Theses and Dissertations

2021-04-07

Ecological Perspectives on Study Abroad for Language Learning

Matthew Thomas Bird

Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Education Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Bird, Matthew Thomas, "Ecological Perspectives on Study Abroad for Language Learning" (2021). Theses and Dissertations. 9413.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/9413

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Ecological Perspectives on Study Abroad for Language Learning

Matthew Thomas Bird

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Peter Rich, Chair
Kirk Belnap
Jennifer Bown
Stephen Yanchar

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2021 Matthew Thomas Bird
All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

Ecological Perspectives on Study Abroad for Language Learning

Matthew Thomas Bird
Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology, BYU
Doctor of Philosophy

The field of study abroad for language learning has drawn extensively on related fields such as applied linguistics and psychology to conceptualize learners’ experiences, which then informs how practitioners go about designing programs for those learners. Research has encouraged practitioners to increase learners’ access to the target language (e.g., through speaking partners, content courses), but it has also become clear that while access might be necessary, it does not guarantee learner engagement and growth. This dissertation explores two unique conceptual frameworks for understanding language learners and presents empirical research that demonstrates the kinds of findings that these frameworks can produce. The common subject of analysis involved the experiences of participants who struggled to engage in speaking during an Arabic study abroad program.

The first framework emerged from a grounded theory analysis and characterizes participants’ struggles as a clash of expectations that required negotiation. The findings fit well with a recent “ecological turn” in language learning, and a review of study abroad research from an ecological perspective suggested avenues of research that would further develop the field’s understanding of access, engagement, and the learners themselves. The second framework built on interdisciplinary insights to present a hermeneutic moral realist account of the same participants who struggled to engage in speaking activities. This approach revealed a moral ecology of unstructured speaking with unique moral goods, reference points, and tensions that the participants had to navigate as they tried to find good speaking opportunities for themselves. This dissertation positions these findings within current second language study abroad experiences, offering an ecological perspective and recommendations for students and faculty alike.

Keywords: study abroad and language acquisition, study abroad programs, grounded theory, ecological theory, hermeneutic phenomenology
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is difficult to recognize the multitude of people who impacted my research and helped me give it being. Surely no one has been as directly helpful as Dr. Peter Rich, who patiently encouraged me to pursue my interests in language education research and provided timely counsel over the course of several years. Dr. Steve Yanchar partly authored the theoretical framework that drove the second half of my research, and his passion for his work was contagious. Drs. Kirk Belnap and Dilworth Parkinson mentored me for years both before and during my graduate studies. I long ago lost count of the many doors that they have opened for me. Dr. Jennifer Bown gave me courage to pursue a dissertation using qualitative methods and pointed me toward academic conversations relevant to my work. I am humbled to have received the help of so many admirable scholars and am delighted to call them my mentors and friends.

I also feel to thank my parents and siblings for their encouragement and unfailing confidence in me. My father, Randy, lost his battle with cancer after I started graduate school, but despite the distractions of terminal illness and loss, I have always felt that he and my mother, Cyndi, have been behind me all the way. Despite delays in my progress, not once has my family communicated doubt or worry about my graduate studies—a fact that I will not forget.

An enormous share of my gratitude belongs to my wife and partner in many adventures, Joy. When the opportunity came to conduct research for four months in Jordan, she did not hesitate to transplant our family overseas for the third time in five years. Her unwavering loyalty and kindred spirit have made this all possible, and I cannot imagine a better companion.

My final thanks are to God, my Heavenly Father, who set me on the path and placed so many wonderful people along the way to help me.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE................................................................. i
ABSTRACT................................................................. ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................. iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS....................................................... iv
LIST OF TABLES .............................................................. x
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................. xi
DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AGENDA AND STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION .... xii
ARTICLE 1: Struggling to Engage With Arabs on Study Abroad: Negotiating Expectations

for Speaking................................................................. 1
Abstract........................................................................ 2
Introduction ...................................................................... 3
Theoretical Framework ................................................... 4
  Defining Context ....................................................... 5
  Defining Engagement ................................................ 5
Methods.......................................................................... 6
  Researcher Perspective .............................................. 7
  Program Description .................................................. 7
  Sample......................................................................... 8
  Data Collection and Analysis ...................................... 9
Participant Profiles ......................................................... 10
  Andrea ....................................................................... 11
  Austin ....................................................................... 11
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purposive Study</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reflection</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelioration</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: Research Consent Form</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: Grounded Theory Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: Audit Trail: Grounded Theory Analysis</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: Audit Trail: Moral Configuration Analysis</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISSERTATION CONCLUSION</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISSERTATION REFERENCES</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Article 1

Table 1  A Selection of Expectations and Tensions .................................................................20

Article 3

Table 1  Participant Information ............................................................................................95
Table 2  Moral Configuration Codes ........................................................................................97
Table 3  The Moral Phenomena Involved in Finding Speaking Opportunities ......................118
LIST OF FIGURES

Article 1

Figure 1  Judy’s Reasons for Studying Abroad ................................................................. 17
Figure 2  Matrix of Expectations and Speaking Categories ............................................ 39

Article 2

Figure 1  The Intersection of Three Fields ....................................................................... 51
Figure 2  Insights From the Ecology of Study Abroad for Language Learning .............. 54
Figure 3  Insights From Ecological Research in Second Language Acquisition .............. 62
DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AGENDA AND STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation, *Ecological Perspectives on Study Abroad for Language Learning*, explores the experience of language learners on an intensive Arabic study abroad program through the lens of two different analytic frameworks: grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and hermeneutic moral realism (Yanchar & Slife, 2017). Both of these frameworks contribute to an ecological turn in language learning (Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017) and present unique insights for the improvement of study abroad programming and individual language learning. The body of the dissertation consists of three articles.

The first article, *Struggling to Engage With Arabs on Study Abroad: Negotiating Expectations for Speaking*, produced a grounded theory framework that connects the participants’ struggles to misalignment in their personal expectations, in the program’s communicated expectations, and between personal and program expectations.

The second article, *The Ecology of Study Abroad for Language Learning: Synthesis and Interdisciplinary Insights*, reviews ecological study abroad research, an area that became important as I analyzed the findings of the first article. This article identifies value-based ecological research as a gap in the literature and draws together work from Hodges (2015) and Yanchar and Slife (2017) to propose future research from a value-based perspective. This article has been accepted for publication in the *L2 Journal*.

The third article, *The Moral Ecology of Unstructured Speaking on Study Abroad: Finding Speaking Opportunities*, reanalyses the data of the first article using a value-based method as proposed in the second article. Using Yanchar and Slife’s (2016) moral configurations approach generated new themes from the same data by conceptualizing the practices in which participants engaged as a moral ecology of language learning.
There are also four appendices that document this dissertation’s research process. Appendix A presents a copy of the “Research Consent Form” that participants signed before participating in the intensive Arabic study abroad program. Appendix B includes the protocols that were used throughout data collection. Appendix C includes an audit trail of the grounded theory analysis presented in the first article. Appendix D includes an audit trail of the moral configuration analysis presented in the third article.

