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INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND PARTICIPANTS

The Participants

The three participants of this study have many similarities, but the characteristics that make them unique within this study are what will drive the research question being studied. The three participants are each in their third years at the University of Portland—aged either 20 or 21 years—and they each have lived the majority of their lives in the urban Pacific Northwest of the United States.

The students' unique characteristics relative to the group stem primarily from two things: their families' ethnic backgrounds and their relationship with the Spanish language. The first student—participant number 116—grew up near Seattle, Washington in a white, European-American family. The student has worked toward a minor in Spanish while at the University of Portland to compliment his study of the language in high school. Most notably in the students' study of Spanish, he spent six weeks abroad in Costa Rica during the summer following his freshman year at university. In Costa Rica, the student completed the equivalent of a year of university Spanish coursework and was immersed in the Costa Rican culture while living with a native host family. In all, student 116 has completed six semesters of high school Spanish courses, six weeks of near-immersion in the Spanish language, and four semesters of University of Portland Spanish-language coursework. Student 116 evaluates his Spanish reading ability at a comprehension level of 6 out of 10 and his listening comprehension ability at 5 out of 10.

The second student—participant number 117—was born and raised in a suburb of Portland, Oregon in a family of Mexican immigrants. The student, herself, is a second-generation immigrant, though she frequently speaks Spanish in her home. The student has chosen to pursue a major in Spanish, alongside her primary course of study. During the student's sophomore year of collegiate study, she attended a semester of classes in Grenada, Spain. There, student 117 was also immersed in a native-Spanish family for approximately five months. In all, student 117 has completed two semesters of high school Spanish coursework, one semester of immersion in the Spanish language, and three semesters of Spanish study while at the University of Portland. Student 117 evaluates her Spanish reading ability at a comprehension level of 9 out of 10 and her listening comprehension level at 9 out of 10 as well.

The third student—participant number 118—grew up in a metro-Portland area, Vietnamese household. This student is also a second-generation immigrant and he was raised speaking Vietnamese to his parents and sister. In high school, the student studied Spanish for four semesters, before he dropped the language at college. Student number 118 is different from both of the other participants in the study in that he has had virtually no exposure to the

language—in either a Spanish-language classroom or in a Spanish-speaking country—since his senior year of high school. Student number 118 would evaluate his reading ability at a comprehension level of about 3 out of 10 and his listening ability at a comprehension level of 2 out of 10.

I selected each of these students carefully on the basis of several reasons. I wanted three students who each had experience with the same language, Spanish. I wanted the students to be about the same age, of different genders, and of different ethnic backgrounds. I wanted the students to be similar in many ways, yet different in one important way: their experience with the Spanish language abroad. I carefully chose three students with differing amounts of time spent abroad.

The Nature of the Study

With this study, my research question goes as follows:

“Do language learners who have spent more time immersed in the target language employ more language-learning strategies than language-learners who have had less experience immersed in the target language?”

I want to compare my students’ levels of experience of being immersed in the Spanish language—particularly in a study abroad setting—with the number of language-learning strategies that the students’ use during the completion of two tasks. The two tasks will both be completed online by the students, one after another. The first task will test each student’s reading comprehension; after each student reads a short text, he will be made to answer several questions about the text that he just read. The second task will test the students’ listening comprehension; the student will listen to a one-minute recording and then answer a series of questions about what he just heard. Both tasks will involve answering ten questions, for a total of twenty questions answered per student.

Before a student can begin a task, the student must select at which level he would like to complete the task in order for each student to find a pair of tasks that challenge them the right amount. Each task has six possible levels of difficulty. That is to say, level one of listening would be the easiest level and level six of listening would be the most difficult level, and the same would be true of reading: level six is much more advanced than level one.

