



The Effect of Study Abroad Homestay Placements: Participant Perspectives and Oral Proficiency Gains

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Abstract: *Although the study abroad homestay context is commonly considered the ideal environment for language learning, host-student interactions may be limited. The present study explored how language development of students of Spanish, Mandarin, and Russian related to student and host family perspectives on the homestay experience. The study used pretest and posttest Simulated Oral Proficiency Interviews to investigate student oral proficiency gains and surveys to examine beliefs of these students (n = 152) and their hosts (n = 87). Students and families were generally positive about the homestay, with significant variation based on language. A significant relationship was found between students' oral proficiency gains and their being glad to have lived with a host family. Significant correlations were also found between students' language learning satisfaction and their satisfaction with the homestay.*

Key words: *homestay, host families, oral proficiency, participant perspectives, study abroad*

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Study abroad is often viewed as the ideal environment for language learners to develop their abilities because it is assumed to provide a depth of immersion into the target language that is rife with interactions with native speakers. Living with a local host family is further seen as the optimal context to foster language gains due to the opportunities for target language input it affords.

The conventional wisdom about the guaranteed benefits of the homestay has been challenged, however, by studies questioning the richness of student-host family interactions (Diao, Freed, & Smith, 2011; Iino, 2006; O'Donnell, 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Wilkinson, 1998) and finding that homestay students do not make greater language gains than learners in other living arrangements (Magnan & Back, 2007; Rivers, 1998; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). Although two parties constitute the homestay dynamic, few studies have considered the host family perspective in investigating study abroad language contact and gains (Engel, 2011; Kinginger, 2013b; Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2002).

With increasing numbers of U.S. university students participating in study abroad (Institute for International Education, 2013), it is critical to examine the language gains students make after a period abroad and steps programs can take to further promote language learning. The present study explored student and host family attitudes at the beginning and end of semester-long study abroad programs for Spanish, Mandarin, and Russian in order to gain a deeper understanding of the connections between the homestay experience and oral proficiency gains. By investigating the perceptions of both study abroad learners and their hosts about the homestay relationship, the study aimed to provide additional insight into how this type of study abroad placement can foster language development.

Background

Research on Language Learning During Study Abroad

According to Freed (1998), early research on language learning in study abroad contexts primarily used criterion-referenced tests to measure language growth. While these studies suggested a positive relationship between time spent abroad and second language acquisition, many lacked control groups and used measures that were unable to draw fine distinctions in language gains or conclusions about individual variation in results. Freed noted that later studies moved beyond exclusively test-based data to investigate the relationships between language development, student characteristics, and specific experiences abroad.

Kinginger (2011) enumerated three research trends that grew from the results of early outcomes studies that showed great differences in individual achievement after periods abroad. First, studies attempted to correlate language gains with quantitative accounting of student activities and target language use; second, ethnographies and case studies examined student perceptions of the study abroad sojourn; and most recently, researchers have pursued mixed-methods studies incorporating qualitative analysis of student behaviors and perspectives with assessment of language learning outcomes. Still, little of this in-depth analysis of the study abroad experience has included concurrent investigation of the host perspective (Kinging, 2013b). Most previous study abroad research has also focused on learners of one language, most commonly French or Spanish (Llanes, 2011).

DuFon and Churchill's (2006) review of research findings indicated that learner engagement with the host community is a key factor in language acquisition during study abroad because the opportunities for and quality of interaction vary greatly and are mediated by both learner approaches and host culture practices. Recent studies examining study abroad outcomes have identified

the need for interventions to support language development by encouraging students to increase their engagement with native speakers (Back, 2013; Cadd, 2012; Du, 2013; Goldoni, 2013; Kinginger, 2011), including homestay hosts (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2010; Martinsen, 2010; Vande Berg et al., 2009).

Oral Proficiency Gains From Study Abroad

The following studies cited involve U.S. university students unless otherwise noted. Researchers investigating oral proficiency development as a result of study abroad have frequently used such measures as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI). These assessments are rated according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines—Speaking, a scale used to evaluate functional language ability that consists of five major levels, the lower three of which are divided into Low, Mid, and High sublevels (ACTFL, 1999). Gains in ACTFL proficiency ratings have been documented for groups of learners of French (Magnan & Back, 2007), German (Lindseth, 2010), and Spanish (Isabelli-García, 2006; Mendelson, 2004) after one semester abroad, learners of Portuguese after a six-week summer program (Milleret, 1991), learners of Japanese after an eight-week summer program (Hardison & Okuno, 2013), and high school and gap-year learners of Swedish over a year abroad (Spenader, 2011). Davidson (2010) found that OPI gains of more than 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students of Russian who participated in study abroad programs of various durations between 1994 and 2009 were strongly correlated with longer lengths of stay and showed a wide range of individual variation. Watson, Siska, and Wolfel (2013) found that 295 of 369 learners of seven target languages made gains on the OPI after semester programs in various countries.

