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Subjectivity and Spirituality during Study Abroad: A Case Study

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In this paper, we examine the case of Veronica,¹an American undergraduate studying abroad in Paris, whose struggles to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences highlight a deeply personal and emotional attempt to reconcile the symbolic values she assigns to her national, ethnic and *imagined* identities. While at first glance this student's accounts may seem self-centered, a closer inspection reveals a depth of worries, passions, and desires that suggests a degree of reflexivity and self/other awareness long associated with personal development, intercultural competence, and even spiritual conversion. Considering this case study through the dual lenses of subjectivity and spirituality affords a reframing of Veronica's desire to re-invent herself as indicative not of an urge to cling to the familiar but of an incipient metanoia, or a profound shift in her way of looking at herself and the world. Following the case study, we explore the implications of our approach for study abroad research and outline a curriculum for helping students address issues related to subjectivity and spirituality during a term abroad.

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990's, applied linguistics research on study abroad has increasingly focused on how student identity (or identities) can impact language-learning outcomes. In particular, this research underscores how students tend to cling to identities that compromise their ability to negotiate linguistic and cultural difference in study abroad contexts (Citron, 2002; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005). However, while these studies provide a compelling analysis of how such identity conflicts can undermine linguistic and pragmatic development, they rarely explore the dimension of personal development. That is, given their focus on measurable gains in linguistic proficiency, these scholars tend to see their research participants only as learners, rather than as "whole people with whole lives" (Coleman, 2013, p. 17).

Similarly, as foreign language departments increasingly describe their learning outcomes in terms of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971), what students can do *with* the language often eclipses any consideration of what language learning can do *to* them. As language teachers, we understand the need to establish objective measures of linguistic proficiency; however, as practitioners and proponents of liberal education in the Jesuit

¹ A pseudonym.

tradition, we wonder if the notion of communicative competence has become too narrow and transactional. We understand the benefits of education as going beyond developing technical skills to include expanding an individual's personal development, understood here in terms of the post-structuralist concept of subjectivity (Kramersch, 2009; Weedon, 1987) and the Jesuit notion of *magis* or more (Duminuco, 2000).

In this paper, we examine the case of Veronica, an American undergraduate studying abroad in Paris, whose struggles to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences highlight a deeply personal and emotional attempt to reconcile the symbolic values she assigns to her national, ethnic and *imagined* identities. While at first glance this student's accounts may seem self-centered, a closer inspection reveals a depth of worries, passions, and desires that suggests a degree of reflexivity and self/other awareness long associated with personal development, intercultural competence, and even spiritual conversion. Considering this case study through the dual lenses of subjectivity and spirituality affords a reframing of Veronica's desire to re-invent herself as indicative not of an urge to cling to the familiar but of an incipient metanoia, or a profound shift in her way of looking at herself and the world. Following the case study, we explore the implications of our approach for study abroad research and outline a curriculum for helping students address issues related to subjectivity and spirituality during a term abroad.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Subjectivity and Language Learning

Like other post-structuralist critics of the reductionism of the category of student or learner (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kinginger, 2008; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 1997), Kramersch (2009) sees a language learner's efforts at identification as symbolic processes that transcend the immediate context of any given moment of language use. She considers the more deeply personal ways in which people position themselves *to* and *through* their symbolic resources, i.e. their subjectivity:

Subjectivity...is our conscious or unconscious sense of self as mediated through symbolic forms. It is the symbolic meaning we give to ourselves, to our perceptions, reactions, and thoughts that orients our relationship to others. (p. 18)

This view of meaning-making is less concerned with the kinds of motivation that operate in the *interpersonal* plane of existence; instead, Kramersch (2009) argues for a deeper consideration of the highly subjective "myths" and "desires" that undergird a subject's *intrapersonal* negotiation of symbolic equilibrium or "self-fulfillment" (p. 101). That is, Kramersch sees the beginner language learner as less concerned with and/or conscious of the objective realities of a language and its speakers. Instead, the novice language learner orients him/herself more to the sounds and surfaces of things. These subjective resonances with the foreign language forms Kramersch calls myths:

It is a way of using language less for its objective truth value than for the subjective beliefs and emotions that it expresses, elicits, and performs. [...] Because it condenses a variety of historically contingent meanings into one timeless symbol, myth often functions as a 'condensation symbol' [...] Because myth is anchored in an imagined reality

that does not operate in chronological, historical time, it has been called ‘a-historical’ (Barthes 1957). (pp. 11-12)

Like myth, a subject’s desire is often only tenuously grounded in objective reality. What language learners yearn for often exceeds mere grammatical or communicative competence and may even be unattainable in interaction with others altogether. Kramersch (2006) writes:

This need for identification with others, with their language, their way of speaking is so strong that Kristeva gave it the name ‘desire’ (Kristeva, 1980). Desire in language is the basic drive toward self-fulfillment. It touches the core of who we are. Anyone who has spent some time learning a foreign language while studying or working abroad knows the thrills and frustrations of desire. (p. 101)

However, desire is not only a force of attraction, a drive toward unity. Self-fulfillment can also be achieved through symbolic processes of distinction, as we will see quite clearly in the following case study of Veronica, as she tries to reconcile the conflicting symbolic values she ascribes to her multiple linguistic, ethnic, and national identities.

Although this emphasis on the personal dimension of language learning is relatively new in applied linguistics research, the Jesuit approach to education has long conceptualized all learning as a form of self-transformation *cum* liberation that results from an active -- yet deeply personal and symbolic -- reconciliation of one's self with various others, whether real, literary, or divine.