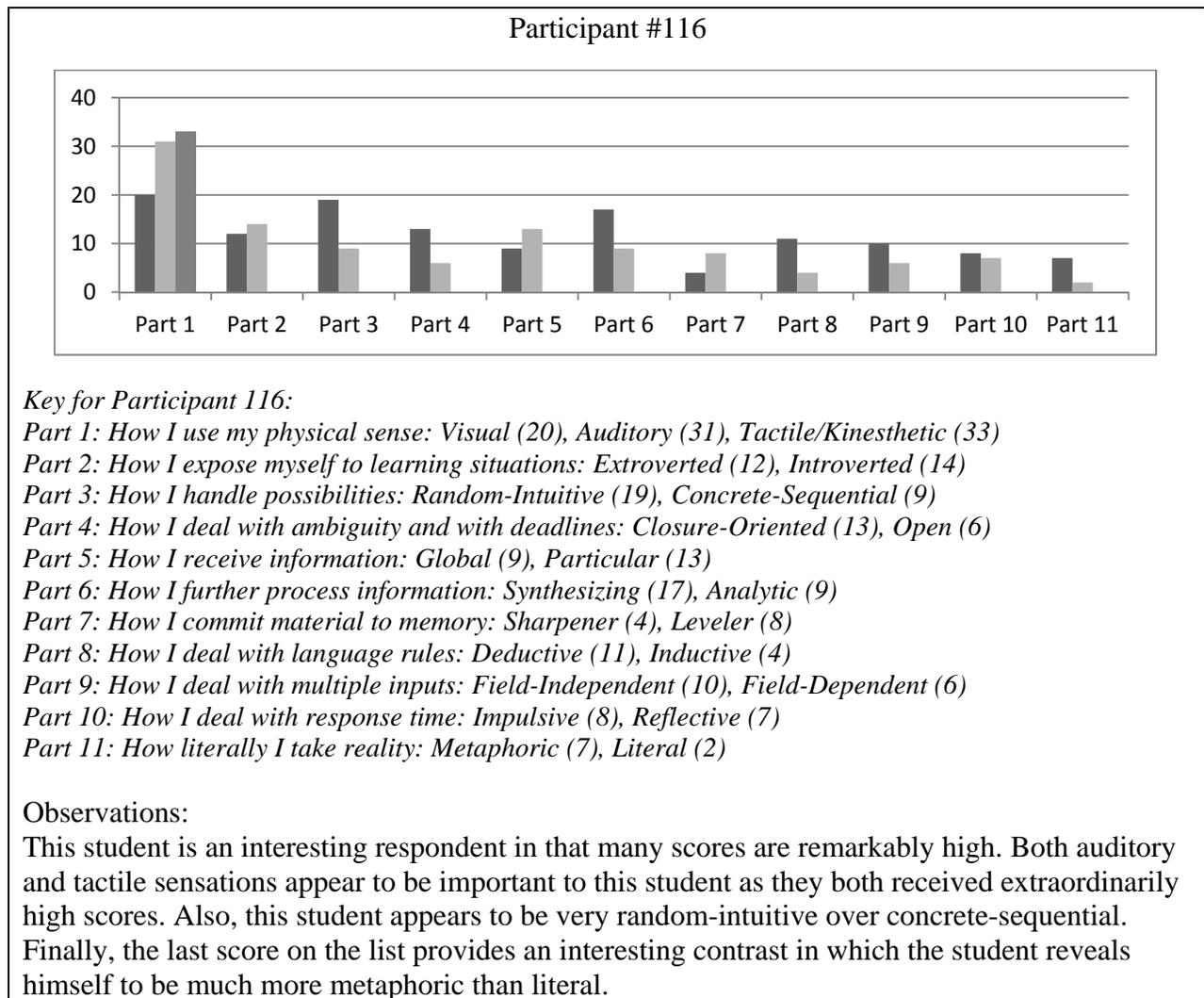
My metric for measuring a student’s level of experience abroad is based on their self-reporting. In having them fill out surveys and consent forms, I asked each student to appraise how much time they had spent immersed in the Spanish-speaking world.

My hypothesis is that those students who have spent more time immersed in the Spanish-speaking world will be more aware of language-learning strategies and so will employ more of the language-learning strategies while they complete the two tasks.