Several studies comparing oral proficiency results for study abroad learners and control groups of similar learners at a

home institution over one semester have observed differences between the groups. Freed (1995) found that greater numbers of study abroad than at-home learners of French moved more than one sublevel and crossed level boundaries in the ACTFL Guidelines. Segalowitz and Freed (2004) found significant gains in OPI ratings for a group of study abroad Spanish learners in contrast to a group at the home institution that did not show significant improvement. Hernández (2010a) also found that study abroad learners of Spanish made significantly greater gains in SOPI ratings than on-campus learners. In Vande Berg et al.'s (2009) study of more than 800 learners of seven target languages in programs of varied length, SOPI gains were significantly greater for the study abroad group; on average, these learners improved one ACTFL sublevel, while control students improved half as much.

Although the OPI and similar instruments have been widely used to investigate study abroad outcomes, critics have questioned the application of the ACTFL Guidelines to measure language learning during study abroad. Researchers noted that the Guidelines may not be sensitive enough to measure the incremental progress made by learners during their time abroad, especially for those with higher proficiency levels and in shorter-term programs (Freed, 1998; Llanes, 2011). Many studies have demonstrated that proficiency gains as measured by the Guidelines are more common for students who enter study abroad programs with lower proficiency levels (Davidson, 2010; Lindseth, 2010; Magnan & Back, 2007; Mendelson, 2004; Milleret, 1991), which may be due to the construction of the scale in which the amount of language control increases exponentially, rather than in a linear fashion, at each subsequent proficiency level.

The Homestay Experience

Research examining the relationship between the type of housing students

experience during study abroad and their oral proficiency outcomes has produced mixed results. Rivers's (1998) analysis of proficiency scores from more than 1,000 undergraduate and graduate learners of Russian over 20 years found that homestay participants were less likely than those who lived in dormitories to gain in oral proficiency. Magnan and Back (2007) did not find a difference in OPI gains between French learners living with native speakers and those living with nonnatives in a semester program. While Vande Berg et al. (2009) did not find a correlation between type of housing and SOPI gains in their large-scale study, they reported an association approaching significance between homestays and greater oral proficiency gains for students of less commonly taught languages. Hernández (2010b) noted that 15 of 16 Spanish learners who made gains on the SOPI after one semester abroad lived in a homestay, while three of four who did not improve lived in apartments with nonnative speakers.

Studies investigating contact in the host home and language growth have shown surprising results that, like the mixed findings regarding housing type and oral proficiency outcomes, do not support assumptions that a homestay provides a linguistic advantage. Segalowitz and Freed (2004) found a negative correlation between time speaking with the host family and gains in length of longest turn for learners of Spanish in a semester program and suggested that interactions with members of the host family during the homestay may have been mostly short and formulaic. Working with learners in the same program, Lafford (2004) found a significant negative correlation between time speaking with the host family and use of strategies to fill communication gaps, pointing to a focus on meaning rather than on form. Martinsen (2010) found no relationship between Spanish learners' evaluations of relationships with their host families and gains on an oral skills test after a six-week summer program. Evidence that the homestay does not always provide a source of rich and pragmatically appropriate target lan-

guage input can be seen in Iino's (2006) recordings of interactions at home, which demonstrated that family members used simplified language and provided limited corrective feedback to learners of Japanese in an eight-week summer program. Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) found, however, that for learners of Spanish in summer and semester programs, time spent with the host family was significantly correlated with students' belief that they had learned as much language as they had anticipated learning during the time abroad. Vande Berg et al. (2009) also reported a significant relationship between time spent with host families and SOPI gains for learners of French, German, and Spanish.

In addition to measures relating language growth to target language contact in the homestay, student perspectives on the homestay experience have been extensively reported, with a trend toward positive affective outcomes. Large-scale studies have reported that, at the conclusion of their programs, 85% of students felt comfortable with their host families and more than 90% would recommend a homestay to others (Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004, pp. 257, 260), 80% of learners thought that living with a host family was "very important" or "essential" to the improvement of their language skills (Gutel, 2007–2008, p. 177), and 64% held unequivocally positive views of the contributions of the homestay setting to their language learning (Diao et al., 2011, p. 122). Evaluations of homestay relationships and learning outcomes were not, of course, uniformly positive across study abroad participants and additionally fluctuated over time as students navigated the study abroad experience (Diao et al., 2011). Ethnographic and case studies have documented individuals' negative attitudes toward the homestay placement, including feelings of discomfort, isolation, and disappointment with limited interaction (Allen, 2010; Kinginger, 2008; O'Donnell, 2004; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Wilkinson, 1998) as well as positive feelings of integration and comfort (Spender, 2011) and appreciation of the host family as a key

point of access to language practice and social networks (Castañeda & Zirger, 2011).