Spirituality and Language Learning

For readers unfamiliar with the terminology of Ignatius of Loyola’s spirituality (also referred to as Jesuit or Ignatian spirituality) and for those scholars for whom bringing spirituality to the domain of applied linguistics might cause some resistance, we offer a short introduction to a few key concepts. It is significant to underscore the fact, as Pierre Hadot’s (1995) study has argued, that the “spiritual” does not necessarily belong to the sphere of the “religious” (pp. 81-82). The Greek and Roman philosophical tradition considered philosophy as a spiritual exercise whose purpose was to perfect one’s way of thinking. Ancient philosophers saw in this exercise, focused on the self, more than a training of the intellect: it engaged the person’s entire psychism, that is, imagination and sensibility as well. The goal of spiritual exercise was to help the subject rise above the present condition and to have a better grasp of what it means to live a fulfilled life. Early Christianity absorbed the spiritual method of philosophy from Greco-Roman antiquity into its own religious practice. Because of the connection of spirituality and philosophy in the Greco-Roman world, when we speak of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, the book for which he is known in Catholic religious circles, we should remember that his sixteenth-century ideas of spirituality are offspring of a distant Western philosophical tradition. Of course, Ignatius, being an ardent Catholic at the time of a major religious turmoil in Europe, the Reformation, centers his spirituality on the relationship of the individual with the divine as it is conceived by the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, the principle of transformation through an interior effort of the person remains in connection with the entire tradition of spirituality in the philosophical and religious sense.

The key concepts of Ignatian spirituality are the dialectic of consolation and desolation, and *magis* borrowed from Latin signifying *more*. Consolation underlies the whole of the *Spiritual Exercises*. For Ignatius of Loyola, consolation is a state of soul characterized by “an inner joy, a serenity in judgment, a relish, a reassuring step forward, a clarification of insight” (O'Malley, 1993, p. 83). This state, however, might be vulnerable to the forces of evil and lost to its opposite: desolation, marked by sadness, confusion, anger, and resentment. Consolation can be recovered and maintained through the process of discernment. The purpose of spiritual exercises is to surrender the person to the “Discernment of Spirits” (O'Malley, 1993, pp. 42-43), that is to register the movements felt in one’s heart and to determine their origin. The human heart (soul) gives heed to its experience of consolation and desolation. The successful outcome of a spiritual exercise is the state in which one finds oneself under the influence of the “good spirit” (O'Malley, 1993, p. 43). and that entails consolation. Of course, for Ignatius, the good spirit emanates from God whereas the evil spirit originates in the enemy of human nature, the Devil. Once the subject achieves that clarification through discernment and regains consolation, she or he will likely respond to the environment enthusiastically by trying to maximize her or his effort to retain that state by following the desire to do more for God. The Jesuit shorthand for this aspiration is *magis*, derived from the Jesuit motto *Ad majorem Dei gloriam* [For the greater glory of God]. *Magis* does not encourage hyperactivity but a desire for personal growth through the discerned awareness of one’s own human potential. In that sense *magis* has been the underlying principle of Jesuit pedagogy in their network of schools aiming to foster in their students a desire for personal development in harmony with their predispositions recognized through discernment.

Magis and the Ratio Studiorum

The Jesuit pedagogical tradition codified in the *Ratio Studiorum*, a comprehensive educational plan elaborated at the end of the sixteenth century, was grounded in the spirituality of the founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola. He wrote his well-known *Spiritual Exercises* as a method to prompt spiritual experience. Therefore, it is not surprising to see in the educational plan that he initiated the idea of a personal transformation of the pupils, expected to occur through the process of study. The *Ratio Studiorum* pioneered an education that would take into account the pupils’ natural predispositions for certain arts. The underlying drive of the Jesuit Order to draft the *Ratio Studiorum* was the impulse to interiority (O'Malley, 2000). That is, the goal of education was to care for the whole person by paying attention to the movements of the soul subject to the influences of the external world. The ultimate aim of this type of education was a self-knowledge and self-acceptance or a conversion to a world-friendly spirituality. This notion implies that the world is good in itself and that the purpose of human existence is to live in harmony with the environment and to contribute to the common good. To this end, schools as institutions are to foster a positive appreciation of the world by offering a humanistic curriculum.

It is intriguing to find a parallel between the discourse of spirituality and interiority and the language of subjectivity Kramsch (2009) uses to denote the change that occurs in language learners as they undertake the process of subject positioning induced by contact with a new symbolic reality. As in any spiritual practice, the intention of such positioning is to transcend the self and reach beyond the boundaries elaborated and imposed by social conventions. We are subject to these conventions or symbolic forms that exercise on us a

power aiming to confine us to the space wherein their meaning is decipherable. Subjectivity is thus the symbolic meaning we give to ourselves in a social context inhabited by symbolic forms that impact us in our interiority.

However, in contact with the reality conveyed by a new language, the need for identification with the other intensifies. The new cultural realities with their elusive symbolic forms cause frustration and a lack of fulfillment. It is that space of the initial search for symbolic equilibrium or self-fulfillment that is of great value for our educational endeavor. Learning a foreign language intensifies this search aiming to fulfill an inner expectation of continuous growth that education should foster. We could associate the idea of *magis* and desire since both concepts denote the idea of going beyond the confines of the self conditioned by its current symbolic forms.

The fulfillment of this desire for identification and the achievement of *magis* can happen through a process of clarification of inner conflicts that impede on the subject's personal freedom. Of course, this desire for fulfillment never actually reaches its climax. In a polity, the subject can achieve a sense of equilibrium and freedom only by working through compromises. In this context we may risk a juxtaposition of the terms subject positioning and conversion: both terms point to a liberation from external conventional constraints that leads to a successful mediation through symbolic forms, or a self-acceptance in the midst of conflicting symbolic forms of the polity that solicit our allegiance.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND PROGRAM DETAILS

Veronica and the three other focal students in the larger study (Wolcott, 2010) were undergraduates participating in an American public university's study abroad program in Paris during the fall semester of 2006. Eligible students were required to have no less than one, but no more than three, semesters of college level French. As a result, most program participants were functioning at the beginner to advanced beginner level, and all non-language courses were conducted in English. So, while language study was an integral part of this study abroad program, it was not a French language program *per se*, and none of the incoming students were French majors or minors.