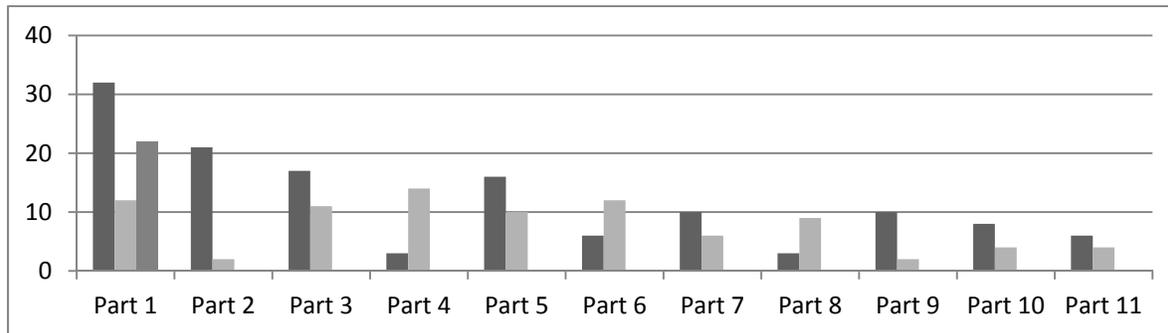
PROJECT RESULTS

Learning Style Preferences

The following graphs are results from the students' Learning Styles Surveys:



Participant #117



Key for Participant 117:

Part 1: How I use my physical sense: Visual (32), Auditory (12), Tactile/Kinesthetic (22)

Part 2: How I expose myself to learning situations: Extroverted (21), Introverted (2)

Part 3: How I handle possibilities: Random-Intuitive (17), Concrete-Sequential (11)

Part 4: How I deal with ambiguity and with deadlines: Closure-Oriented (3), Open (14)

Part 5: How I receive information: Global (16), Particular (10)

Part 6: How I further process information: Synthesizing (6), Analytic (12)

Part 7: How I commit material to memory: Sharpener (10), Leveler (6)

Part 8: How I deal with language rules: Deductive (3), Inductive (9)

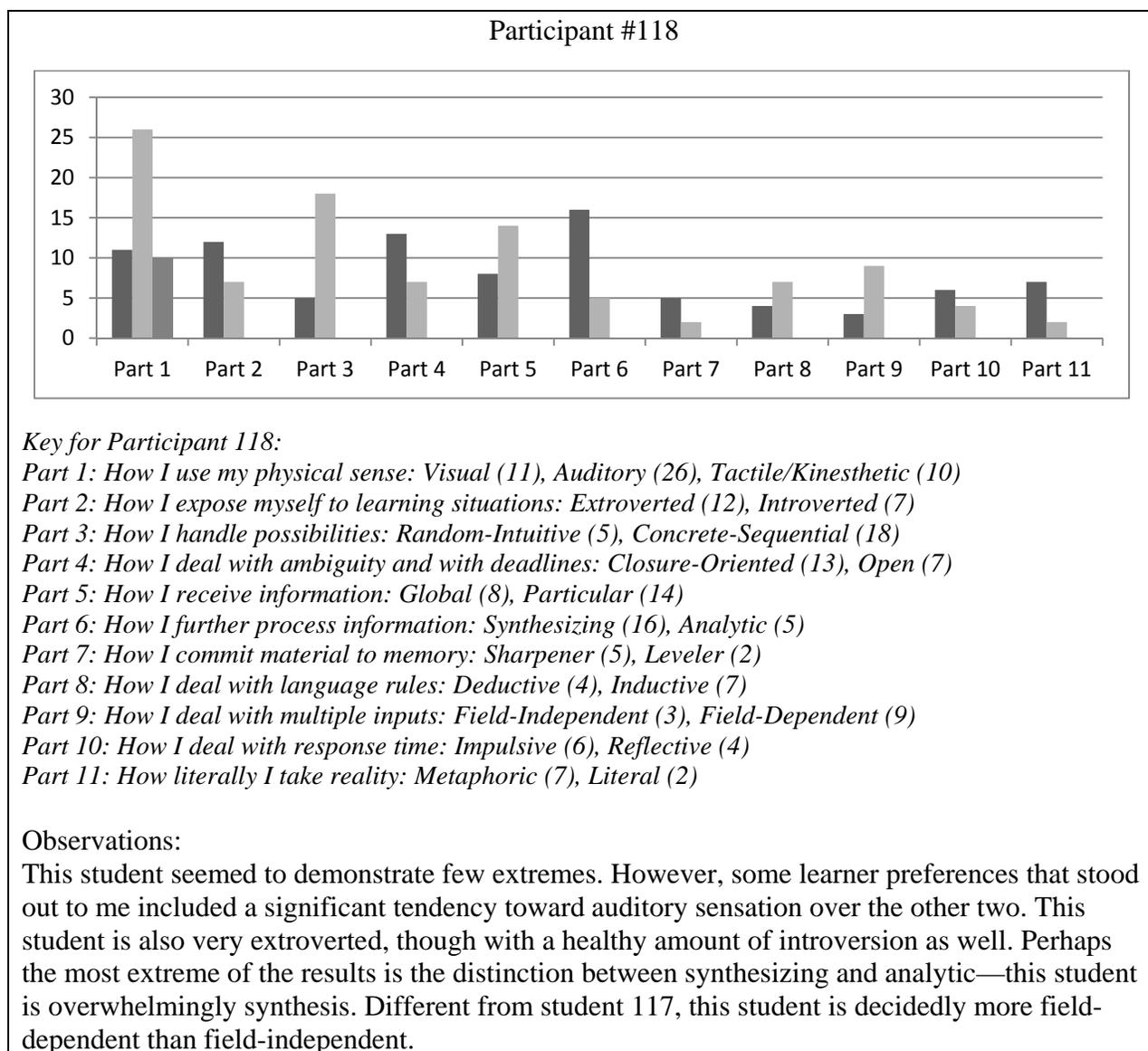
Part 9: How I deal with multiple inputs: Field-Independent (10), Field-Dependent (2)