The host family perspective on the homestay experience has been much less discussed in the literature. Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002) interviewed 24 host families in Spain and Mexico and found that, while all considered the family to be a valuable linguistic resource for students, many mentioned individual student characteristics as factors that limited interaction and reported that they would not push students who were reluctant to participate in family activities. Comparing student and host family perspectives from the same sites, Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) discovered a marked discrepancy in assumptions about who was responsible for encouraging participation in family activities—students thought that hosts should issue invitations, and families felt that students needed to take initiative. Stephenson (1999) surveyed and interviewed 56 Chilean host families and found that they most commonly cited cultural exchange as a reason for hosting American students, followed by social reasons such as companionship, and believed that hosting changed their own appreciation of Chilean culture and their views of people from the United States, but not specific political beliefs and social values. Engel (2011) conducted interviews with members of 15 host families in Spain and found that they (1) viewed themselves as local guides, teachers, and cultural mediators for students, as well as surrogate family figures; (2) identified cultural transmissions from American students in the areas of lifestyle, food practices, values, religion, politics, and language; and (3) reported that hosting students benefited them economically and socially by augmenting income and providing companionship and a sense of purpose.

From the wealth of research on study abroad, it is clear that learner experiences and language development vary greatly and at times fail to meet expectations of the assumed homestay advantage. As Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2010) found in implementing assignments to in-

crease student-family interactions in programs for Spanish, there can be a discrepancy between what students say they want to accomplish during a study abroad homestay experience and what they actually do while abroad. The current study was designed to further explore student and host family perspectives and their relationship to students' oral proficiency gains during study abroad across three target languages (Spanish, Mandarin, and Russian). The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How did students perceive their relationship with their host family?
2. To what extent were students' perceptions related to both their satisfaction with their language learning experiences and their actual language gains?
3. How did host families perceive the disposition of the student they hosted?
4. To what extent were host families' perceptions related to student language gains?

Methods

Participants

The total number of participants by language is shown in Table 1. Although program staff assisted in recruiting participants for this study, participation by both students and host families was voluntary. Upon completion of all study requirements, participating students and families received compensation for their time.

Student Participants

Between the spring 2011 and fall 2012 semesters, data were collected from 152 students enrolled in semester-long study abroad programs and living in homestays in Lima, Peru, and Valparaíso, Chile; Nanjing, Beijing, and Shanghai, China; and St. Petersburg, Russia. The programs were operated by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), a U.S.-based organization that accepts students from a variety of American universities. Some

TABLE 1

Participant Population				
Participants	Spanish	Mandarin	Russian	Total
Students	53	49	50	152
Hosts	31	26	30	87

students were directly enrolled in local universities, while others took courses designed for international students or the program group. Although coursework varied by program, all courses were taught exclusively in the target language.

The student population was composed of 92 females and 60 males between ages 18 and 45, with an average age of 20.9 years ($SD = 2.30$). The majority of participants were in their junior year of university study, with 1 gap-year student, 6 sophomores, 33 seniors, and 2 recent graduates. Participants reported a wide variety of majors, with 64% majoring in the target language or related area studies. The average length of prior formal study of the target language was 4.3 years, with a range from 0 to 15 years. English was the sole language used in the childhood home by 116 students; 15 home languages were listed by the other students. While some learners were studying their home language (four Russian, three Mandarin, and two Spanish), their number was insufficient to constitute a separate group for statistical analysis.

Host Family Participants

A subset of 87 representatives of families who hosted these study abroad students

also participated in the study. Families were asked to designate one adult member of the household to participate in data collection. Table 2 shows the composition of the 87 informant host families by language.

Of the 14 single-member households, 2 were composed of host fathers. A total of 43 households included two parents, and 10 included host grandparents. There were 24 households with no children, 41 with one child, and 22 with multiple children living at home. Of the households with children, 30 included children ages 17 to 25 who could be considered peers of the hosted student, while 16 had younger children and 17 had adult children living at home. Three families were hosting foreign students for the first time, 10 had hosted a single student before, 22 had hosted two to five students, and 52 had hosted more than five students previously.

Instruments

SOPI

The SOPI, a 45-minute tape-mediated test developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL; Stansfield, 1996), was administered as a pretest and posttest in order to measure students' oral proficiency gains.

TABLE 2

Host Family Composition				
Number of Members	Spanish	Mandarin	Russian	Total
Single	3	2	9	14
Multiple	28	24	21	73

The SOPI requires test takers to follow instructions in a printed booklet while listening to an audio file that delivers 15 speaking tasks (13 for Russian). The test is designed to elicit speech samples rated according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 1999), with an algorithm used to calculate a global rating from the ratings on the individual tasks. Possible SOPI ratings range from Below Novice High to Superior.

Surveys

Surveys were completed in English by students and in the local language by host family representatives at the beginning and end of the semester. The pre-survey asked students about their language and travel background and host family composition; the pre-survey for families asked about their previous hosting experiences and motivations for hosting. The post-survey asked students and families about language activities conducted at home and student dispositions toward the host family. Students were also asked to evaluate statements about the homestay experience.