Together the articles presented herein outline a direction for qualitative language learning research that generates practical insights for future study abroad participants and the administrators and instructors who implement and evaluate study abroad programs. This dissertation provides new ways to conceptualize language learners and their experiences, and it demonstrates the kinds of insights that can be discovered through multiple theoretical lenses.
ARTICLE 1

Struggling to Engage With Arabs on Study Abroad:

Negotiating Expectations for Speaking

Matthew T. Bird

Brigham Young University
Abstract

Study abroad is a common pedagogical intervention to accelerate second-language students’ acquisition of both the target language and cultural understanding. In this study, we analyzed student journals, supervisor observation notes, and interviews of Arabic study abroad students in Amman, Jordan over a four-month experience. Our goal was to better understand the reasons students struggled during study abroad and the ways they coped with this struggle. We found that struggling study abroad students negotiate between their personal expectations and the expectations that their program provides. Learners who engaged in a process of negotiating different personal and program expectations found creative ways to satisfy both, whereas those who chose not to confront this tension found themselves less and less engaged in speaking activities. We discuss the implications that better understanding these tensions has on the design and delivery of foreign language study abroad programs.

*Keywords*: study abroad and language acquisition, grounded theory, speaking expectations, learner engagement
Introduction

Over the last decade, questions have arisen in study abroad research about the relationship between providing access to second language (L2) speakers and the degree of participant engagement with those speakers, their language, and their cultural institutions. While well-designed programs that provide access to the language may be necessary to help the most participants learn during their time abroad, Bown et al. (2015) reminded the field that “even an optimal program is, of course, no guarantee of student success” (p. 283). Mounting research describes the stagnation of participant growth even when opportunities for access are provided (Allen, 2010; Bird & Belnap, 2018; Bown et al., 2015; Trentman, 2013a; Wilson, 2015). While some participants seem to succeed even without program interventions, others seem to struggle in their language learning despite applying research-backed strategies.

The study abroad (SA) considered herein was conducted by a large private university in the western U.S. Every year since 2011, the university has carried out an intensive Arabic SA program in Amman, Jordan during the Fall semester. Consistent evaluation and research of the program has led to interventions for the purpose of facilitating participant engagement with the host language and culture. For example, the program began to arrange speaking appointments with trained native Arabic speakers through the host language institute. While providing more access seems to have helped, faculty have expressed concern for participants who struggle to move beyond convenient arrangements like this to engage Arabic speakers outside of the institute. Speaking appointments have only provided up to three hours of interaction a week, whereas the program has asked participants to dedicate 10 hours or more.
The intersection of this program-specific need with trends in SA research inspired the specific question of this study: What more can we understand about participants who struggle to engage in speaking outside of the institute by exploring their individual contexts?

**Theoretical Framework**

Researchers have sought to expand the perspective of the field beyond positivistic hypotheses for explaining what happens on study abroad. Gibbons and Bunderson (2005) argue that in any scientific field, thorough exploration of what is happening leads to better explanations of why it is happening. “Exploration leads to the formation of the categories (sets) of empirical observations, and relations among them. These lead in turn to measurement, and then to strong tests of causal predictions and relations among them” (p. 929).

Scholars within the field of SA have suggested exploratory research over the last decades (DeKeyser, 1991; Ginsburg & Miller, 2000; Kinginger, 2008), encouraging researchers to turn their attention to the experiences of study abroad participants. Norton and Toohey (2001) sought to change definitions of “good” language learning so that they “focus not only on learners’ internal characteristics, learning strategies, or linguistic outputs but also on the reception of their actions in particular sociocultural communities” (p. 308). Ushioda (2009) urges “a focus on real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions” (p. 220), and Kinginger (2008) argues that researchers should consider “the ideological forces at play as students attempt to derive meaning and coherence from disparate, often inchoate experiences” (p. 107). Expansions such as these have pushed the subject matter of study abroad research toward more comprehensive approaches to understanding student experiences.

Exploratory research of study abroad has the effect of situating explanatory data, such as measures of language proficiency, in insightful new ways (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2008;
McKeown, 2009; Ushioda, 2009). Additionally, exploring the larger context of learners’ experiences on SA through qualitative inquiry may better equip programs to connect environmental affordances to those things that matter to participants, leading them to take advantage of provided opportunities and engage with the target language and culture (Trentman, 2013a).

**Defining Context**

The word “context” is often invoked in SA research to help make sense of research findings across the field. On one hand, numerous publications use the phrase “study abroad context” to set apart their research from other learning environments, such as on-campus or domestic intensive programs. On the other hand, qualitative reports often describe different kinds of contexts, including social, historical, political, and linguistic contexts, in order to paint a larger picture of the learner and their environment. This research report uses “context” in this second way, with a slight twist. Most qualitative research explicitly chooses a particular context (e.g., the social context) of a learner’s study abroad experience to explore. In the case of this project, however, grounded theory research procedures sought to allow context to emerge without applying external frameworks. This left open the possibility of uncovering new kinds of contexts and ways to describe what happened during the program under study.

**Defining Engagement**

The use of the term “engagement” deserves explanation in the context of this study. In general, engagement denotes a state of emotional or cognitive interaction with an object, place, person, group, or idea. In the field of SA and SLA it is sometimes used to describe students’ choices to participate in specific language learning activities, such as talking with people on the street or attending a cultural event. A student may sit down with a friend and talk in the language
without truly engaging in the conversation, without ascribing personal meaning and value to the interaction. Trentman (2013a) speaks of engagement in this way when addressing the responsibility of SA programs for their participants: “Programs must work to help students find opportunities not only for proximity, but also engagement, potentially through shared interests and activities (such as a conference, play or sport). *This engagement is often dependent on the value (often nonlinguistic) that the learners provide*” (p. 470, emphasis added). In other words, engagement is a state of interaction that involves the emotions, cognition, values, and interests of the learner. As will be shown, the value that learners assigned to different speaking activities proved critical to their level of engagement. Further context for this definition can be found in Trentman’s (2013b) work with Arabic learners in Egypt, which draws on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) framework of communities of practice.

**Methods**

We approached data collection and analysis using grounded theory methods, which aim to allow codes, categories, themes, and substantive theories to emerge from the data through inductive analysis and constant comparison with the data. We adhered to Charmaz’s (2006) interpretive definition of grounded theory, which “calls for the imaginative understanding of the studied phenomenon” (p. 126). Rather than producing a formulaic statement of cause and effect between variables, this theory aims only to “provide interpretive frames from which to view realities” (p. 128). The intent of employing this method was to identify a framework that makes sense of the difficulties participants had with speaking activities on their Arabic SA experience. While we claim no large-scale generalizations, insights resulting from this substantive theory may prove useful for study abroad leaders, researchers, and learners with similar characteristics.
Researcher Perspective

Despite taking various measures in the research process to increase the grounded nature of the results, this study did not presume to remove the effect of the researcher’s perspective. On the contrary, the researchers’ own subjectivity was seen as a valuable contribution to the interpretation of the data. The first author played multiple roles in this study. He was both researcher and study-abroad coordinator. He interacted with SA participants primarily as a program leader and fellow sojourner (i.e., participant observation). As a past graduate of the same SA program, the first author related to participant’s experiences personally, and some of them may have seen him as a near-peer model for their own aspirations (Bandura, 1994). This position allowed him to live around and work with participants on a daily basis for the entirety of the program, simultaneously instructing, evaluating, and researching. While such a position might be considered a weakness in some research endeavors, persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is considered a strength in light of the current project’s objectives and methods.