Part 10: How I deal with response time: Impulsive (8), Reflective (4)

Part 11: How literally I take reality: Metaphoric (6), Literal (4)

Observations:

This student demonstrated the most striking preferences in many categories. She showed a blatant desire for one favorite physical sense over the others. Additionally, the student declared herself to be overwhelmingly more extroverted than introverted. The student chose options that made her seem much more open than closed. Also, the survey revealed her to be field-independent rather than field-dependent.



Language-Learning Strategies

Each of the three participants' preferred language strategies differ from one another. Student 116's responses seem to indicate a significant preference for reading strategies, with writing strategies being a close second, and his least favorite strategies are speaking strategies. These revelations should not be surprising, as in his interview, the student mentioned that his favorite current class is an English writing course at University of Portland. He often spends time reading essays in his spare time, and he considers himself a capable writer. The student rated several reading strategies to improve reading ability very highly as being ones that he currently uses often and successfully. Several of the highest-rated strategies are as follows: *read as much as possible in the target language; try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language; plan out in advance how I'm going to read the text, monitor to see how I'm doing, and then check to see how much I understand; make ongoing summaries of the reading either in my mind*

or in the margins of the text; make predictions as to what will happen next; and, skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully. As mentioned before, the strategies that this student uses often are varied and many, though parallel with his free-time interests.

Student 117's responses differed significantly from those of Student 116. Student 117 revealed herself to rely much more heavily on listening strategies, particularly those designed to listen in conversation in the target language. Within this category, the student readily evaluated many answers as being helpful and often-used by her. Her tendency to gravitate toward listening strategies makes sense, because of her history with the language of Spanish. Student 117 grew up in a home where her parents forced her to speak Spanish much of the time, although she lived in an area of primarily English-speakers. Unsurprisingly, this student realized many listening strategies with which she could cope in the Spanish conversations at home. Several examples of listening strategies that the student rated highly go as follows: *listen for key words that seem to carry the bulk of the meaning; practice skim listening by paying attention to some parts and ignoring others; try to understand what I hear without translating it word for word; and, focus on the context of what people are saying.* Student 117's inventory of strategies point directly to her family background with the Spanish language.