Procedures

Survey data were collected during Weeks 2 and 3 of the study abroad program once students had begun their homestays and again near the end of the semester, at about Week 15. The majority of participants completed the surveys online, and printed versions were made available to those for whom Internet access was problematic.

SOPIs were administered during Weeks 2 or 3 and again during Week 15 in a language lab or in classrooms using digital recorders at sites without access to lab facilities. SOPI ratings were assigned by trained raters familiar with the test format and the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. More than one third of Spanish SOPIs and all Mandarin and Russian SOPIs were double-rated to establish interrater reliability. Moderate agreement between raters was found, with a linear weighted kappa of 0.55. Ratings that did not agree were adjudicated based upon close examination of individual task ratings and rater comments.

Data Analysis

Because the majority of participants gained just one sublevel or did not change from pretest to posttest SOPI ratings, students were divided into groups of “gainers” and “nongainers” to analyze how their language gains related to participant perceptions of the homestay. Kendall’s Tau correlation was selected to measure for significance in these relationships, using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Inc., version 19.0). To compare participant perceptions across language groups, the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used.

Results

Students’ Perceptions of the Homestay Experience

The 151 students who completed the post-survey provided mostly positive responses about the homestay experience, as Table 3 shows (one student did not complete the post-survey). Different patterns emerged within each language, with students of Spanish overall more positive than students of Mandarin and Russian. A Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was significant variation based on language for each evaluative statement (see Appendix A for full results disaggregated by language with test statistics). More than one quarter of Russian students disagreed or only somewhat agreed that they were glad to have lived with a host family, compared with 6% of Spanish and 10% of Mandarin students. About one fifth of students of Mandarin and Russian disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt like a member of the family, in contrast to the 11% of Spanish students who merely disagreed. Only a single learner of Spanish disagreed that the host family helped improve his or her language skills, while 12% of learners of Mandarin and 8% of learners of Russian disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Approximately 18% of Mandarin students and 24% of Russian students also disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would keep in touch with their host families, in contrast to 8% of students of Spanish who

TABLE 3

Student Evaluation of the Homestay (n = 151)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am glad that I lived with a host family.	98 (65%)	32 (21%)	16 (11%)	5 (3%)	0 (0%)
I felt like a member of the family.	54 (36%)	37 (25%)	34 (23%)	21 (14%)	5 (3%)
My host family helped me improve my [language] skills.	76 (50%)	39 (26%)	25 (17%)	8 (5%)	3 (2%)
I will keep in touch with my host family after returning to the United States.	63 (42%)	37 (25%)	26 (17%)	18 (12%)	7 (5%)
I would recommend living with a host family to other students.	93 (62%)	34 (23%)	20 (13%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)

disagreed. However, despite varying feeling toward their host families, nearly all students would recommend living with a host family to other students studying abroad.

Correspondence of Students' Perceptions to Their Language Learning Satisfaction and Language Gains

Students were also asked in the post-survey to indicate their agreement with a statement about the extent to which their language learn-

ing compared with their expectations. Table 4 shows responses by language. Across languages, more than one third of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had learned as much as anticipated. There was, however, considerable variation based on language, with 25% of students of Spanish and 27% of students of Mandarin in disagreement compared with 50% of students of Russian. A Kruskal-Wallis test found that the difference between language groups was significant, $H(2) = 7.22, p = 0.027$.

TABLE 4

Student Response to "I Learned As Much [Language] As I Thought I Would" (n = 151)

Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (n = 53)	11 (21%)	17 (32%)	12 (23%)	10 (19%)	3 (6%)
Mandarin (n = 48)	13 (27%)	12 (25%)	10 (21%)	9 (19%)	4 (8%)
Russian (n = 50)	5 (10%)	14 (28%)	6 (12%)	18 (36%)	7 (14%)
Total	29 (19%)	43 (28%)	28 (19%)	37 (25%)	14 (9%)

Table 5 compares students' language learning satisfaction with their perceptions of the homestay, with survey responses collapsed into three categories: strongly agree plus agree, somewhat agree, and disagree plus strongly disagree. The table demonstrates that students who were disappointed with their language learning were more likely to have negative feelings about the homestay. Significant but moderate correlations were found between satisfaction with language learning and satisfaction with the homestay, with the largest effect seen between perceived language learning and the feeling that the host family helped participants improve language skills.

In terms of measured language gains, pre-test and posttest SOPI ratings were available for a total of 149 students. Table 6 shows the distribution of pre- and post-SOPI ratings, and Table 7 shows SOPI gains by language. All participants maintained or improved their oral proficiency ratings over the course of their programs, and a paired samples *t* test showed that participant gains were significant, $t(148) = -13.23$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.74$.

Table 8 shows how student SOPI gains related to their perceptions of the homestay for the 148 students for whom both pre- and post-SOPI ratings and surveys were available. There were not large differences in perceptions of the homestay between students who made gains on the SOPI and those who did not, although greater proportions of gainers than nongainers expressed agreement in each area. Only the relationship between SOPI gain and being glad to have lived with a host family was significant, $\tau = 0.158$, p (two-tailed) = 0.044. Therefore, in response to the second research question, student perceptions of the homestay experience were more closely related to their language learning satisfaction than to their actual oral proficiency gains as measured by the SOPI.