Students were invited to volunteer to participate in the study via email correspondence from the program administrators. Of course, these self-selected students represent a convenience sample insofar as we could not ensure a representative sample of the broader population of students. However, while it is impossible to generalize from a single case, interactions with the rest of the program participants through an author's work as a researcher, residence advisor, and assistant instructor suggest that Veronica shared many of the same goals and attitudes as the majority of her peers.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The following case study draws primarily on data collected through interviews conducted during and post-program. Veronica was interviewed in Paris twice, once in early November and once in early December. One follow-up interview was also conducted after her return to her home campus. In these semi-structured interviews (Smith, 1995), some pre-scripted prompts were used, yet Veronica was also encouraged to explore any topics she found relevant to the questions. Still, we understand that even this most open-ended interview

technique is embedded within an asymmetrical power relation that must be considered in any analysis of its speech data (Briggs, 1988; see Wolcott, 2010 for a full discussion).

However, in what follows we focus on how the form and content of Veronica's interview accounts provide textual evidence of more deeply personal processes of meaning making. Issues of context – from the situational to the cultural – are largely excluded in favor of more thematic and textual analyses. We recognize that this kind of content analysis is increasingly viewed with suspicion by discourse analysts and narrative theorists (Atkinson 1997; Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; cf. Freeman, 1999). However, the symbolic complexities of her accounts led us to first consider these comments in relative isolation from the more interactional and conventional constraints on their production. That is, while the larger study (Wolcott, 2010) paid attention to the ways in which Veronica's interview accounts represent active efforts at identifying with recognizable social groups/personae, here we examine the degree of creativity displayed as she negotiates idealizes and *mythologizes* (Barthes, 1957; Kramsch, 2009) such identities.

CASE STUDY: VERONICA

Veronica entered the fall semester of 2006 a twenty-year-old junior majoring in communications. Although she was born in Romania to Romanian parents, her family immigrated to the United States immediately after her birth. Aside from a two-day jaunt to Mexico one spring break, Veronica had never left her home state of California prior to her semester in Paris. She was bilingual English-Romanian; however, her parents had insisted on English in the home, so her knowledge of Romanian was passive and she was not literate in the language. She had studied French for four years in high school, but she had not taken any undergraduate French classes prior to the term in Paris.

Like many of the other students in the program, Veronica was not primarily motivated by language learning goals. For Veronica, studying abroad in Paris was seen as an opportunity for a break from the rigors of her home university; in fact, she admitted to having selected Paris largely due to the portrayal of France and the French on American television:

V: Um, well I definitely wanted to do, um I decided to do France because it's like the cultural capital of Europe, like whenever you see people on *TV* going abroad they go to *France*, and um, I figure, uh Paris, you know everybody talks about Paris, it was really mostly just um, I just thought that it would be interesting cause everyone goes on about Paris, I didn't have any, I didn't *research* it too much honestly. (Interview 1, see Appendix 1 for transcription notation)

Like many students, Veronica equates culture with the degree of cultivation and refinement that both nations and individuals differentially possess (cf. Risager, 2006). Moreover, she also tacitly assumes that an individual may enrich his/her own culture in contact with a new and more cultivated community. However, Veronica's high regard for French culture actually holds her back from engaging with her environment. For fear of coming off as an uncultured provincial, Veronica admits to avoiding any engagement with the French on their terms, i.e. in French:

- V: Yeah, sort of, um, I sorta had this crazy idea in my mind that I was going to become really fluent ((laughs)) but it was kind of like wishful thinking and, but I, I blame myself, I should've uh (.1) the first words out of my mouth here usually when I go ask someone, is 'parlez-vous anglais?' so it's kinda my fault that I don't, uh, push myself more=
 =T²: You do that?=
 =V: Yeah I totally do that ((laughs)) I'm *weak*, but uh, yeah it's really hard, but I *know*, I know the French, I, I know how to speak it, but I just really, you know the French are very *proud* people so I'm really self-conscious of how my accent sounds? (Interview 1)

Indeed, Veronica seems to have taken yet another cue from American popular culture stereotypes of the French: yes, they are extremely cultivated people; unfortunately, they know it all too well and are rude, condescending snobs (Levenstein, 1998, 2004; Sedaris, 2000). During the first interview, Veronica describes most of her run-ins with the French as emphatically negative – from waiters who mock her to a baker who pretends not to understand the French of one of her American peers. Like the students in Kinginger's (2009) study, Veronica reacts to this perceived rudeness by withdrawing into her American identity:

V: I was just like pissed off when I was there, I was like wearing my [college] sweater when the [program] people were like do not wear things that say American things on them, I'm like *fuck everybody! This is my shirt with letters on it!* (Interview 3)

Furthermore, turning her attention to her peers, Veronica suggests that those students who insist on speaking French are doing so more to put on haughty, elitist airs than to work on their linguistic proficiency:

V: Ok, there's one group we call the faux pas's ((laughs)) [...] because they're *douchebags* and they speak French in class [...] and they try to show off, they seriously think they're better than other people just because they speak French. (Interview 1)

However, while Veronica does focus much of her discussion on her peers, she does this primarily to set herself apart from them and to highlight her struggle to successfully negotiate her social identity and status in her peer interactions. According to Veronica, due to the vagaries of the rapid clique formation in the early weeks of the program, she received an imposed identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) that pigeon holed her as a social outcast:

V: And then, [...] like now that I hang out with like cool people here and stuff I feel like I'm more like myself, but at the beginning I was like, I'm so out of character right now, because [...] everyone here thinks I'm like this quiet, little like nerdy person, I was like nobody has any idea what I'm really like and then I was kind of like I don't care because I was still talking to my friends from home a lot? [...] and I was telling my best friend from home and she'd be like, who cares like you talk to me and I know how you are, but [...] it's frustrating not being able to be yourself you know, and I was like I know I'm in a

² T refers to the interviewer, Timothy Wolcott.

different country but I'm still hanging out with American people in an American dorm, it shouldn't be like this. (Interview 1)

Clearly, for Veronica, adjusting to life in Paris was extremely difficult, and this caused her to assume a defensive position vis-à-vis both the French and her more successful peers. In fact, most of Veronica's interview comments center on evaluating the peer dynamics of her fellow Americans. Critics of American study abroad suggest that this focus on her peers is typical of American undergraduates' narcissistic incapacity to consider the other on its own terms (Engle & Engle, 2002; Feinberg, 2002). Whereas her reaction is undoubtedly narcissistic, it is important to note that it is only the onset of an introspective process that will lead to a personal transformation.