Student 118 produced responses that differed most significantly from the other two respondents. First of all, this student was much more likely to respond to strategies by selecting the option for having not used the strategy before. The category that this student evaluated as highest came in the category of writing strategies, specifically within the list of strategies for basic writing. This student's lack of recognition for many of the strategies in the list is likely due to his near-severed relationship with Spanish. The student has neither studied nor been immersed in the language for some time and so he doesn't feel as in touch with the strategies as the other two respondents do. The writing strategies that this student rated highly go as follows: *practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in the target language; plan out in advance how to write academic papers, monitor how my writing is going, and check to see how well my writing reflects what I want to say; and, take class notes in the target language as much as I can.* The student's answers reveal a distance to the language-learning process.

Culture-Learning Strategies

Though the inventories of language-learning strategies revealed much about each student's experience with Spanish, the inventories of culture-learning strategies revealed even more. Though the culture-learning inventories are much simpler than language-learning, a greater divide was revealed between the two students who had spent some time immersed in the Spanish language and the one student who had merely studied Spanish in high school.

Throughout the inventories, Students 116 and 117 each rated their in-country strategies as being relatively capable. Student 116 felt that his most helpful strategy while he was in Costa Rica was to participate in sports and other activities in order to gain a sense of inclusion and ability relative to his peers. Student 117 felt that her most helpful strategy to be involved with keeping herself physically healthy, in order to keep her mind and body sharp as an in to the Spanish culture in which she was immersed. However, the odd one out, Student 118, seemed to struggle to answer for his in-country strategies—at first, he didn't want to answer because he recognized that the inventory was geared toward students who had studied abroad. With coaxing,

he selected strategies that he thought would be helpful if he were to someday study abroad. His favorite strategy from the list was to explain his cross-cultural experiences to his family and friends at home. All in all, the culture-learning inventory provided a valuable glimpse into the cultural skills acquired by students abroad.

Motivational Temperature to Study the Language of Focus

Each student's current involvement with Spanish compares interestingly with his or her motivation to learn the language. Student 116 is perhaps the most motivated to be learning Spanish. Because he is not a heritage speaker, he is in fact the only member of his family who speaks any Spanish. For that reason, his language ability is a source of ample pride; the novelty of his ability makes him feel he has one-upped his brother and parents. Student 116 expresses regret that he isn't currently enrolled in more language courses, but he completed the requirements for a minor and so doesn't feel the need to continue with Spanish.

Student 117 is slightly less motivated than 116. She is the heritage speaker of the group and so there is no motivation for her to be a novelty Spanish-speaker in her family. Nevertheless, she enjoys the language and expresses a feeling of satisfaction from being stretched by the quirks of Spanish. While studying in Grenada, Spain, Student 117 developed several additional friendships with other students who speak Spanish, which has contributed to her motivation for the language—in having close friendships with other Spanish-speakers, the student has gained a sense of intimacy with the language.

Student 118 is the least motivated of the three participants, though he makes it clear that he does still enjoy the concept of the Spanish language. This student's connection to the language is of course the most strained, but he claims that the reason he isn't currently enrolled in Spanish courses is because of his busy schedule as a Biology student. He expresses a lingering fascination with the language and so he thinks that he might pick it up at some point again, but he also recognizes that he doesn't put much thought into his language ability, indicating an apathy and lack of motivation. Generally speaking, the students with higher motivation seem to demonstrate a consistent involvement with Spanish and a family connection to the language as well.

Intersection Analysis

The two tasks that the three participants completed tested the students' reading comprehension and listening comprehension. The tasks were completed online, at a website called National Spanish Examinations, from the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. Six levels of difficulty are offered on the website for each task. Each student first selected which level of difficulty he or she thought would be appropriate for their level of ability and then completed the ten-question test before receiving a score at the end and then moving on to the second task. Students first completed the reading comprehension task and then the listening comprehension task. In the reading comprehension task, students read a short paragraph about Spanish history. Then, the students answer a series of ten questions based on the text in the paragraph. For the listening comprehension task, students listened to a one-minute recording of a Spanish voice, also speaking about some pop-Spanish topic. After listening once, each student clicks through the ten-question test answering questions about the recording.