Host Families' Perceptions of the Hosted Student

Families were asked in the pre-survey to indicate how important four different factors

were in their decision to host foreign students. Across languages, more than half of host families rated spending time with a student from another culture, spending time with a student who speaks another language, and helping the student to learn the target language as very important motivations for hosting a foreign student, while having additional company at home was considered only somewhat important by 42% of families and not important by 17%. There was divergence by language in the motivation most commonly rated as very important. The desire to help students learn the target language was selected most often by Spanish-speaking (97%) and Russian (73%) families, while the desire to spend time with a student from another culture was selected most often by Chinese families (69%). For both of these motivations, there was significant variation based on language group (see Appendix B for full responses).

When asked to indicate their agreement with a series of statements about their hosted student at the end of the semester, the 87 host family representatives who completed the post-survey were quite positive, as Table 9 shows. Across languages, nearly all families either agreed or strongly agreed (98%) that their students were comfortable in the family's home. The majority of families also agreed or strongly agreed that the students they hosted were talkative (85%), interested in spending time with the family (84%), eager to learn (95%), and open to new cultures and customs (97%). Host families had more varied feelings about whether their students were homesick, as did the individual students themselves.

Differing patterns were seen when analyzing by language, with Spanish-speaking host families more positive as a whole than Chinese and Russian families. For all questions except being talkative with the family, there were significant differences based on language group (see Appendix B for full results disaggregated by language with test statistics). The majority of Spanish-speaking families (87%) strongly agreed that their

TABLE 5

Student Language Learning Satisfaction and Perceptions of the Homestay

Language Learning Satisfaction	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I Am Glad That I Lived With a Host Family			
Learned as much as expected (n = 72)	69 (96%)	3 (4%)	0 (0%)
Learned somewhat as much as expected (n = 28)	26 (93%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
Did not learn as much as expected (n = 51)	35 (69%)	12 (24%)	4 (8%)
$\tau = 0.366, p \text{ (two-tailed)} < 0.01$			
I Felt Like a Member of the Family			
Learned as much as expected (n = 72)	59 (82%)	9 (13%)	4 (6%)
Learned somewhat as much as expected (n = 28)	20 (71%)	3 (11%)	5 (18%)
Did not learn as much as expected (n = 51)	12 (24%)	22 (43%)	17 (33%)
$\tau = 0.468, p \text{ (two-tailed)} < 0.01$			
My Host Family Helped Me Improve My [Language] Skills			
Learned as much as expected (n = 72)	70 (97%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
Learned somewhat as much as expected (n = 28)	24 (86%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)
Did not learn as much as expected (n = 51)	21 (41%)	20 (39%)	10 (20%)
$\tau = 0.573, p \text{ (two-tailed)} < 0.01$			
I Will Keep in Touch With My Host Family After Returning to the United States			
Learned as much as expected (n = 72)	60 (83%)	7 (10%)	5 (7%)
Learned somewhat as much as expected (n = 28)	22 (79%)	2 (7%)	4 (14%)
Did not learn as much as expected (n = 51)	18 (35%)	17 (33%)	16 (31%)
$\tau = 0.436, p \text{ (two-tailed)} < 0.01$			
I Would Recommend Living With a Host Family to Other Students Studying Abroad			
Learned as much as expected (n = 72)	67 (93%)	5 (7%)	0 (0%)
Learned somewhat as much as expected (n = 28)	25 (89%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)
Did not learn as much as expected (n = 51)	35 (69%)	13 (25%)	3 (6%)
$\tau = 0.379, p \text{ (two-tailed)} < 0.01$			

TABLE 6

Student Pre- and Post-SOPI Ratings by Language (n = 149)

Rating	Chinese		Russian		Spanish	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Below Novice High	8	0	0	0	0	0
Novice High	1	1	5	1	0	0
Intermediate Low	16	8	16	5	11	4
Intermediate Mid	14	13	23	30	4	5
Intermediate High	6	11	6	10	17	12
Advanced Low	4	9	0	4	14	18
Advanced Mid	0	7	0	0	1	8
Advanced High	0	0	0	0	3	3
Total	49		50		50	

students were comfortable in the home, compared with 50% of Chinese families and 43% of Russian families. In terms of interest in spending time with the family, 71% of Spanish families strongly agreed, compared to 35% of Chinese and only 10% of Russian families. More than 80% of Spanish-speaking families also strongly agreed that their students were eager to learn and open to new customs and cultures compared to about 60% of Russian families and less than half of Chinese families. Fewer Chinese families reported that their students were homesick (12% agreed or strongly agreed) than families hosting students of Spanish (42%) or Russian (40%).

Correspondence Between Host Families' Perceptions and Students' Language Gains

There were no significant relationships found between any of the measured host family perceptions and student SOPI gains.