Program Description

The primary component of interest was the SA speaking experience, which occurred alongside other parts of the program. Besides the two-hour speaking assignment, every weekday included many other assignments and tasks for participants to complete, such as:

- a one-hour reading class in Arabic and English taught by program leaders,
- a two-hour issues class in Arabic taught by an L2 speaker,
- a presentational speaking or writing appointment with an L2 speaker,
- a two-hour reading comprehension and translation assignment, and
- preparations for the next day’s classes and presentations.
While weekends, holidays, and planned program excursions offered some relief from these activities, students worked hard to complete two years’ worth of coursework in 14 weeks. For a more in-depth description of the components of the program, see Bird and Belnap (2018).

Sample

Participants came from a single cohort of students on the university’s 2016 Arabic study abroad program in Amman, Jordan. A purposive sample of 9 participants was chosen from among the 28 possible students based on a criterion-based sampling strategy. Several criteria were consulted during the first half of the semester to indicate which students struggled to engage with Arabic speakers. Each day students were required to submit daily reports in which they reported two aspects of their speaking experience: the hours spent speaking that day and an average measure of their engagement in speaking that day. Taking an average of these two measures during the first half of the semester revealed which students reported more struggling than others, alerting me to potential struggles that could be discussed during interviews with each prospective participant. Based on those averages, daily observations, and experiences that came up during the first round of interviews, the first author selected nine students for further interviewing. However, only eight students remained in the sample, since one student was unable to complete a second official interview. As one of the program administrators, interviews that I conducted with a specific research purpose could sometimes be derailed by the immediate needs of the learner. Of the remaining 8 participants, two were female and six were male, which reflected the gender ratio of the program overall.

“Struggling” was not simply determined by grades. While several of the participants struggled with the program generally and performed linguistically and academically in the lower half of the program, several participants excelled in the program by some academic standards.
Determining which students struggled to engage with their speaking activities ultimately came down to whether they reported (through their journals and interviews) a lack of plentiful, satisfying, meaningful speaking experiences. It was not uncommon for participants to perform well on other parts of the program (e.g., reading translation assignments, presentation appointments, etc.) and struggle with speaking activities beyond the institute’s walls. Additionally, the ways in which participants initially seemed to struggle with speaking engagement varied. For example, some reported plentiful opportunities but few deep conversations, others wrote how dissatisfied they were with the topics their contacts tended to discuss, and others discussed their struggles to balance time spent speaking with the needs of their family.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected and analyzed consistent with grounded theory methods so as to allow emergent perspectives to describe learner speaking experiences on study abroad (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The first author conducted one interview with every participant in the program during the first four weeks, after which he selected participants for further interviewing based on the sampling strategy described above. During the first round of interviews, he identified emerging themes that he could follow up on with each participant during the second round, including participants’ experiences speaking Arabic around other English speakers and their perspectives on Arabic itself. In addition to interviews, weekly language journals were collected in which students reflected on their speaking experiences, among other things. Observations and journal entries provided additional data points by which he confirmed ideas that emerged during each phase of interviewing and analysis. The total amount
of data analyzed came to 16 interviews (two per participant) and roughly 80 journal entries (about 10 per participant).

After the program’s completion, the process of transcription and open coding began, accompanied by memoing and the further formulation of categories and themes (Charmaz, 2006). Several precautions were taken to establish the grounded nature (Charmaz, 2006) and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the analysis results: first, we engaged in constant comparison between results and the data after each round of categorization and thematization; second, the first author’s position as a researcher/leader/peer allowed for prolonged engagement and persistent observation as he collected and analyzed data; third, we conducted member checking by sharing our understanding of each participant’s experience related to the main themes with him/her, confirming that the themes were not misrepresenting the data and the participants’ understandings; fourth, we conducted a negative case analysis during the last round of thematization, revealing misconceptions about the participants’ experience as a whole and refining the resulting framework.

**Participant Profiles**

The first and most granular results of the analysis were descriptions of individual participants that grew and changed as categories and themes emerged. These descriptions served as a space between raw data and the structural or theoretical results which allowed us to keep a focus on the entire sample of participants and avoid zeroing in too early on themes that would not apply to all of the participants and therefore be harder to transfer to the experiences of other study abroad learners. Here, we provide a brief, general outline of each of the eight participants to give context to the emergent framework that will be described afterward.
Andrea

Intending to work in the Middle East to teach English at some point, Andrea came to Jordan excited to develop relationships and practical skills for living in the host country. She sought to engage in the host culture and make strong friendships, but poor health, family issues back in the U.S., and limited language ability slowed her progress. Although she came with a cohort of students with whom she had been friends in previous classes, she was disappointed to find those relationships unreliable at the beginning of the program. While she found other friends among the students, she came to see independence from her compatriots as ideal and worked towards that throughout the program with some success. Still, as a female participant Andrea had to deal with restrictions on her speaking plans that made group speaking more of a necessity as she figured out a routine for her activities.

Austin

Having lived in Africa for a time before studying Arabic, Austin saw his time in Jordan as a means to prepare for a career in North Africa. His focus on African Arab countries spoiled his appetite for speaking experiences using the Jordanian dialect, making the daily assignment of speaking outside of the institute a tedious chore. Still, he was determined to make the most of his time in a country full of Arabic speakers. In the beginning of the program, this meant getting into a routine of full immersion after classes, but after falling ill for several weeks in the middle of the program, he changed his focus to predictable speaking opportunities in formal Arabic at or around the institute.

Chris

Chris saw other relationships with other students as desirable at the beginning of the program, but eventually he gave up on group outings with them and figured out how to do
speaking with his small family, which accompanied him. The balancing act of finding speaking opportunities and his family relationships caused him to prioritize. Chris was not interested in real relationships with Arabs that went beyond being speaking partners. He intentionally limited his friendships to certain physical locales and kept everyone “in their sphere.” Despite a lack of deep friendships, he figured out ways to get high quality, engaging experiences for himself by going downtown or visiting the nearest shopping district with his family and bringing up unique topics, especially with taxi drivers.

**Jonathan**

Having extensive experience with formal Arabic before studying abroad, Jonathan looked at speaking as an opportunity to learn to learn spoken Arabic in its varieties. He went speaking by himself often but settled into routines with other students as well. Jonathan saw relationships with Arabs as a steppingstone on the way to getting high-quality speaking opportunities. His reason for coming on the program was to learn Arabic, and as such the relationships were always second to this. Still, he saw them as closely tied objectives. Jonathan favored situations where he could actively seek to “understand” the language, and he actively sought out speaking activities that fit him better and had more appropriate interlocutors for someone like himself.

**Thomas**

Coming into the program, Thomas anticipated high levels of performance anxiety in front of his English-speaking peers and as such sought to avoid them in his speaking activities. However, he was initially dissatisfied with the results of his independent efforts. Thomas tired of street-talk from younger acquaintances and sought for more advanced topics in social issues that he was interested in. He favored mature, older friends who had opinions worth mentioning, and
was intent on developing relationships and learning from his Arab friends’ unique perspectives. He came on study abroad to get their nuanced insights into the region's problems and events.

**Judy**

Similarly, Judy sought out speaking opportunities away from other students to mitigate performance anxiety. She managed to fill her time well on her own, but did take part in some group speaking activities like visits to Arab homes for dinner parties. For Judy, learning Arabic was a tool for being able to talk and listen to Arabs. She developed regular friends, but felt some disappointment that she did not find friends who were interested in issues she cared about. Judy definitely liked political issues, especially the most prominent regional problems such as the Palestinian conflict or women’s rights.