The three students each demonstrated different patterns of motivation fluctuation. Student 116 expressed medium levels of pre-task motivation. He answered that he enjoyed the language very much, although he didn't think that he was either a particular good language learner or motivated to complete two tasks in Spanish that would not result in a grade. While working on the two tasks, the student's motivation did increase slightly, but remained fairly consistent at "somewhat motivated." The student did express an interest in the prospect of feedback, saying that he was feeling competitive and he hoped to do better than the other participants. Student 117 expressed much more pre-task motivation than 116. Student 117 scored consistently in the upper levels of pre-task motivation. Throughout the two tasks, though, the student's motivation dipped slightly. The student made a point of commenting about how she was disappointed about how much paperwork she needed to fill out prior to the tasks, something that likely diminished her motivation. Student 118 expressed the lowest levels of motivation out of the group during the pre-task evaluation. As mentioned before, he felt that he was in a hurry for a class on that evening and so his sense of needing to rush likely made him feel less motivated about having to sit down and complete two language tasks. Additionally, his motivation throughout the task remained low, likely due to his lack of success in the tasks. Post-task, Student 118 answered that he was "not very motivated" to complete a similar task in the future.

While each student completed each of their two tasks, I took the role of observer. Sitting at the same table as the students, I watched and recorded how the students went about completing the tasks at hand: the strategies they employed and the thoughts that they expressed aloud throughout their work.

Based on my observation I found several interesting things about each participant as far as confidence in language ability is concerned. Each participant began the first task with a different level of confidence in Spanish-language ability. Student 116 began the first task hesitantly; he didn't completely know what to expect of the task. However, as he continued onto the second task after having achieved a score of 9 out of 10 on the first, his motivation increased and with it his confidence. In the second task, the student selected the second most difficult level of task on the site, a score of 8 out of 10. Student 117 experienced a similar progression in confidence level. She began the first task with substantial confidence, quickly selecting the second most difficult activity on the site. As she excelled in the first task to a score of 10 out of 10, both her motivation and confidence skyrocketed. In the second task, Student 117 selected the most difficult activity on the site and confidently began, on route to a score of 9 out of 10. Student 118 experienced a drop in confidence. He began on level 3, a middle level of difficulty, but only achieved a score of 4 out of 10, and so experienced a drop in confidence and in motivation. In the second activity, he decreased the difficulty of the activity and selected level 1, the easiest. This intersection in confidence and motivation is interesting because of the close effect that the confidence in each student's ability seems to have on motivation to strive for a more difficult activity. Success led to confidence, which in turn led to motivation.

One of the most interesting byproduct findings of this study is based on the language strategies that students actually employed versus the ones that they thought they would employ. Although the study was not designed to measure success in the Spanish-language tasks, I did record success rates. It was fascinating to observe the strategies those students actually made use of during the two tasks as compared to the list of strategies that the same students compiled on the inventory. For example, Student 118 checked boxes on his inventory that indicated an

affinity for writing strategies and listening strategies, such as making ongoing summaries while he listens. However, while performing the listening task during the study, Student 118 did not make use of the strategy at all; he did not make any ongoing summaries at all. On the other hand, Students 116 and 117 also checked the box to indicate that they make ongoing summaries while listening, but they actually did make ongoing summaries of what they were hearing. The scores in their tasks revealed that Students 116 and 117 were much more successful in their tasks than Student 118. In fact, Student 118 averaged a score of 25% in his two activities, while Student 116 averaged 85% and Student 117 scored 100% twice. The two students who actually employed the language strategies that they said they would use scored significantly higher than the student who didn't.

Tied into the point from directly above, Student 118's motivation changed dramatically during the completion of two tasks. From the time that Student 118 completed the inventories and paperwork to the time that he completed his two tasks, he experienced a severe drop in motivation. It's impossible as a researcher to say whether his drop in motivation caused him to stop using his usual language strategies or whether the two were independent. However, Student 118 would have done well to employ specific strategies in order to maintain a level of motivation and engagement with the tasks if he had been striving for better results.