Discussion

Although students as a group viewed the homestay in a positive light, a finding that is consistent with previous research (see, e.g., Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004), the data indicate that significant differences existed in both student and host family perceptions of the homestay relationship based

TABLE 7

Student SOPI Gains by Language (n = 149)

Language	No Change	Gain of One Sublevel	Gain of Two Sublevels	Gain of Three Sublevels
Spanish	21	22	7	0
Mandarin	3	19	25	0
Russian	19	23	8	2
Total	43	64	40	2

TABLE 8

Student SOPI Gains and Perceptions of the Homestay

SOPI Result	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree
I Am Glad That I Lived With a Host Family			
Nongainer (n = 43)	35 (81%)	6 (14%)	2 (5%)
Gainer (n = 105)	92 (88%)	10 (10%)	3 (3%)
I Felt Like a Member of the Family			
Nongainer (n = 43)	23 (53%)	9 (21%)	11 (26%)
Gainer (n = 105)	65 (62%)	25 (24%)	15 (14%)
My Host Family Helped Me Improve My [Language] Skills			
Nongainer (n = 43)	32 (74%)	10 (23%)	1 (2%)
Gainer (n = 105)	80 (76%)	15 (14%)	10 (10%)
I Will Keep in Touch With My Host Family After Returning to the United States			
Nongainer (n = 43)	27 (63%)	9 (21%)	7 (16%)
Gainer (n = 105)	70 (67%)	17 (16%)	18 (17%)
I Would Recommend Living With a Host Family to Other Students Studying Abroad			
Nongainer (n = 43)	34 (79%)	7 (16%)	2 (5%)
Gainer (n = 105)	90 (86%)	13 (12%)	2 (2%)

on language. This variation could suggest that cultural proximity between students' native communities and the communities in which they studied shaped how students

perceived and responded to their homestay experiences, with learners of Spanish and host families in Chile and Peru more readily developing an affinity than homestay

TABLE 9

Host Family Description of the Hosted Student (n = 87)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The student is comfortable in my home.	53 (60%)	32 (37%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
The student is talkative with my family.	41 (47%)	33 (38%)	11 (13%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
The student is interested in spending time with my family.	34 (39%)	40 (46%)	12 (14%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
The student is homesick.	5 (6%)	23 (26%)	34 (39%)	21 (24%)	4 (5%)
The student is eager to learn.	55 (63%)	28 (32%)	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
The student is open to new cultures and customs.	55 (63%)	29 (33%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

pairings in the other two countries. It is also possible that the findings point to a difference in the types of U.S. students who choose to learn and pursue study abroad for particular less commonly taught languages such as Mandarin and Russian. In either case, it is important to remember that study abroad learners' engagement with the host community is shaped by identity negotiation as they respond to the challenges to their beliefs and habits that arise during a stay abroad (Kinginger, 2013a). Previous research has suggested that students who are not received as expected, or as desired, in their study abroad destination, whether because of issues of gender in Russia (Davidson, 2010), foreigner status in Japan (Iino, 2006), or ethnic identity in Spain (Goldoni, 2013), need to be equipped with tools to encourage continued contact rather than withdrawal in the face of culture clashes.

While attitudes toward the homestay provide important evaluative feedback, this study's limited results regarding whether more positive perceptions of the homestay lead to greater oral proficiency gains must be considered in order to help learners in study abroad programs maximize language learning. The finding that, among all of the student and host family perceptions that were investigated, only one weak significant relationship was found with language gain could be an artifact of the gross scale of the SOPI. As a measure of holistic oral proficiency, the SOPI may not be fine-grained enough to discern progress made during a semester abroad, and it does not document growth in pragmatics, fluency, vocabulary, listening, reading, writing, or such affective areas as anxiety or willingness to communicate; perhaps it is these areas in which half of the students who did not gain on the SOPI were nonetheless satisfied with their language learning experience. Still, this study demonstrated links between satisfaction with the homestay experience and satisfaction with the amount of language learned during study abroad, and also that students who were glad to have lived with a host family

were more likely to gain on the SOPI. Thus, even if there is not an inherent homestay advantage, there is an advantage to be found in a happy homestay.

Implications for Study Abroad Programs

What can programs do to facilitate a homestay experience that is appreciated by both students and their hosts, which can in turn promote greater language gain? First, students should be prepared for the experiences that they will encounter in the host community, and specifically the host home, that may challenge their expectations and values. Discussion of potential areas of identity negotiation should begin in predeparture orientation and continue throughout the program. As Vande Berg et al. (2009) found in investigating the effect of study abroad program components on SOPI gains, students who learned about cultural differences during predeparture orientation sessions had both greater gains and higher satisfaction with their study abroad experience than those who did not receive such support. To enhance language learning, the authors also suggest employing in-program cultural mentors to help students reflect and remain open as they navigate the host culture.