**Mitchell**

Although he recognized that hanging around his compatriots during speaking activities could possibly minimize his learning, the emotional support of other students kept Michell going with groups of other students for the entire program. He found ways to make group speaking work for him by pairing off with Arabs after arriving, or going to the language exchange events each week. As an introvert, it was difficult for Mitchell to develop relationships with Arabs, even if he wasn’t opposed to it. His reasons for learning Arabic was primarily so that he could get a good job, even if he didn’t use the language as much as he would like. If relationships happened, they were a happy side-effect to getting speaking practice. The logistics of finding speaking opportunities (e.g., transportation, contacting friends, arranging an event) often weighed on him to the point that it didn’t seem worth the effort.
Benjamin

Like Mitchell, Benjamin saw having other students around for speaking as an enabling influence. He felt that if he were by himself that he could not carry out a successful interaction, so he relied on other participants to help him navigate conversations and express himself. However, Benjamin was not interested in developing lasting friendships with the people he met, and once said outright that if he could learn the language without having to go out and make friends, then he would. It turned out that he was happy with conversations on a variety of topics, even some that others might call mundane. A conversation that kept going was a successful one. Benjamin hoped that his experience abroad would equip him with the language skills needed to find employment in government or other policy-related organizations.

Findings: Negotiating Expectations (an Emergent Framework)

The initial analysis led to the identification of 14 categories related to participants’ speaking experiences and the context behind those experiences. Constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) revealed that most of these categories fell under three main themes: going speaking with other participants, relationships with native speakers, and reasons for learning Arabic. Further comparison of these themes with the data led to the creation of a substantive theory, or framework, through which participants and others can make sense of speaking experiences on SA. First, we explain five sequential insights that led to the key finding within this framework—the negotiation of expectations. Next, we describe at a general level what the framework reveals regarding these participants’ experiences. Lastly, we demonstrate how this framework helps to interpret specific participants’ SA speaking experience by drawing upon concrete examples from their experiences.
Describing the Framework

First, the results highlight the presence of and relationship between different expectations. For example, participants may expect to spend most of their time abroad speaking with Arabs, since they may not have frequent opportunity to do so at their home campus. Similarly, a SA program may expect its participants to comply with guidelines put in place to ensure their safety. While expectations from other sources (parents, peers at home, religion, etc.) were occasionally manifest, expectations from the participants and the program were constantly present and pertinent to speaking activities. Consequently, analysis focused on these two sources.

Second, these relationships can be reinforcing or impeding. If a participant expects to spend most of their time each day speaking with native Arabic speakers, they may be disappointed by a program expectation that each participant spend hours reading, translating, or taking classes with other non-natives. Conversely, that participant would be glad to fulfill a different program expectation that participants speak with native speakers outside of class every day.

Third, relationships exist between different program expectations, some of which are formal (e.g., stated learning outcomes, travel and curfew restrictions) and some of which are informal (e.g., suggested ways for completing assignments, practical advice given by a program leader). Informal program expectations can clarify, complicate, or even contradict formal expectations. For example, even though speaking and reading assignments may be balanced time-wise on paper, participants could perceive an informal expectation to prioritize the reading assignment because they were held more accountable for it through daily assessments.

Fourth, a given relationship between expectations can be complemented or complicated by relationships to other expectations. Taking the above example, if a participant expects to
master the grammatical structures of the language while abroad, then an informal expectation to prioritize reading assignments would be welcomed. On the other hand, a participant who expects to develop long-term relationships with native Arabic speakers could feel tension regarding that same informal expectation.

Fifth, expectations are persistent but malleable. Participants cannot wish away formal or informal program expectations, but their perception of the relationship between expectations can change over time. A participant who expects to learn the language without developing close relationships may struggle with an informal program expectation that participants meet repeatedly with the same Arabic speakers in order to get beyond shallow topics of conversation. The tension between these two expectations could dissipate over time, however, as the participant discovers ways to discuss advanced topics with people without developing close friendships. The expectations do not change, but participants can find new angles from which to view them and relieve tension around their speaking activities.

The primary finding of this study, as illustrated by the above points, is that participants experienced competing program and personal expectations, and this competition required negotiation on the part of the participant. As they negotiated expectations, they learned to differentiate between formal and informal expectations and to create engaging speaking opportunities for themselves. As the following examples show, participants who embraced these negotiations eventually found speaking arrangements that met expectations, while those who avoided negotiation tended to disengage from speaking activities.

**Negotiating Expectations: General Insights**

The juxtaposition of personal and program expectations showed up frequently in weekly language reports and interviews as the participants reflected on how they prioritized certain
activities with limited time and energy each day. After attending classes and appointments at the host institute for much of the morning, participants had the afternoon and evening to complete a variety of assignments and prepare for the next day. They sometimes found that fitting everything in was easier said than done, especially as the days went on in the same way for several weeks. For example, Judy felt that speaking activities helped her meet her own expectations for the program, but other activities held her back at times (see Figure 1). Judy disassociated the translation assignment from her own expectation that she learn how to speak with Arabs, creating a distinction between her program “end” and certain program expectations.

Figure 1

Judy’s Reasons for Studying Abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Some people come on the study abroad program to prepare for a job—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>—Right, which is what the translating is for because that’s a very important skill if you want to go work in the CIA or the state department or something like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>And so speaking to Arabs is like a means to an end for some people—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>—yeah, but that’s my end…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, Jonathan evaluated the value of certain program activities in light of his and others’ academic and professional goals. Having made a significant investment of time and money to study abroad, did the program’s expectations match personal expectations and further each participants’ academic and professional aspirations?

So, I know I’m not the only one that feels this way, even though I feel this way for my own particular reason, but I definitely feel like an outsider in a lot of ways. And it’s not that I’m feeling lonely and depressed, kinda just like— There’s only two linguists in the
class so they probably are like, is this really what I need to be doing to study linguistics?

[...] Is this really the right thing? [...] So, trying to figure out my approach to the program. Despite the fact that he had committed himself to the program, Jonathan felt the need to “figure out [a] unique approach to the program” that harmonized personal and program expectations.

Upon arrival in the host country, study abroad participants found themselves having to choose how they use their time each day. While many of their activities were scheduled and organized for them, it was their responsibility to take advantage of these activities and fill their unstructured time in ways that met both program and personal expectations. From the beginning of the program, they began negotiating these expectations on a daily basis by asking questions about the merit of different decisions: should I spend the afternoon doing the reading assignment, or should I first go out and find someone to talk to for a while? Should I go by myself or with the other students who usually go to the university together? These are questions that participants silently asked themselves during the course of their time abroad, trying to find ways to meet multiple, seemingly conflicting expectations.

As noted in the program description before, students were expected to complete a considerable number of tasks during a given day or week. Moreover, those tasks were to be completed according to various rules and guidelines. Some program expectations were explicit, such as preparing for and attending appointments, completing reading assignments, night-time curfews, travel and housing restrictions, and other rules or standards intended to ensure participant safety while abroad. These expectations were laid out for students months before the program began. On the other hand, some expectations were informal, unwritten, and came as guidance from program leadership or as values implied by the program’s accountability structures. For example, leaders often encouraged students in trainings or interviews to speak
one-on-one with other Arabs, as opposed to involving other participants in the conversation. This expectation was also implied in daily language journal prompts when asking about how much of their speaking was done alone. Informal expectations were often the subject of participants’ negotiations, perhaps because they were by definition more flexible than formal expectations.