In my final observation, a comparative look at students' language style preferences and language strategy preferences presents a contradiction of sorts. On the one hand, two of the student participants evaluated themselves as being on the extroverted side of the spectrum, indicating a tendency to enjoy interaction with others and communicative stimulation. Those two students were Students 117 and 118. From the two, Student 117 also evaluated herself as being a language learner who thrives on listening strategies, a crucial aspect of being a successful extroverted socialite. However, student 118 evaluated himself as being a language-learner who is most likely to employ writing strategies, a type of strategy that does not seem to match his perception of himself as an extrovert. Student 116 evaluated himself as introverted and also evaluated himself as being a learner who enjoys reading and writing strategies the most, each of which are typically solo strategies that would fit an introvert.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research Summary

The research for this project sought to answer the following research question:

“Do language learners who have spent more time immersed in the target language employ more language-learning strategies than language-learners who have had less experience immersed in the target language?”

In order to go about answering the research question, three participants were carefully selected based on three varying levels of experience being immersed in a Spanish-speaking place. The three students had experiences ranging from no time spent abroad to an entire semester of study in Spain. With these three different levels of experience in tow, the three participants performed two computer-based language tasks, testing reading comprehension and

listening comprehension. To the study, success in the tasks meant little; what really mattered was the amount of language strategies of which each student was aware.

I measured each student's language strategy usage based on an inventory that each student completed prior to their two tasks. The inventory (is attached and) lists 90 different possible language-learning strategies. In order to count how many strategies a student knowingly employs, I tallied the number of strategies to which that student answered affirmatively.

The results go as follows:

Student ID	Weeks Spent in Spanish Immersion	Language Strategies
116	6	62
117	15	86
118	0	33

As the table shows, Student 117 spent the most time in immersion abroad, 15 weeks, and also employed the greatest number of language strategies, according to the language strategy use inventory. Student 116 spent the second-most time immersed in Spanish abroad, 6 weeks, and employed the second-greatest number of language strategies. Student 118 spent no time immersed in Spanish study abroad and also employed significantly fewer language strategies than the other two student participants.

The results of the study showed a strong positive correlation between students' time spent immersed in Spanish abroad and their number of language strategies employed. The student who spent the most time immersed in Spanish, Student 117, employed the most language strategies and the student who spent no time immersed in Spanish, Student 118, employed the fewest language strategies. According to the results of the study, students who spend more time immersed while abroad employ more language strategies.

Evaluation

Generally, the study was successful, though several limitations may have prevented it from reaching the level of reliability that may have shown the data to be more effective. For one, the nature of the extensive paperwork involved in each participant completing their part in the study may have affected the results. Each of the three participants was asked to complete four sheets about how they learn language in addition to the two Spanish-language tasks. The fact that so much was required of each participant may mean that some of their answers were rushed and not authentically of the participant's opinion. Student 118 is an example of this problem; he sped through the inventories more quickly than would suffice for thoughtful opinions because he said that he wanted to get dinner with a friend. Either a more concise questionnaire would be advisable in the future, or perhaps making a series of appointments with each participant in order to allow for ample time would have been a better course of action.

Secondly, it is possible that other factors than immersion experience could contribute to a language-learner's tendency to use a wide range of language strategies. For example, though Student 118 never spent time immersed in a Spanish-language setting, he did make use of several language strategies. He likely learned those language strategies in two ways: because of his background as a bilingual being (he speaks Vietnamese with his parents) and because of his Spanish classroom experience in high school. The fact that language strategies are not only

attained in immersion settings complicates any correlation that could answer the original research question.

Finally, the results of the study may have less broad-ranging effect because of some similarities among the student participants. The students were each approximately the same age, which confines the impact of any results that may come from the study. For example, the fact that three language-learners in their early 20s showed evidence that their study abroad experiences were highly correlated with increased levels of language strategy use does not mean that the same would be said for language-learners of all ages. Perhaps forty-year-old language-learners would show different results. Additionally and to the same tune, each of the participants are from the Pacific Northwest of the United States; each of the participants occupy similar socioeconomic statuses with their families; each participant is unmarried, among other similar characteristics that may have improved the efficacy of the study's results on a broader scale. However, the study ultimately achieved its purpose to test for a basic correlation between students' levels of immersion experience abroad and the amount of language-learning strategies that those students subsequently employ.