To use the terms of spirituality, Veronica experiences "desolation," a state of mind characterized by inner sadness, rejection, and confusion (English, 1995, p. 83). We observe here a disintegration of the self that struggles to make sense of a new environment that catalyzed the fragmentation of the fragile equilibrium between her current subject position and her American identity prior to her sojourn. She realizes that she is neither integrated into the cohort of Americans nor accepted by the French.

When the crisis takes place, however, Veronica's identity negotiation goes well beyond peer interactions. In her desolate narcissistic outburst she directs her frustration at her Romanian background. Despite her conscious efforts to dismiss her Romanian roots, her ethnicity surfaces when she feels the unraveling of her American identity. Although she was born in Romania and raised by Romanian parents, Veronica has never visited her homeland and she has some significant qualms about ever doing so. While she positions France as the "cultural capital of Europe", Veronica's imagines a Romania that is so culturally un-evolved that life itself – instead of television or film – occurs in "*black and white*":

=V: ((laughs)) well plus, I don't know, I have this image of it in my mind like it's *black and white* almost, like I just imagine that it's *so backwards*, and I'm actually kind of scared to go over there just to see what it's like but I will eventually go, but, yeah, my dad was super pissed when I came here and I didn't go there, but [...] this is why I didn't go to *Prague* because I knew that if I went to eastern Europe he would kick my ass for not going to *their* eastern Europe, and I told him, I was like 'dad, I'll go when Romania joins the EU' that's when I'll go to Romania, cause they're still on the lay, it's different money, I'm a vegetarian, my grandmother would *not* understand this concept, she'd be like, oh, you're a vegetarian?, she'd put *lamb* on my plate or something, like something ridiculous, yeah, so, I mean, I know eastern Europe isn't what it used to be I'm still kind of worried about going there, and, I don't know the language, and I know that she'd be really (.2) disa-, (Interview 1)

As in her rejection of the "nerd" subject position imposed by her peers, Veronica's struggle to identify with her Romanian-ness on her terms is fraught with anxieties. Once again, she is unhappy with the symbolic capital of the identities available to her in the public sphere (a non-"EU" eastern European identity from "their eastern Europe"), and she prefers to opt out of engagement rather than to attempt to reconcile who she imagines herself to be with how others see her. In the hypothetical meal with her grandmother, for example, Veronica imagines her identity as a "vegetarian" – which she has presumably managed to negotiate successfully in the United States – being rejected in a "backwards" Romanian

context where her grandmother “would not understand this concept.” That is, Veronica’s Romania is a place of imposed identity (Romanians = meat eaters) where she would lose all control over her subject positioning, the negative consequences of which would include a corporal revulsion (“she’d put *lamb* on my plate or something, like something ridiculous”). Unlike the haute cuisine of (EU) France that she equates with high culture (“the cultural capital”), Romanian cuisine is associated with an antiquated “black and white” Europe that Veronica avoids at all costs.

At the time when Veronica took part in the study abroad program in Paris, stereotypes of Romania were numerous. As Rohozinska (1999) has pointed out, among the most damaging ones was that of a backward culture, ignorant and corrupt, marked by a xenophobic and anti-Semitic nationalism. To symbolically separate herself from this, Veronica’s Romania falls into a stereotype that represents all that which the US political mainstream rejects and discourages.

However, we notice that a positive symbol begins to emerge from Veronica’s overwhelming confusion about identity: the prospect of Romania becoming part of the European Union. Veronica sees there is a chance for Romania to shed off the label of backwardness by joining what she sees as the more cultured European nations, emblematic of progress and tolerance. Although brought up in America, her Romanian identity is present in her, constantly reactivated in contact with her relatives. To overcome the symbolic conflict that this fragmentation causes or to avert desolation she must reevaluate her predicament as a Romanian in the civilized world. She must renegotiate her subjectivity by finding a new set of symbolic referents to warrant the legitimacy of her choice. The European Union provides a perfect match. In the terms of spirituality, we may identify this process as “discernment,” derived from the Latin verb *discerno* meaning “to sever or separate” as well as “to distinguish, discriminate, comprehend, and judge” (Madras, 2004, pp. 48-49). That is, in order to avoid the negative evaluation of judging herself in terms of her Romanian-American identity, Veronica rises above the symbolic fray by adopting a transcendent and transnational “European” subject position (Interview 2, see excerpt below).

Unlike the situation of integrating into the American study abroad program community, in this instance the specter of her Romanian grandmother confronts Veronica with a more face-threatening scenario rooted in the differentially accorded symbolic capital afforded by the complexities and contradictions of her multicultural and multilingual subjectivity. In a continuation of the previously cited comments, Veronica tells the story of a particularly distressing run-in with her Romanian grandmother:

V: [...] she called me, this Saturday she called me, I don’t know how she got my number, I guess my dad gave her my dorm room number, and she calls me and in Romanian she says ‘why don’t you call? Why don’t you write?’ I couldn’t, I was responding in French, because that’s like, I know she doesn’t understand English and I was like well French is closer to Romanian than English is, and then after I respond in French, she says, oh, you learn French but you don’t learn Romanian?, and then she says, oh PS tell your dad I said happy birthday, talk to you later, and then she *hangs up the phone*, so we had like this 2 minute long conversation [...] it was *ridiculous!* And I sent her a postcard and I didn’t put the return address because she writes me these big elaborate letters in Romanian that I (.2) my dad usually has to sit there, and like, I’ll tell him what I want to say and he tells me how to write it, but I can’t do it on my own and she gets really pissed. (Interview 1)

Raised by Romanians in an English-only household, she has acquired only a passive competence in the language of her extended family. However, her parents also expect her to maintain relationships with her Romanian family *in Romanian*. Like many immigrants in that situation, Veronica feels torn between understanding herself in purely American terms and attempting to explore the Old World dimensions of her hyphenated linguistic and cultural identities. In fact, despite the apparent dislike of her Romanian heritage, Veronica cannot dismiss it: it is a constitutive element of her subjectivity. The way of overcoming the fragmentation with which she wrestles is to work out a compromise through a surrogate identity. In the terminology of spirituality, we notice here the adoption signs of “consolation,” or a clarification of the personal predicament that brings comfort and appeasement (Madras, 2004, p .30).