Second, students should be encouraged to clearly demonstrate their interest in engaging with their host families and to be proactive in pursuing interactions and activities. It is critical that students understand that extensive interaction with native speakers does not happen automatically during study abroad, but rather requires a personal commitment to generating and taking advantage of speaking opportunities, including with the most obvious source: the host family. Programs can help students internalize this advice through explicit instruction or required assignments. Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2010) found that students who were initially hesitant about a project to complete conversation tasks with their host families reflected later that the assignment encouraged and deepened

conversations that otherwise would not have occurred.

Third, host families should be given more ownership in the language learning process of the students they host. Programs can ask families for their interpretation of homestay practices and interactions, including misunderstandings that occur with hosted students (Kinginger, 2013b), maintain continuous communication with hosts to discuss their role in student progress (Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2002), and provide families with training in strategies to draw their students into meaningful conversational exchange (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Such training must necessarily be culturally appropriate and can be tailored to the local audience. For example, if Chinese families see cultural exchange as a more important element than language assistance in their decision to host foreign students, as this study found, they may benefit from more discussion of the large role that host families can play in helping students to improve their speaking skills.

Implications for Research

Further research on the language development that occurs during study abroad should consider additional means of assessing oral gains such as specific measures of fluency, complexity, and accuracy (Serrano, Tragant, & Llanes, 2012), as well as gains in other skills. The study findings raise other questions worthy of investigation, such as:

1. What are students' expectations for language learning during study abroad, and how do they gauge whether these are met?
2. What host family perceptions could help shed light on the language gains students make as a result of homestay interactions?
3. Which trait or traits associated with each language group contributed to their divergent perspectives about the homestay relationship?

The differences that emerged based on language could be elucidated with survey questions targeting intercultural understanding in order to explore how intercul-

tural development informs language development during study abroad. More open-ended questions would also enable students and host families to provide explanations for statements with which they disagreed and allow for qualitative analysis of perspectives from both sides. Furthermore, interviews of host families, such as those used by Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002), would be invaluable in helping to understand the host family point of view on homestay interactions. Finally, while this study was designed to fill gaps in the research on language learning in study abroad by collecting data from a large number of participants, including host families, in different study abroad settings, the field would benefit from studies examining more diverse populations of study abroad participants with regard to age, sending institution, country of origin, and program type in order to determine which models succeed in nurturing language learning and why.

Within the research design, the study had some necessary limitations. First, findings were based on self-reported survey data that represent subjective perspectives that are not static over time and may show bias toward positive responses. Second, the survey design inherently reflected researcher beliefs about what participants would find important to report, and results were thus colored by the questions asked. Interviews or observations could provide more robust data, although these qualitative methods carry their own potential researcher and respondent biases.

Conclusion

This study investigated students' and host families' perspectives on the study abroad homestay experience and the relationship of those perceptions to student language gains. Results showed that groups of learners of Spanish, Mandarin, and Russian living in homestay placements made significant gains on the SOPI, a measure of holistic oral proficiency, after one semester abroad. Students and their host families had largely positive views of the relationship that developed during the time abroad, although these

perceptions varied significantly by target language, with learners of Spanish and their hosts in South America most positive, participants in Russia least positive, and participants in China generally in the middle. Most student and host perceptions of the homestay relationship did not correlate with language gains, but students who indicated that they were glad to have lived with a host family were more likely to make a gain on the SOPI. Students' satisfaction with their language learning during the time abroad was significantly correlated to positive feelings about their relationships to the host family.

These study findings provide additional evidence that, by placing study abroad learners in a situation of close contact with native speakers, a homestay placement can facilitate language development. Beyond gains made on the SOPI, students who reported learning as much target language as they expected overwhelmingly agreed that their host families helped improve their language skills. Future studies should consider the specific areas in which students see progress during study abroad in order to pinpoint what is being learned that is not captured by holistic measures of oral proficiency. From both a research and programmatic perspective, it will be important to explore interventions that could magnify the benefits of a study abroad homestay so that it truly becomes a wellspring of language learning.

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APPENDIX A

Student Survey Responses (n = 151)

TABLE A1					
I Am Glad That I Lived With a Host Family					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (n = 53)	40 (75%)	10 (19%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (n = 48)	33 (69%)	10 (21%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Russian (n = 50)	25 (50%)	12 (24%)	11 (22%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
Total	98 (65%)	32 (21%)	16 (11%)	5 (3%)	0 (0%)
$H(2) = 9.359, p = 0.009$					

TABLE A2					
I Felt Like a Member of the Family					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (n = 53)	28 (53%)	11 (12%)	8 (15%)	6 (11%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (n = 48)	14 (29%)	14 (29%)	11 (23%)	6 (13%)	3 (6%)
Russian (n = 50)	12 (24%)	12 (24%)	15 (30%)	9 (18%)	2 (4%)
Total	54 (36%)	37 (25%)	34 (23%)	21 (14%)	5 (3%)
$H(2) = 10.370, p = 0.006$					