In contrast to the formal expectations that they commit themselves to meeting as part of the program, participants also brought their own expectations. Participants were cognizant of some of their expectations and made plans early on or even before coming to Jordan to reconcile these with program expectations. For example, Thomas came to the program with the expectation that he would find one-on-one speaking opportunities without having to speak in front of other participants. Mitchell, on the other hand, set an expectation early on that he would do most of his speaking activities with the moral support of another participant nearby. Other personal expectations took some time to unpack and recognize, such as Chris’ expectation to learn the language without developing close relationships with native speakers.

Participants’ expectations varied from person to person, yet the general themes that emerged in the initial analysis allow for discovering insights into the common experience of negotiating personal and program expectations. Table 1 provides an outline of the personal and program expectations that presented themselves to each of the participants. We have limited each participant to one personal and one program expectation to show their primary expectations that caused tension.

**Negotiating Expectations: Specific Insights**

Having an idea of the variety of expectations with which participants grappled regarding their speaking experiences, the following sections present specific insights related to the general framework of negotiating expectations in light of concrete experiences that participants reported.
We present these under the three themes mentioned before: going speaking with other participants, relationships with native speakers, and reasons for learning Arabic.

Table 1

*A Selection of Expectations and Tensions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Personal Expectation</th>
<th>Program Expectation</th>
<th>Relationship of Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Meaningful friendships</td>
<td>Language proficiency</td>
<td>Time spent with friends competed with time on other assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Career skills</td>
<td>Build relationships</td>
<td>Informal speaking took time from more targeted learning activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>No close friendships</td>
<td>Build relationships</td>
<td>Relationship-building was seen as a precursor to engaging conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Conversational Support</td>
<td>One-on-one conversations</td>
<td>One-on-one conversation was seen to provide the best practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>Arabic proficiency</td>
<td>Build relationships</td>
<td>Relationship-building was seen as a precursor to engaging conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>Meaningful friendships</td>
<td>Language proficiency</td>
<td>Time spent with friends competed with time on other assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>Conversational Support</td>
<td>One-on-one conversations</td>
<td>One-on-one conversation was seen to provide the best practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Speaking without others around</td>
<td>Meaningful conversations</td>
<td>Travelling with others provided access to Arabic speakers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Going Speaking With Other Participants**

After finishing classes and appointments in the early afternoon each day, participants were usually faced with the question of whether to complete reading assignments or go out speaking somewhere (e.g., walk or take taxis to somewhere where they could find speaking opportunities). If they attended to their reading assignments first, they may have missed out on speaking opportunities and resigned themselves to lesser prospects later in the day. On the other
hand, participants might have felt like they needed a break from speaking after several hours of classroom discussion and appointments. Also, one participant’s choices affected other participants, as paying for taxis (usually the best option) to the local university, downtown, or other locations added up quickly for one person. Thus, the daily choice of whom to go speaking with, if anyone, took up a surprising amount of some participants’ time and energy.

Moreover, participants dealt with somewhat conflicting program expectations. Going speaking in groups was encouraged particularly at the beginning of the program as participants adjusted to life in Amman, became familiar with their surroundings, and explored different speaking options around the city. On top of this, for their protection the program stipulated that participants were to never be alone in areas far from the host language institute, and female participants were to be accompanied by at least one male participant in certain circumstances. Despite these expectations that participants travel together, participating in the same conversation as other participants was discouraged in order to promote one-on-one interactions with Arabs where the participant would carry at least half the weight of a conversation. Certainly, students could travel to a location in a group and then split up to talk with Arabs one-on-one, but even if those opportunities presented themselves some students found it difficult to break off from their compatriots. These conflicting program expectations added a layer of complexity to the already difficult process of negotiating between personal and program expectations. On one hand, if a participant expected to go out speaking alone, this aligned with one program expectation but may have limited the locations they visited and the people they spoke with in order to comply with program rules. On the other hand, if a participant expected to always go speaking with others in order to frequent good speaking venues, they may have found it difficult to meet the informal program expectation to find one-on-one speaking opportunities.
Not all participants saw their speaking in this binary fashion, but for a few participants it was a consistent issue throughout the entire program.

Getting beyond this and consistently meeting personal and program expectations required realizing that one’s personal expectations were not being met by focusing on the program’s expectations alone. Once students began including their personal expectations in the negotiation process they changed their habits, looking for and experimenting with new speaking opportunities that led to satisfactory solutions.

For example, Thomas came to the program with the expectation to struggle performing in front of other participants: “I just feel, like, really exposed in all of my, like, weaknesses and I just don’t handle it very well.” Struggling with anxiety early on, he chose to go speaking near his apartment by himself at first. However, an expectation concerning the people he spoke with led him to dislike this strategy. How, then, could he find enough meaningful speaking opportunities without going out to speak with other students? Two pieces came together to form a solution. First, a program leader introduced him to a university graduate who was interested in the same topics, and this friend introduced Thomas to a social network of similar friends. Second, Thomas began to regularly host this group of friends in his apartment each evening for food and discussion. While this situation did not evolve until the last half of the program, Thomas and a few others found a consistent source of engaging interactions in these events, leading to the fulfillment of both program and personal expectations. While this development may seem quite fortuitous after the fact, Thomas struggled to find consistent, meaningful speaking opportunities for nearly two months before finding a speaking arrangement that worked well for him. He continued exploring options until he found a way to meet expectations that previously seemed contradictory.
Andrea found herself caught up in the program’s expectations during her first weeks abroad, feeling disappointed with group speaking efforts and trying to find a daily routine that would get her more one-on-one speaking. “People in the group have a different idea of what going out is meant for and don't look for [speaking] opportunities.” Nighttime restrictions didn’t make things easier: “If I go out with different people I get more Arabic, or go by myself even—and I can’t do that at night so that’s where it’s a little trickier.” Midway through the program and dealing with persistent health issues, she realized that her dependence on others was keeping her from meeting her primary personal expectation for the program— to develop real friendships with Arabs and people of other cultures. She began to choose independence each day, even if she didn’t get a full two hours of speaking. “I want to focus on making lasting friendships and bonds with people no matter who they are or what language they speak. I am still going to insist on talking Arabic with Arabs, but I just… that mental switch is helpful to me, to make me feel like this is my program and my goals too.” During the latter part of the program, Andrea prioritized independent speaking time above other activities and developed long-term relationships with her Arab friends.

Thomas, Andrea, and others readily recognized tension between different expectations, but not all participants did so. Benjamin did not feel enough tension between expectations to warrant negotiation, and this lack of negotiation seemed tied to his personal expectations related to going speaking with other participants. From the very beginning of the SA and throughout the program, he preferred to be around other students when talking to Arabs. I usually try to go with another person. Um, I think it just helps one with approaching strangers, a little bit, with the confidence and legitimacy of it. And then it’s, I think it’s just more interesting for the conversation. And it helps me so if I can’t like express
myself or understand clearly what the other person’s saying we can feed off of each other.

Throughout the rest of the program, Benjamin continued to see the presence of other students as empowering, though in comparison to the perspectives and experiences of other participants it could also be seen as a limiting dependence.

Similarly, Mitchell consistently decided to go speaking with other students and relied on them to provide moral and conversational support as he went outside his comfort zone to talk to people he did not know. Still, he recognized that speaking around other participants meant less valuable speaking. “So far, I've only gone out with another student from the program, and we've talked with people together. This helps, because I don't feel like it's all on me, but at the same time, it doesn't give me as much chance to speak.” This tradeoff between support and quality continued throughout the rest of the program.

