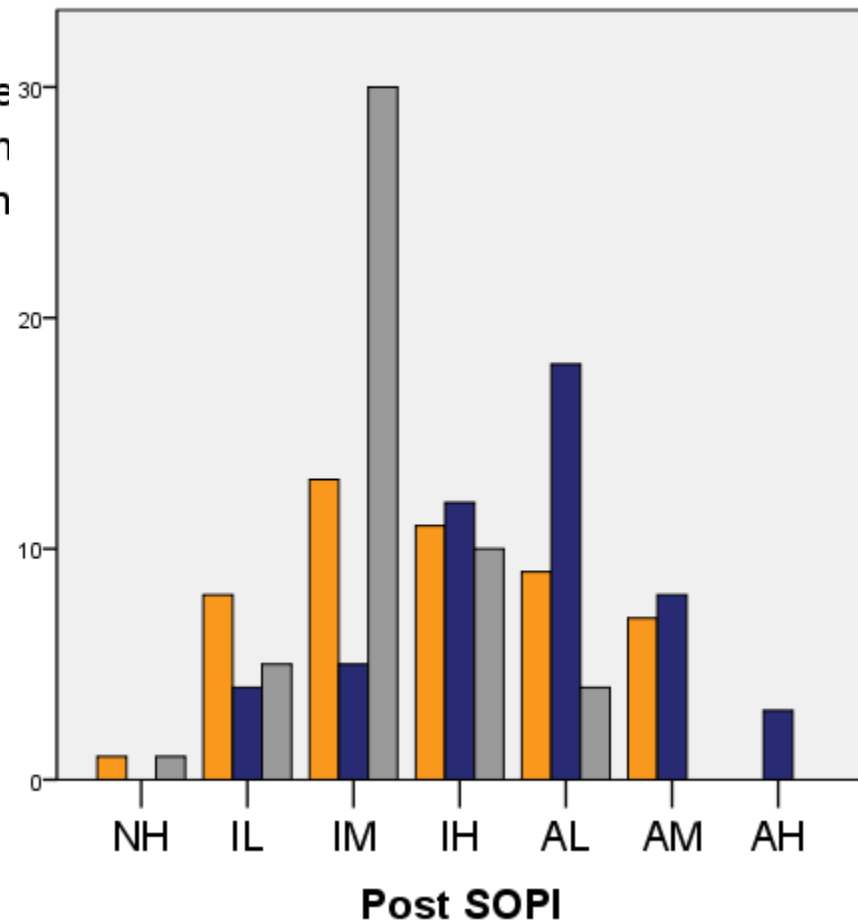
Group	=	+1	+2	+3
Control	20 (32%)	35 (56%)	7 (11%)	1 (2%)
Experimental	23 (27%)	49 (57%)	13 (15%)	1 (1%)
Total	43	84	20	2

No significant difference in gains between groups.

SOPi ratings by language



Chinese
Russian
Spanish



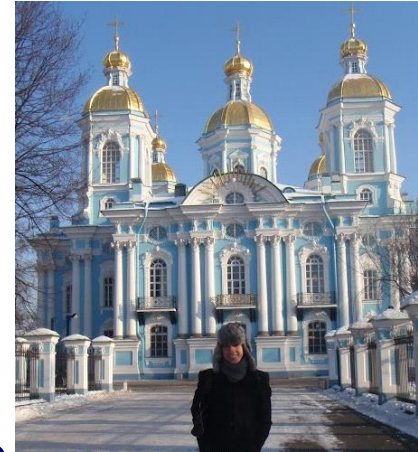
Preliminary data: Student post-surveys

- ▶ What could your host family have done to help you learn more [language]?

Response	EG (n=65)	CG (n=45)	Total
Nothing	15	11	26
Interact with me more	13	10	23
Correct me more	10	8	18
Spend more time with me	10	4	14
Be more patient with my speech	6	2	8
Take me on outings	5	2	7
Don't use English	4	4	8
Use less colloquial/dialect	4	2	6
Review assignments with me	4	-	4
Speak more slowly	4	-	4
Ask me more questions	3	4	7
Different composition of host family	2	2	4
Watch TV/movies together	2	2	4

Select student survey quotes

- ▶ “Ask me more about myself, tell me more about themselves: in some ways I don't think basic conversations happened as much as they maybe should have.” (Spanish)
- ▶ “Engage me a little more. I just lived with one older woman and I have no idea how to start a conversation about something with a stranger from a different culture. I didn't know what questions about her life would be fine to ask and which would be too familiar to ask.” (Russian)
- ▶ “Involved me more in household activities and made me feel more like a member of the family. There are not as many opportunities to speak Chinese with them because they are usually isolated from me.”



Preliminary data: Host family post-surveys

- ▶ How could the training be more effective and useful to you as a host?

Response	Total (n=55)
Training was beneficial	30
Have more sessions	6
Good to exchange ideas in a group	5
Success depends on student characteristics	5
Advise taking students on outings	3
Have longer training	2
Differentiate training based on student proficiency	2

Select family quotes (translated)

- ▶ It is easy to talk about training, but it is hard to put it into practice. It's very hard to communicate with the students because of their Chinese levels. It's hard to do some deep conversation. Training should be two-way and should be interactive.
- ▶ Concrete examples are necessary. It would be interesting to learn about the experience of other families. (Russian)
- ▶ I think it was good, clear and entertaining. In addition it allowed us to share experiences with other host mothers. (Spanish)

Discussion: Student comments

- ▶ Positive comments on host family experience
 - Limitations in learning due to student choices
- ▶ Desire for more host-student interaction and time together
- ▶ Desire for greater correction but also patience with speech

Discussion: Student suggestions for hosts

- ▶ Avoid English and colloquial speech
- ▶ Use more advanced target language
- ▶ Initiate conversations and ask more questions
- ▶ Review student assignments
- ▶ Watch TV/movies together
- ▶ Discuss news and current events
- ▶ Take students on local outings

Discussion: Host family comments

- ▶ Positive comments on usefulness of training, especially in a group setting
- ▶ Importance of considering variability in student characteristics
 - Shyness
 - Motivation
 - Proficiency level

Discussion: Host family suggestions

- ▶ Expanded training:
 - More frequent sessions, including session to discuss outcomes
 - Longer session
 - Larger group training

- ▶ Additions to training:
 - Strategies for hosts
 - Discuss topics of interest to students
 - Spend more time with students
 - Interactive activities
 - Written materials
 - Organized outings with students

Next steps

1. Transcribe select SOPI tasks and recorded conversations.
2. Analyze ratings, transcriptions, and survey data.
3. Compare control group data to experimental group data.
4. Disseminate full results.

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Thank you!

▶ Questions?

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