TABLE A3					
My Host Family Helped Me Improve My [Language] Skills					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 53)	34 (64%)	13 (25%)	5 (9%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 48)	22 (46%)	14 (29%)	6 (13%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 50)	20 (40%)	12 (24%)	14 (28%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
Total	76 (50%)	39 (26%)	25 (17%)	8 (5%)	3 (2%)
<i>H</i> (2) = 7.22, <i>p</i> = 0.011					

TABLE A4					
I Will Keep in Touch With My Host Family After Returning to the United States					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 53)	31 (58%)	12 (23%)	6 (11%)	4 (8%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 48)	19 (40%)	10 (21%)	10 (21%)	6 (13%)	3 (6%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 50)	13 (26%)	15 (30%)	10 (20%)	8 (16%)	4 (8%)
Total	63 (42%)	37 (25%)	26 (17%)	18 (12%)	7 (5%)
<i>H</i> (2) = 12.823, <i>p</i> = 0.002					

TABLE A5					
I Would Recommend Living With a Host Family to Other Students Studying Abroad					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 53)	39 (74%)	9 (17%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 48)	30 (63%)	11 (23%)	7 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 50)	24 (48%)	14 (28%)	9 (18%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Total	93 (62%)	34 (23%)	20 (13%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
<i>H</i> (2) = 7.743, <i>p</i> = 0.021					

APPENDIX B

Family Survey Responses (n = 87)

TABLE B1			
Host Family Motivation: To Spend Time With a Student From Another Culture			
Language	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Spanish (n = 30)	27 (90%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (n = 26)	18 (69%)	8 (31%)	0 (0%)
Russian (n = 30)	15 (50%)	14 (47%)	1 (3%)
Total	60 (70%)	25 (29%)	1 (1%)
$H(2) = 11.498, p = 0.003$			

TABLE B2			
Host Family Motivation: To Spend Time With a Student Who Speaks Another Language			
Language	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Spanish (n = 29)	19 (66%)	9 (31%)	1 (3%)
Mandarin (n = 25)	14 (56%)	10 (40%)	1 (4%)
Russian (n = 29)	14 (48%)	12 (41%)	3 (10%)
Total	47 (57%)	31 (37%)	5 (6%)
$H(2) = 2.068, p = 0.356$			

TABLE B3			
Host Family Motivation: To Help the Student Learn [Language]			
Language	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Spanish (n = 31)	30 (97%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (n = 26)	14 (54%)	11 (42%)	1 (4%)
Russian (n = 30)	22 (73%)	8 (27%)	0 (0%)
Total	66 (76%)	20 (23%)	1 (1%)
$H(2) = 14.425, p = 0.001$			

TABLE B4			
Host Family Motivation: To Have Additional Company at Home			
Language	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 29)	14 (48%)	12 (41%)	3 (10%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	11 (42%)	11 (42%)	4 (15%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 29)	9 (31%)	13 (45%)	7 (24%)
Total	34 (41%)	35 (42%)	14 (17%)
$H(2) = 2.646, p = 0.266$			

TABLE B5					
The Student Is Comfortable in My Home					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 31)	27 (87%)	4 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	13 (50%)	12 (46%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 30)	13 (43%)	16 (53%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	53 (60%)	32 (37%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
$H(2) = 14.050, p = 0.001$					

TABLE B6					
The Student Is Talkative With My Family					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 31)	20 (66%)	8 (26%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	10 (38%)	11 (42%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 30)	11 (37%)	14 (47%)	5 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	41 (47%)	33 (38%)	11 (13%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
$H(2) = 5.398, p = 0.067$					

TABLE B7					
The Student Is Interested in Spending Time With My Family					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 31)	22 (71%)	5 (16%)	4 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	9 (35%)	15 (58%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 30)	3 (10%)	20 (67%)	7 (23%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	34 (39%)	40 (46%)	12 (14%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
$H(2) = 18.153, p < 0.001$					

TABLE B8					
The Student Is Homesick					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 31)	3 (10%)	10 (32%)	15 (48%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	10 (38%)	9 (35%)	4 (15%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 30)	1 (3%)	11 (37%)	9 (30%)	9 (30%)	0 (0%)
Total	5 (6%)	23 (26%)	34 (39%)	21 (24%)	4 (5%)
$H(2) = 12.707, p = 0.002$					

TABLE B9					
The Student Is Eager to Learn					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 31)	25 (81%)	5 (16%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	12 (46%)	14 (54%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 30)	18 (60%)	9 (30%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	55 (63%)	28 (32%)	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
$H(2) = 6.396, p = 0.041$					

TABLE B10					
The Student Is Open to New Cultures and Customs					
Language	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Spanish (<i>n</i> = 31)	25 (81%)	6 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Mandarin (<i>n</i> = 26)	11 (42%)	13 (50%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Russian (<i>n</i> = 30)	19 (63%)	10 (33%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	55 (63%)	29 (33%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
$H(2) = 9.374, p = 0.009$					