Neither Benjamin nor Mitchell openly discussed how the formal expectation to speak for two hours a day and the implicit expectations that they go in groups while still looking for one-on-one opportunities clashed with their own expectations for the program. Instead of experiencing dissatisfaction with their speaking strategies and looking for new opportunities, it seems that they became less concerned with negotiating expectations for speaking since they were technically meeting the two-hour speaking assignment. Interestingly, during the last weeks of the program, both participants expressed a lack of motivation to go out and speak, whereas other participants were hitting their stride and still engaging.

**Relationships With Native Speakers**

Participants came with specific, though sometimes tacit, expectations for the relationships that they would make with Arabic speakers in Jordan. The program brought fewer formal
expectations on this topic than that of going speaking with other Americans, but informal ones were very present. The most important program expectation here, for many participants, went something like this: quality speaking is necessary for learning Arabic, and close relationships with Arabs are necessary for quality speaking. While the program’s stated objectives stress both linguistic and cultural learning, students sometimes found themselves paying more attention to linguistic outcomes. When asked what advice he might give himself if he could start the program again, Benjamin wished he had worried a little less about formal assignments and had placed more value on informal speaking experiences.

If you feel overwhelmed with the homework load and you have to cut something out, cut the [article translations] out and go and talk to people instead. I mean, ideally you want to do everything, but people are always looking for what can they cut out first, and I think for me it was usually speaking versus the other type of homework, because there was more accountability for turning in the homework and things like that.

Students who struggled with speaking found it easier to focus on aspects of the program for which they knew they would be held immediately accountable, such as written assignments that had to be turned in the next morning. Since speaking had a somewhat delayed accountability structure (i.e., it was tallied at the end of each week), it seemed easier to give priority to other assignments from day to day. Perhaps because of this difference in accountability, these students perceived that the program valued learning the language over relationships, setting an informal expectation that needed to be negotiated with a variety of personal expectations about student relationships with Arabs. Among the participants of this study, these expectations could be organized into three categories: relationships as an important gateway to learning, relationships as an unfortunate requirement for learning, and relationships as the primary objective.
Relationships as a Gateway to Learning

One group of participants primarily sought to develop relationships as a way to learn the language, whatever other value those relationships may have had for them. This was especially clear for Jonathan, who reflected extensively in his language journal on how best to learn the language and scheduled his weekday speaking time accordingly. In one instance he admitted that he needed to save the last day of the week for relationship-building.

I would prefer to have it as the day of finding activities where I go and try something new, but because cultivating a relationship and getting to know people on a personal level is so important, that fifth day often turns into going back to the university and hanging out with them than it is anything else.

He saw developing relationships as a prerequisite to learning about the language and culture, and therefore something he had to prioritize. The relationships were valuable, but primarily as a function of learning the language.

Participants with this perspective had expectations that aligned nicely with the implicit expectations of the program: find people to speak with, make friends, speak with them often, and learn Arabic. The closer the relationship, the better the speaking, supposedly. However, for some the expected intensity of the relationship differed—some felt that only casual friendships were enough to learn what they needed. For example, Chris knew that he needed to make friends in order to learn the language, but intentionally limited what relationships he started.

Early on in the program he had put energy into strategies that other participants were using, such as making friends with people at the gym that he would see every day. However, he found that he lacked the time and desire to make the close friendships that other participants sought.
I get stressed from people wanting to go do things with me, like, besides where we are, you know, and it’s like: let’s hang out tomorrow! I’m like: I dunno if I want to do that.

But, especially like in this certain sphere, in your shop, in this area, like, hanging out with people, that’s really fun for me.

He recognized that he expected something different than what the program seemingly endorsed and shifted his strategy towards making genuine, interesting conversation with people that he had already had some success with: shopkeepers, taxi drivers, and other service-based interactions. This adjustment actually worked well to satisfy both his and the program’s expectations. He felt that the interactions he had with people, despite their brevity or lack of commitment, were genuine and interesting, giving him the practice he needed to learn Arabic.

**Relationships as an Unfortunate Requirement for Learning**

A second group of participants saw relationships with Arabs as an unfortunate reality, feeling like they were forcing friendship on people in whom they were not deeply interested. Benjamin explained that this was not because of his dislike for the people themselves, but rather his own custom of having only a few close friends. In fact, from his view he was being sensitive to the Arabic speaker: “I didn’t want to feel like I was using them because I didn’t have those intentions to carry on a friendship. I was just trying to learn Arabic.” This discomfort speaking with others even led him to wish that he could learn the language without developing relationships with Arabs. “You know, if I could become proficient in Arabic, you know, and not have to go make friends, then yeah.”

As can be imagined, negotiating expectations here was particularly difficult. Participants with this perspective found it painful to go out speaking by the end of the program, tired of putting on a good face and talking to people solely for practice. As seen with expectations
regarding going speaking with other participants, Benjamin seemed resigned to the status quo that he settled into early in the program, choosing not to struggle with contradictory expectations and find creative solutions.

**Relationships as the Primary Objective**

For some, relationships were the very reason for studying abroad. As seen somewhat already, Andrea, Judy, and Thomas prioritized making meaningful friendships and attempted to make this expectation work within the constraints and offerings of the program. This perspective clashes quite differently than the previous two with perceived program expectations. In Figure 1 Judy perceived an informal expectation that formal assignments had to be prioritized over informal speaking, which made it hard for her develop relationships with Arabs. Each of these three participants recognized this disconnect and began searching for solutions. Both Andrea and Thomas dealt with this disconnect by giving their own expectations more weight in their daily decisions: Andrea spent less time speaking, but when she did speak she engaged more; Thomas limited his active speaking to situations where he felt comfortable and could speak with mature, educated Arabs, leading to the creation of a tight-knit group of friends.

Judy, however, appears to have remained satisfied with her speaking opportunities from early on, perhaps because she was getting a good amount of speaking time in as the program expected. However, the relationships she made were not quite what she had hoped.

I have made Arab friends here. And they’re very sweet and nice... I’m very interested in political issues and I like to be having those conversations with Arabs and I like to get their perspectives on it. And that happens in the issues class, but the friends that I’ve made here are not really interested in that stuff. I mean it’s more kinda like normal stuff, music and food and everyday things.
While she felt like more could have been done to meet her higher expectation (i.e., find friends interested in political issues, etc.), perhaps the satisfaction of meeting the program’s expectation (i.e., speak ten hours per week) and the fulfillment of her minimal expectation (i.e., develop friendships) kept her from making significant changes to her speaking habits. While she did make friends and had plans to communicate with them in the long term, she also felt disappointment: “I wish I’d done more… I didn’t quite find the crowd I wanted to for having the kind of conversations I wanted to have.”

**Reasons for Learning Arabic**

The final theme deals with the reasons why participants were studying Arabic in the first place. Overwhelmingly, the participants in this study saw Arabic primarily as “a means to an end.” Several students used this phrase or others like it to describe their perspective on the language, suggesting a hierarchical structure of priorities in which Arabic stood below something else. Only Jonathan claimed that the language itself was his primary reason for coming on the program: “there doesn’t have to be another goal. I think I feel more that way more than anything else. I want to learn the language for language’s sake.”