In fact, even during the first interview, Veronica attempts a similar form of symbolic consolation and discernment when she self-identifies as first and foremost a “Californian”:

- T: So, if you had to speak in those terms, you wouldn’t consider your sort of Romanian-ness as like a significant part of your identity?
- V: No
- T: You’d say like I’m an American first? and a Californian? Or what would you say?
- V: I’m:: yeah, I’m Californian, more than I, yeah I think that I’m more Californian than American because there’s a lot of things about America that I think I don’t identify with as much, but California, anything goes, so I identify much more with that. (Interview 1)

However, she also indicates that one of her primary motivations for studying abroad in Paris was to connect with her parents’ *European* past. So, while she sees identifying with the French as impossible, and identifying with the Romanians as distasteful, she eventually opts for a “European” identity (Interview 2):

- T: In the last interview we had, you mentioned the fact that your parents are Romanian and you mentioned the fact that you didn’t really have a strong connection with your European Romanian family [...] but now you’re saying you’re European, what do you mean by that?
- V: Well, I’m better than most people ((laughs)), no but I mean [...] I felt European even before I came here but now I really know, like I think it’s really cool- like my mom did gym-, she was in Romania, she did gymnastics for like the first 14 years of her life, [...] my mom did all this stuff, and then, when they took us to the French ballet here I was looking, they were doing like a little imitation of um, gymnastics and I was thinking this is what my mom did, and then when I came back from Venice on a tour bus, that’s what I was thinking about like my mom would travel all over the country for these meets and stuff, so I just feel like a lot of things I’m doing were things that she did and I think it’s so cool because like I get to, see, you know (.2) what the experience was like kind of, you know, I know it’s like eastern Europe and it was much poorer and it’s really different but, I just think it’s really cool that I get to see that kind of stuff. (Interview 2)

Taking the two previous excerpts together, one finds Veronica selectively cobbling together an “inwardly-generated identity” (Taylor, 1992, p. 34) or subjectivity: here “Californian”, “Romanian”, and “European” do not indicate geographic provenance – these terms point not to places on the map, but to the symbolic capital of idealized subject positions. Caught between the two unacceptable symbolic valences of her Romanian-American identity, Veronica chooses *not to choose* by replacing her hyphenated identity with a purely symbolic subject position that exists only in her perception of the symbolic distinction afforded to her being a “European” among Americans. In many ways, studying abroad in France has allowed Veronica to have her European homecoming on her own terms: by aligning her mother’s past as a Romanian gymnast touring “poor” “eastern Europe” with Parisian ballet dancers and Veronica’s bus ride from Venice, Veronica creates a “layered simultaneity” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 136) wherein Veronica’s and her mother’s 20-year-old selves confront each other in the a-historical moment of the myth of “European-ness,” in which both she and her mother can escape the unwanted symbolic values of “Romanian” and “American”.

Of course, one might be inclined to dismiss this myth making as akin to the identity shopping of the cosmopolitan elite (Skeggs, 2004). In Veronica’s case, however, this self-construction is part of a more fundamental and high-stakes process of reconciling the contradictions inherent in an identity that is “multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time” (Norton, 1995, p. 14). Moreover, while it may be hard to establish a causal link between studying abroad *in France* and the triggering of Veronica’s identity crisis, it is clear that her understanding (however essentialized) of the differential cultural and symbolic endowment of France, Romania, and the United States all factor into her efforts to negotiate a subject position among all three.

From a spiritual perspective, the passage of Veronica, from a conflicted college student with shifting identities characterized by a narcissistic refuge into herself to a young woman who comfortably embraces an umbrella European identity, illustrates a process of personal development that culminates in liberation from anxieties inflicted by the symbolic reality in which she did not really fit. Veronica’s liberation consists in a compromise that allows her to navigate freely between conflicting symbolic forms and make sense of them as she attains a new subject position. Her sojourn abroad accelerated that process in which she needed to confront her current subjectivity, reject it partially, and eventually accept it. In the process of conversion from a rebel who rejects how others position her to a subject that knows the limits of her freedom to self-identify, Veronica becomes savvy in using her inner resources within a polity that both imposes its constraints on her and allows her to “make do” within its ideological boundaries (de Certeau, 1984, p. 18).

Higher education institutions have means to foster this type of transformation by creating programs that offer conditions stimulating personal development. Study abroad programs provide the unique opportunity to be immersed in a new reality that can challenge students to the core of their being by subverting the symbolic realities around which they have constructed their subjectivities. In the contemporary global reality, immersions into a foreign environment are increasingly possible and necessary. There is hardly a better way of learning the perspective of other people and acquiring the capacity to function in our increasingly transnational reality.

That is, following Kramsch (2009), we assume that Veronica's myths and desires regarding the French language, its speakers, and French culture are not simply stereotypes to

be exposed, debunked, and abandoned. While deconstructing essentialisms is a component of our pedagogic approach outlined below, we also accept that such idealizations are an integral part of what drives students to study abroad (or to study the language) in the first place. So, the pedagogic challenge as we see it is to at once *demystify* and *edify*, i.e. to help students check their subjective perceptions and imaginings against the realities of life in France, but also to encourage students to continue to reflect on this subjective dimension, with the understanding that such emotional, aesthetic, and life-historical orientations to the other, if kept in realistic perspective, can be a source of the kind of motivation and self-reflexivity that drives successful language learning, acculturation, and personal - even *spiritual* - development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In addressing issues related to identity and subjectivity, this study aligns itself with much of the recent applied linguistics research on study abroad (Dervin, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2008; Ogden, 2007; Wilkinson, 2002). Moreover, like these other studies, we have addressed the ways in which issues related to identity can complicate and/or compromise students' capacity or inclination to align their learning efforts with the intended goals of the program. This study, however, departs from previous work in several key ways.