Language-Learning Recommendations

As I study the results from my participants in this study, the obvious recommendation that I can offer is to spend more time immersed in the language in a Spanish-speaking country. In my study, not only did the students who had studied abroad employ more language strategies, they also achieved substantially higher scores at higher levels in the two language tasks.

More specifically, Student 116 would do well to keep his learning style preferences in mind as he makes plans to further his language-learning. In his preferences, the student showed himself to be high on the introverted scale. Introverts typically like "to do more independent work (studying or reading by [himself] or learning with [his] computer) or enjoy working with one person [he] knows well" (Paige, 160). While he performed the two tasks, the student did a good job of working independently and employing his reading strategies. However, study abroad experiences are often geared toward extroverts, as ample opportunities are made available to interact with local Spanish-speakers and spend time with the people of the culture. An introvert may shy away from those sorts of interactive experiences, having anxiety about communication with new people. Paige recommends, "that the best cure for anxiety is meeting and talking with people...if anxiety is something that you encounter, try planning out your conversations in advance, developing a list of topics you want to talk about, or coming up with a set of questions you like to ask others. Being prepared can help ease you into these anxious situations" (Paige, 77). Student 116 would do well to prepare for his Spanish-language conversations by planning out topics to guide the conversation, mitigating his anxiety level.

Student 117 is at a high Spanish-language ability already and introversion is not something that would hold this student back from Spanish-language interaction. Rather, the category of language strategies in which she expressed the greatest deficiencies were with vocabulary strategies. Paige recommends several specific methods for learning vocabulary, including "making a list of the words you expect to use often. Make flash cards or write them in your journal so you can review them every day; Purchase sets of ready-made flash cards..." (Paige, 187). However, given the student's family connections to the Spanish language, I think that a different strategy would be the most helpful and the most accessible for this student:

“spend time with native speakers and have them provide you with crucial vocabulary you might not know” (Paige, 187). The student would do well to use her parents, native speakers, as resources to help her learn vocabulary, as Paige advises.

Student 118 should most simply spend time immersed in the language abroad. Paige harps on the importance of stepping outside our own cultures, both for the benefit of acquired language ability and for the benefit of gaining an outside cultural experience. Paige writes, “We all belong to several cultures, each infusing us with ideas and patterns that make us unique and connected with others in our cultural groups” (Paige, 43). According to Paige’s argument here, Student 118 would gain an understanding of himself and of others by taking the leap and immersing himself abroad.

Final Conclusions

This study has offered an interesting opportunity for me to step out of my role as language-learner and into an instructor’s seat. As a language-learner, I think that this study reveals two important lessons to me: first, I think that I feel even more pressure to spend time immersed in the Spanish language and second, I realize the importance of employing many language strategies.

Shown by Student 117, the benefits of spending time immersed in the Spanish language are paramount to the learning process, in terms of exposure and in terms of being aware of helpful language strategies. Father Art, director of University of Portland’s study abroad programs, preaches the benefits of being immersed in language and culture until he turns blue in the face, but this study is further proof of the benefits thereof.

Additionally, I now see even more proof of the benefits of employing as many language strategies as possible. I realize that I often seek quick options that I think will help me memorize or learn for my Spanish exam. However, in my role as researcher and with my research question guiding my work, I’ve been able to see the negative effects experienced by students who fail to purposefully learn a language. By purposefully, I mean students who try to learn without thought to the strategies that would be most helpful. Student 118 presents a helpful demonstration of that cause and effect relationship. He employed very few language strategies during the completion of his two tasks and did very poorly, likely as a result of his lack of strategies.

With this study in mind, I can strive to be more like Student 117 in my rate of study abroad experience and less like Student 118 in my use of language strategies. This study has offered me the analytic view of instructor with which I can analyze my learning as a student.

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