All other participants provided one of two reasons for learning the language that outweighed the language’s inherent importance in their life: developing language skills for a career or gaining cultural insight through relationships. While any given participant may give both of these reason for learning Arabic, they clearly gave priority to one perspective over the other in their interviews and daily speaking decisions. Even though program objectives and training explicitly emphasized a broader definition of success than only linguistic proficiency, some participants felt that the program implicitly valued learning Arabic over developing relationships with Arabs. For participants who were primarily learning Arabic in preparation for
a future career, this perceived expectation was a convenient way to focus on what they most wanted. For those who wanted to develop relationships but struggled with speaking in some way, this perceived expectation became a reason for some of their difficulty. Two participants exemplify this difference.

Learning Arabic for a Career

Austin began the program with a specific career path in mind and a goal to reach a high level of proficiency before leaving Jordan. Despite losing a fair amount of his time abroad to health issues, he was able to meet his personal expectations for the program by giving up on relationship building and spending that time instead on his reading and formal speaking abilities. As the last weeks of the program approached, full of reading and speaking examinations, he felt that he was prepared and had fulfilled both his and the program’s expectations. Little if any negotiation had to be done to reconcile his own expectations with what he perceived the program’s expectations to be.

Learning Arabic for Cultural Insight and Relationships

On the other hand, Andrea valued relationship-building and cultural insight over linguistic ability. Like Austin, she also faced health issues that slowed her progress and caused her to think carefully about her available time. However, as the end of the program approached, she felt torn between spending time with her Arab friends and preparing for exams. Her expectation, while obviously related to the program’s expectation of learning Arabic generally, suddenly had to be negotiated on a daily basis. Should she call her new friend up and invite her to lunch, or should she review old reading assignments and practice using the vocabulary in them? Naturally, such questions create less anxiety for those who already feel prepared for the exams, but for Andrea it could have meant sacrificing her personal expectations in order to stay
in a degree program, keep a scholarship, or find a job. She said it best in her language journal half-way through the program:

I didn't know how to resolve my feelings. It's important that I learn Arabic, but for me it's not important to have Al-Jazeera-level Arabic. That's not my goal, or my dream. I want to teach English in the Middle East so I do need Arabic and I love learning the language, but I don't want to stress out and put all this pressure on myself for something I don't want or something I only want for a grade. I need to get a good grade and still need to learn Arabic, I know that is important even if I see it in a different way than what the program focuses on. I am going to reapply myself to my homework and really buy into the program that way. Apply myself, but not lose myself in goals and a focus that isn't my focus.

As mentioned before, Andrea managed to develop meaningful friendships by limiting her total speaking time and focusing what speaking she did on promising opportunities, which gave her time to complete other assignments. She felt at the end that she had met the program’s expectations, but it was an uphill battle involving help from program leaders, repeated moments of anxious negotiation, and weeks of trying to find the right balance of activities.

Discussion

The Participant Context: Negotiating Expectations

Returning to this project’s research question, we asked what more could we understand about students who struggled to engage in speaking outside of the institute by exploring their individual contexts? Using the negotiating expectations framework as an analytic lens provided new insight into participants’ study abroad speaking experiences.
First, it became clear that participants spent time and energy negotiating personal and program expectations, and some were more prepared to do so than others. Jonathan, for example, anticipated before his arrival in Jordan that he would need to create his own “unique approach” to the program, based on his language background and other personal characteristics. He saw that most participants had more experience speaking Arabic than he did, but not as much experience reading, so he took time at the beginning of the program to prioritize speaking opportunities. Similarly, Thomas anticipated that his performance anxiety would limit his opportunities, so he planned from the very beginning to focus on meeting people who lived near his apartment. On the other hand, many participants were caught off guard by their need to negotiate expectations. Andrea and Judy both expected to give relationships with Arabs a lot of time and effort, but came to feel that the program’s expectations were at odds with their own in this regard.

Second, participants who consistently tried to negotiate expectations eventually found sufficient solutions that enabled them to engage with Arabic speakers. Chris initially felt unease regarding the short-term nature of his relationships with Jordanians, but as he discovered people who were willing to have deep conversations without developing close friendships, this tension dissipated and he felt more confidence going speaking during the last month of the program. When Thomas’ first attempts to find low-stress speaking opportunities failed to satisfy, he sought out other opportunities through existing relationships until he established a trusted cohort of friends with whom he felt at ease making mistakes and practicing. He also showed confidence regarding speaking at the end of the program. The duration and intensity of negotiations was different for every participant, but those who kept trying new strategies stood a better chance of finding something that would satisfy expectations.
Third, participants who were content to satisfy only some expectations and avoid negotiation appeared to disengage from speaking activities in the final weeks of their studies. Mitchell and Benjamin both reported in their final interviews that speaking was becoming harder and harder to do, despite making linguistic improvement. They knew that the program expected them to speak two hours per day outside of their classes and had worked to meet that expectation throughout the semester, but they felt more and more like their speaking activities were not worth the effort. Benjamin felt that his early strategy of speaking alongside other participants empowered him with his current linguistic ability:

I still feel my Arabic is too weak to carry on a continuous conversation individually.…
With another individual on the streets I am okay speaking because with the two of us, we can figure out and help if the other gets stumped so that the person we are speaking with doesn't just want to talk in English or leave.

Yet the resulting speaking experiences failed to meet his and the program’s expectation to have engaging, meaningful conversations. He held back from negotiating because his strategy seemed adequate for his current ability level. The assumption was that once he improved to a certain point, he could speak on his own. Late in the program, however, Benjamin began to lose interest in speaking and rarely tried out new strategies that could lead to better opportunities. There could be many reasons for this disengagement, but I found it interesting that neither Mitchell nor Benjamin had given much thought to changing their speaking strategies to better satisfy some informal program expectations (e.g., that students speak without the help of other participants). They were content to meet the program’s formal expectations.

If expectations really do affect students’ engagement with the host language and society while abroad, and engagement is an important goal of SA, negotiating expectations deserves the
attention of SA researchers and administrators to make sure that fewer participants find themselves disengaging during a critical moment of their learning.

**Study Abroad Literature**

While some SA research has addressed student expectations as a facet of the SA context (Dewey et al., 2012; Miller & Ginsburg, 1995; Pellegrino, 1998) and other research has addressed their relevance to actual performance (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Mendelson, 2004; Savage & Hughes, 2014), the field has focused mainly on identifying and correcting students’ unrealistic expectations for study abroad. This study, however, looks at conflict between realistic expectations held by participants and the program itself.

Much like other aspects of the SA context that have come into view recently (e.g., nationality, gender, cultural attitudes, etc.), the effect that expectations have on a study abroad experience is sometimes assumed to be simple, adequately explored by survey questions, and explained with simple correlational statistics. On the contrary, the results here depict a complicated interplay of expectations from both the program and the participant that gives new meaning to the struggles participants work through while abroad. This interplay, which sometimes calls for negotiation, plays out in the small, everyday decisions participants make for learning: what am I going to do with my time today?

**Making Sense of SA Experiences**

While not specifically addressing expectations, recent research has brought up relevant questions related to SA participant experiences. Specifically, Kinginger (2008) invited research that “[broadens] our perspective to include the ideological forces at play” on SA and finds ways “in which students derive coherence from their study-abroad experiences” (pp. 107-108). This report reveals program expectations as ideological forces that further complicate the typical
stories told about participants’ experiences abroad. Research has tended to focus on interactions between the learner’s identity and the host environment (Higgins, 2011; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2008; Trentman, 2013a), with forces at play such as cultural notions of gender or nationality. In this study, program expectations emerged as an aspect of the SA environment that has not been treated before or discussed in a similar way. As opposed to aspects of the host society causing students difficulty, the program itself should be remembered as a source of expectations with which students must also grapple.