First of all, most of the qualitative studies of American study abroad that have addressed the issue of learner identity have done so largely in an effort to explain the types of interactive and intercultural mismatches that arise as student behaviors and interpretations remain rooted in an intransigent American habitus (Bourdieu, 1991). Of course, these researchers often reach widely divergent conclusions regarding the pedagogic implications of this mismatch, with some advocating greater accommodation of American students (Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005) and many others calling for more concerted efforts to train the students themselves to adapt to the foreign environment (Dolby, 2004; Kinginger, 2008; Levin, 2001). In this case study, we have also addressed the ways in which this student's initial learning goals gave way as she negotiated the unexpected identity issues triggered by spending a semester abroad.

However, in order to account for the complexities of the symbolic work involved in these negotiations, we have found it necessary to move beyond the structuralist notion of identity in favor of the post-structuralist concept of subjectivity. That is, rather than only considering the ways in which Veronica's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors do or do not align with recognizable American norms, we have also explored the degree to which her accounts represent a form of symbolic cobbling together of a subjectivity through discursive practices that incorporate as much *self-imagining* as identification with recognizable communities or archetypes. In this process we have had recourse to the tradition of spirituality. A spiritual perspective pays attention to all these interior movements, welcomes, and valorizes them as integral parts of discernment, a process that ultimately leads to a transformation of the self, or, in terms of spirituality, to conversion.

As a result, while we also support the call by many researchers for more pre-departure preparation (especially in foreign language curricula), our findings suggest that simply viewing the situation of students like Veronica as an intercultural contact, with the most relevant and salient cultures at hand being American and French, would obscure the much more complicated symbolic reality at hand. As we demonstrated in Veronica's case, a student's drive to learn French may have as much to do with the heritage language they are

not learning as it does with the foreign language they *are learning*. If future research and study abroad program curricula are to succeed in understanding the reasons for the well-known unpredictability of study abroad as a learning context, they may need to account for not only what students are *moving toward* but also what students are *leaving behind* by electing to study abroad. Although the majority of applied linguistics research on study abroad frames students' behaviors as inherently *forward-looking*, this study suggests a view of motivation and intentionality that is non-linear and imbedded in a more subjective experience of time wherein the reasons for acting today, including the things we say (and especially how we incorporate new experiences into our ongoing life story), potentially draw on multiple scales of life-historical time (Lemke, 2002).

This study also offers a new perspective from which to consider the increasingly frequent critiques of American students' treatment of study abroad as a 21st century Grand Tour (Engle & Engle, 2002; Kinginger, 2008; Ogden, 2008). While it is undeniable that Veronica framed her time in Paris as primarily geared toward non-academic cultural pursuits, what is ultimately most striking about her testimony is this alleged fixation on culture is quickly eclipsed by a focus on much more personal issues. That is, while many students claim to be studying abroad to soak up high culture and take time off from the rigors of their home university, they often end up more keen on discussing the impact of their experiences abroad on their sense of self vis-à-vis the identities – real and imagined, inherited and desired – that have been brought into stark relief as a result of their term abroad. We believe this unintended focus on identities can be labeled as spiritual experience. The initial motivation of a cultural exploration was relocated from its external cognitive intentionality to the interiority of the participant.

Moreover, this reconceptualization of motivation goes beyond considering study abroaders as pursuing the type of distinction that many describe as the chief profit gained by international experiences (Skeggs, 2004 cf. Bourdieu, 1984). Of course, profit-seeking (of symbolic capital of various forms) is central to much of what Veronica describes; however, her pursuit goes beyond the structurally-determined value she see herself accruing in the social sphere and delves into more deeply personal drives toward self-fulfillment and “plenitude” (Kramersch, 2009, p. 14). Indeed, Veronica's initial purpose for going to Paris might very well have been motivated by her sense of the market conditions in the United States regarding the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) of having studied abroad in Paris. However, once in the country, both this cultural and the more material forms of rational calculus (e.g. labor market concerns) fell by the wayside when she faced the unintended consequences of her term abroad on her subjectivity.

Of course, researchers concerned with advanced bilingualism (Kramersch, 2009; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) have already touched on these issues. However, few (save Kramersch, 2009) have taken seriously the idea that such phenomena among beginner language learners are anything but errors or distortions, i.e. an intransigent monolingualism and monoculturalism typical of those who persist in seeing others through the lens of the self. While we do not deny that Veronica's interpretations of her experience abroad are largely incongruent with the primary educational purposes of study abroad (and advanced language learning), we simply suggest that they are fundamental enough to the core processes of living and learning in a foreign context to be addressed head on and made public enough to help students work through them.

Furthermore, these dreams, desires, and essentializations are not tightly held secrets; they are not hard to elicit through standard qualitative research methods. On the contrary,

students are inclined to discuss this subjective dimension of their experience with compassionate interlocutors; a fact which suggests study abroaders are potentially open to critically examine their own positions, perspectives, and ways of speaking about study abroad. Of course, this willingness to share these reactions may not amount to any particular form of competence unto itself. Indeed, this study may not offer any insights into the type(s) of competence that study abroad *should* develop. However, our findings do underscore the fact studying abroad can trigger the kind of high stakes symbolic negotiations that characterize symbolic competence (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). That is, as Veronica struggled to integrate her study abroad experiences into her self-reflexively understood life history, she found herself wrestling with the tension between her self-generated subjectivity and the various identities imposed on her from without. From a spiritual perspective, this period of wrestling with self-generated subjectivity and externally imposed identities is the stage of discernment. It led Veronica to a compromise allowing her to endorse freely those symbolic forms that suit best her subjectivity reformed through the tensions that arose in contact with the reality she encountered abroad. Granted, the practical stakes of these negotiations may have been minimal and largely self-serving; however, with the appropriate educational intervention, perhaps this symbolic competence could have been extended to include a more thorough consideration of others on their own terms (the French, the Romanians, etc.).

From a programmatic and pedagogic perspective, then, it seems safe to assume that while the exact contours of each student's subjective reactions to their experiences abroad may be too idiosyncratic to anticipate fully, the likelihood that such reactions will occur is sure enough to allow for educational interventions that help students work through this subjective dimension in a manner that is more in keeping with the intended learning goals of the program. To this end, we now turn to the curricula we have created for pre-departure and in-country courses to help students better anticipate and manage these subjective reactions to their experience abroad.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

The key finding of this case study (and the larger study, Wolcott, 2010, 2013) is that Veronica accounted for the significance of her experiences studying abroad in terms that transcended the institutionally sanctioned academic and professional goals of the program. Of course, it is impossible to generalize these findings to all American undergraduates studying abroad. However, insofar as Veronica's emphasis on issues related to personal identity resonates with the findings of so many other studies on American study abroad, it seems safe to assume that most study abroaders make sense of their experiences in ways that go beyond the goals of program curricula. What seems necessary, then, is an educational intervention that gets students to reflect more consciously on these personal interpretations *and* builds a bridge between the personal and the cultural.

For example, Veronica's view of Paris as the "cultural capital" (Interview 1) of Europe fed into a deeply personal negotiation of the relative symbolic capital of American and Romanian national identities. If she had had an opportunity to explore the degree to which her views on culture in general and French culture in particular represent, for example, a specifically American perspective, Veronica might have benefited in at least two key ways: (1) She might have been more inclined to notice the cultural and class complexity of contemporary France (i.e. checking her pre-conceived notions against the realities of her

environment); and (2) She might have been able to better identify her own opinions and perspectives among the more or less conventional ways of speaking (discourses) she drew on to account for her study abroad experiences.

Regarding this last point, here we would like to offer a post-structuralist expansion of previous study abroad research, especially Kinginger (2008), that has called attention to the potentially adverse effects of students drawing on such textual resources and collective rememberings (Wertsch, 2002). We concede that it is through the re-animation of such discourses that students may reproduce, for example, a rigid and defensive national identity or a hip consumerist persona on an extended tour/shopping excursion (Gore, 2005). However, we also suggest that the collective means of making meaning do not fully determine an individual's total symbolic capacity. By calling students' attention to the recognizably American cultural scripts they may be following while abroad, it is possible to also help them consider how their interpretations of their experience depart from such widely circulated dominant discourses.

In this way, our proposed course will scaffold students' exploration of the significance of their experiences abroad on both the interpersonal (via class discussions, writing assignments, ethnographic projects) and the intrapersonal (via journals and other self-reflection assignments) planes of meaning-making. Crucially, these latter assignments will be organized such that students can write both for themselves and for the instructor: that is, while students will be required to hand in some version of these writings, they will also be explicitly encouraged to write parallel texts to themselves, i.e. with no intended audience, in order to allow themselves to explore personal topics that they would prefer to keep private.

The primary objective of the course will be to highlight the tension between convention and invention that all social agents more or less consciously negotiate. Our approach is three-pronged, with distinct theoretical, methodological and critical/reflexive components (see Wolcott, 2010, for a full syllabus).

Theoretical

Drawing on work done in linguistics, anthropology, and sociology, we will familiarize the students with current and canonical social scientific theories of identity, language, culture, and the inter-relationships among all three (especially in autobiographical narrative). Given that the majority of the undergraduates who study abroad are majoring in social science disciplines unrelated to linguistics, the primary challenge in working through these readings will be to help the students engage with the theory in a manner that is immediately applicable to their experiences abroad. As such, the overarching question will be: how do these scholars' conceptualizations of language, culture, and identity inform your initial and ongoing orientation to and evaluation of your experiences studying abroad?

The underlying assumption here is that students already understand their motivations for studying abroad in terms related to culture and identity, and that by interrogating these terms more systematically and objectively, students will be able to more critically reflect on how they use these concepts to account for their experiences abroad. For example, it is likely that the majority of the students, like Veronica, will see the relationship between language, culture, and identity through the dual lenses of communitarian (one [national] language = one culture = one identity) and individualist (personal "cultivation") discourses.

By tracing the movement in the social sciences from structuralist/nationalist to more post-structuralist/transnationalist conceptualizations of language, culture, and identity (see Risager, 2006), this course will help students see how their own conceptualizations compare to the views of experts, with the ultimate goal of allowing students to take a more self-reflexive stance regarding the epistemological assumptions undergirding their views on these issues. That is, as we explained above, we see these students' commonsense views of culture and identity as only superficially contradictory and counter-productive – if students can be made aware of the cultural and historical specificity of their views, they may be inclined to take more seriously the opportunities presented by a term abroad for a sustained consideration of the inter-relations among language, culture, and identity.

Many scholars and program providers argue for finding a way to make American undergraduates foreground their learner identities more cross-contextually (and thus background all their other identities that might complicate things) in order to remain objective, reserve judgment, avoid conflict, etc. In our approach, however, we assume that by inviting them to reflect on how their term abroad is affecting them beyond their proscribed role as students, they can be made aware of how their outsider status opens up a new horizon of subjective meanings *and* requires a more concerted effort on their part to check these subjective meanings against the realities of their ongoing experience.

Methodological

Taking our cues from the Ealing Ethnography Programme (Barro, Jordan, & Roberts, 1998; Roberts, 2003), we will first help our students make the familiar strange by training them to conduct mini-ethnographies of communication in English to demonstrate that they are at once agents and patients of meaning-making. Next, depending on their level of proficiency in French and their access to native speakers (e.g. their host family), they will record and analyze an informal or classroom interaction in French to help them recognize their limited capacity to establish the kind of mutuality and intersubjectivity they take for granted in many L1 interactions. Ideally, this second assignment would involve some assistance from their French instructor in order to help them more adequately account for the linguistic and pragmatic particulars of the transcribed interaction. However, following Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING analytical framework, the main point of the assignment will be to raise their awareness of the systematicity of linguistic practice, in the spirit of the Hymesian adage, “there are rules of use without which the rules of usage would be useless” (Hymes, 1971, p. 278).

Of course, given the students' limited proficiency, it is likely that they will provide more personal, even idiosyncratic, interpretations of what the L2 and its speakers mean for them (e.g. their favorite French word because of its sound, what it reminds them of in English, how “refined” and “classy” the French seem, etc.). Unlike in a traditional language classroom, in this course these more subjective interpretations will be encouraged, with the premise that by making them public, students can begin to more objectively interrogate the sources and enduring influence of these perceptions.

Critical/Reflexive

Researchers in England found that many study abroaders return with more and/or reinforced stereotypes of their foreign hosts (Coleman, 1998). Similarly, critics of American

study abroad suggest that American undergraduates are decreasingly capable of noticing and respecting cultural differences while abroad (Engle & Engle, 2002; Feinberg, 2002). Moreover, many language educators worry that the growing trend toward shorter-term programs without an intensive language-learning component discourages American undergraduates from developing the kind of intercultural and/or global competence necessary for life in an increasingly globalized world. However, some international educators defend this trend and suggest that it is cultural learning – with or without a specifically linguistic dimension – that is the true educational promise of study abroad. By sharing this published research and commentary on American study abroad with our students, we aim to encourage them to consider to what degree these accounts correspond with their own experiences. That is, through a critical engagement with a broad spectrum of expert opinions on the purpose and potential of undergraduate study abroad, these students will be invited to participate in this debate and to evaluate/defend their own perspective on the educational promise of a term abroad.

CONCLUSION

Veronica's account of her semester abroad highlights her desire to decide for herself how to position herself vis-à-vis the symbolic capital attendant upon her various identities that have become salient through her experiences studying abroad in Paris. Her comments provide ample evidence of a drive to incorporate her experiences abroad into her ongoing biographical narrative and her willingness to engage in active dialogue on the significance of this experience in relation to more than just the goals of the program, her major, and career goals. Moreover, programmatically speaking, rather than dismissing such non-academic dimensions of study abroad, it seems worthwhile to deliberately address these issues, both to help sojourners consider how their views may conflict with the realities of the host community and to identify and reinforce the more deeply-held yearnings that have driven them to enroll in study abroad (and, ideally, language learning) in the first place.

Her comments also speak to the necessity of a pedagogy and program design that recognizes the importance of these deeply personal - or even spiritual - dimensions of living and learning abroad. From the beginning of their involvement in education, the Jesuits have sought to foster an inner transformation in their pupils that would make it easier for them to navigate the challenges of social and political life. The underlying goal of all learning was to induce spiritual experiences in pupils that would have a lasting impact on their lives by training them how to clarify moral and intellectual predicaments and overcome confusion of mind so that they could adapt to ever-changing life situations. Although this type of clarification is referred to as consolation, it is not a feel-good experience but a state of mind that allows one to see oneself in a positive light in the midst of symbolic forms that impact one's subjectivity. Symbolic forms that are not reflected upon and accommodated to might create a sense of alienation, plunging the subject into desolation, the contrary state in which one sees oneself as prey to messages one doesn't know how to interpret. It takes a skill of discernment to exit the meanders of desolation.

In spiritual practices, discernment is assisted through the spiritual accompaniment³ of the person. Jesuit pedagogy uses the principle of discernment in offering retreats or inviting students to act in dramatic productions in which they can play out their fears and find

³ We prefer spiritual accompaniment to the more common spiritual direction as the former emphasizes the collaborative nature of the endeavor.

solutions to overcome them. As we have claimed in the case of Veronica, the program in Paris offered a chance for transformative outcomes. Besides the fact of displacement alone, the conversations with Veronica offered reflective opportunities for a spiritual experience, not unlike the spiritual accompaniment used in Jesuit pedagogy. Study abroad programs with strong language learning components could parallel this pedagogical undertaking by offering students a chance to look at their lives in a new light. Conversations with staff members previously trained for that purpose (and/or researchers), group reflections led by a prepared staff member or a fellow student, and short dramas written in the target language that deal with questions of the relationship to the host culture may prompt experiences that will be unique to each participant yet will inevitably trigger the need for consolation and discernment. This short-term displacement to an uncharted territory, to the domain of the Other, may be a useful trigger for a personal/spiritual transformation that might eventually lead to self-knowledge and self-acceptance in the complex multicultural political realm of postmodernity.

In the end, although we in no way suggest that spirituality replace subjectivity in research on study abroad, we do see it as offering a perspective that may resonate more immediately with teacher-researchers interested as much in educators as in learners. In our view, while the post-structuralist notion of subjectivity can address the interactive, i.e. intersubjective, dimension of interpretive processes, its analytical strength lies primarily in its focus on the individual's unique take on experience as inflected through memory, feeling, the body, etc. The Jesuit notion of spirituality is embedded within a more pedagogic - though not didactic - scenario, one in which the subject's struggles to make sense of complex and/or confusing situations (especially displacements) are supported - even deliberately triggered by - the accompanying educators. In this way, to consider the outcomes of study abroad in terms of spirituality forces researchers and educators to account for the role of the institution (and its delegates) in those outcomes.

Finally, perhaps this perspective is more in keeping with Kinginger's (2009) call for a more activist stance on the part of study abroad researchers and language educators in the design and implementation of study abroad in higher education. Rather than merely describing the rich complexities of student experiences (largely, Kinginger argues, only through their eyes), experts are encouraged to engage in program design and to prescribe best practices that expand the view of study abroad to include a more systematic consideration of the role and the perspectives of the various faculty, staff, and members of the host community with whom students come in contact. While as applied linguists we embrace the descriptivism inherent in effective research into language use, as educators we understand our task as inherently prescriptive, and the language of spirituality lends itself more readily to a kind of compassionate prescriptivism, one in which we are forced to address the expanded context of interaction outlined above. Although here we have mainly addressed the ways in which the terminology of spirituality mirrors the key concepts of a poststructuralist view of subjectivity, as educators committed to taking seriously our Jesuit institution's promise of furthering the personal development of its students, we see spirituality as offering a lens to view study abroad through which educators figure more prominently than in much of the existing study abroad research on identity and/or subjectivity.

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APPENDIX 1: Transcription Notation

,	= quick pause, less than .1 sec
(.1)	= pause in tenths of sec
?	= rising intonation
<i>italics</i>	= emphatic stress, slight increase volume
CAPS	= high volume utterance
(word)	= best guess at unclear utterance
(unintelligible)	= unintelligible utterance
so::::	= elongated vowel sound
=	= latching utterances
[= overlapping utterances