If program expectations are ideological forces, then the negotiating expectations framework presented herein can serve as a tool for participants to “derive coherence” from their experiences (Kinginger, 2008, p. 107). When participants compare program expectations with their own and find workable compromises, their daily actions are validated by an important guide during their sojourn—the program that brought them there. This enables them to focus on doing things well instead of worrying about which thing to do. For participants like Jonathan, Andrea, or Thomas, aligning program and personal expectations allowed them to not only access but also to engage with native speakers and speaking experiences.

The categories of experience in which participants sought to negotiate expectations provide a clear window into what it means to make sense of one’s experiences. Taking participants’ reasons for learning Arabic abroad as an example, not all students who study a foreign language abroad are there primarily to learn the language (Kinginger, 2008). Even participants who define themselves as language learners on SA have unique reasons for learning that complicate their daily choices involving the language. For example, Andrea initially felt like she had to let go of her personal expectation to make close friends with native speakers in order to meet the broader program expectation of achieving Arabic proficiency. She eventually
realized that she could make compromises that would keep both expectations satisfied. Her ambivalence regarding speaking activities was replaced by determination to learn Arabic for her own reasons.

*The Program Perspective*

Kinginger (2008) also calls for research that brings in perspectives other than that of the student, a call which has largely gone unanswered except for the occasional insight from homestay families or speaking partners (see Jackson, 2008). One perspective that has not been clearly voiced, despite its closeness to the research, is that of the program. If personal expectations belong to the participants, program expectations ultimately belong to administrators, teachers, staff, and the institution as a whole. Their combined desires and efforts structure the participant experience abroad and are commonly referred to as a “program.” While this project’s analysis did not include transcripts of interviews with the program director and other staff, it did rely on their advice, feedback, and general perspective. My role as both administrator and researcher embodies part of the program’s perspective, as those being interviewed knew that I was an administrator, and I was involved daily in communicating the program’s evaluation of their efforts. In this way, the program perspective was firmly impressed on the results of this study, without which the negotiating expectations framework might not have emerged.

*Unpacking “Negotiation”*

Forms of the word “negotiation” are commonly used in qualitative SA research in various ways, and some explanation of the relationship between this project’s usage and others is needed. McGregor (2014) describes participants negotiating their identities, program goals, and the relationship between L1 and L2. Jackson (2008) also describes negotiation in the context of
participant identity. These usages can perhaps be linked to Block (2007), and Papastergiadis (2000), who coined the phrase “the negotiation of difference” in reference to the formation of one’s identity at the meeting of past and present. Even before these, foreign language research had used the phrase “negotiation of meaning” (citation?) in reference to conversations between native and non-native speakers—a connotation which is perhaps not entirely lost on the word’s usage today.

The analysis which resulted in the negotiating expectations framework did not draw on the aforementioned literature, rather the term “negotiation” was chosen because of its denotation: to work something out between two parties. Still, the negotiation of expectations shows clear relevance to the negotiation of difference as described in recent publications. Kinginger (2010) contends, as we do here, that participants can study abroad without engaging; they can sojourn without confronting the discomforts of foreign cultures, ideas, and restrictions. Block (2007) suggested that learners are “forced by their individual life trajectories to make choices where choices are not easy to make” (pp. 864-865), but Kinginger (2010) also stipulated that “the negotiation of difference is a result of active participation and engagement in these environments” (p. 217). Consequently, we see participants like Chris actively coming up with ways to keep engaging in speaking despite constraints, and others like Benjamin resisting speaking activities because he felt he did not have good options for the hard choices he would have to make. The negotiating expectations framework aligns with current discourse regarding the negotiation of difference. It adds expectations as a practical manifestation of the learner’s identity and also offers experiential categories of expectations (e.g., relationships with native speakers) as a way to comprehend the differences between personal and program expectations in order to start working out a new identity.
The overall view of recent exploratory SA research was summarized by Kinginger (2010): “… the nature of student’s interactions depends, on the one hand, on the students’ own priorities and interpretations of study abroad and, on the other hand, on how these same students are received in the various contexts and institutions they frequent while abroad” (p. 7). The negotiating expectations framework speaks to the students’ priorities and interpretations and suggests that the manifestation of those priorities are mediated by priorities, or expectations, given by their SA program.

**Using the Negotiating Expectations Framework**

The negotiating expectations framework can also be used to improve participants’ SA experiences by providing both participants and program leaders with a tool (one among many, hopefully) that they can use to understand and overcome obstacles to their learning. Here I suggest that participants may benefit from the framework by starting to negotiate expectations pre-departure and by learning from other students’ experiences both before and during their sojourn. The framework can also empower administrators to adjust program design, intervene during the SA, and evaluate the program’s progress.

**Benefiting Participants**

Research has recognized the value of pre-program training or orientations (Paige et al., 2002; Vande Berg et al., 2009), and learners could benefit from addressing expectations beforehand. Preparing students to negotiate expectations could entail explicating formal and informal program expectations, helping participants identify their own expectations, sharing examples of previous participants, and giving participants time to compare expectations and come up with solutions. Additionally, leaders could provide situations to participants that demonstrate the kinds of decisions they will have to make; simulating part of the complexity that
they will encounter may prepare them to handle *all* of the complexity later. Using a diagram that frames the source (e.g., the program) and domain (e.g., going speaking with other students) of expectations could help participants put their expectations on paper and think about how to deal with potential conflicts. Figure 2 provides an example of what this could look like.

**Figure 2**

*Matrix of Expectations and Speaking Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Program Expectations</th>
<th>Personal Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going Speaking with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Speakers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both before and during their participation, students can benefit from the experiences of past participants and their peers (see Bird & Belnap, 2018). Following up on pre-departure discussions about expectations in a group setting could help students to share their difficulties and learn from each other in a welcoming and understanding environment. For example, it seems that Chris’ strategy of limiting relationships and focusing on genuine conversation would have served Benjamin and others well, all other expectations aside. Program staff can also share experiences from prior programs to show how others responded to particular program expectations or set up speaking opportunities to resolve conflicting expectations.

**Empowering Program Leaders**

For instructors and administrators, understanding the gaps between program expectations and participants’ personal expectations can help them make sense of experiences abroad so that
program designs can more effectively provide for student needs. Even if learning outcomes are articulated clearly and regularly reviewed, participants may perceive that some of outcomes are more important or urgent than. The effect of informal expectations can be difficult to discern from an administrator’s perspective, so particular care should be given to recognizing strategies or behaviors that are encouraged or discouraged but not regulated or graded in some way. Also, as was the case in the program under study, informal expectations can emerge from unbalanced accountability structures, such as the frequency, weight, or supervision of a required assignment. With awareness of these issue, those involved in SA program design can make conscious and transparent decisions regarding expectations and help simplify the negotiations in which future participants may have to engage.

The negotiating expectations framework can also empower directors and staff who work with participants during their sojourn. Concerned directors have limited control over participants’ linguistic progress, but they do control the program’s expectations and can raise their awareness of participants’ expectations. Interventions created with this in mind will not only provide greater linguistic and cultural access to participants, but will also consider whether that access helps participants to meet both personal and program expectations, removing potential obstacles to genuine engagement in activities (see Trentman, 2013a). Creating interventions solely with the goal of increasing time on task or another measure of access could actually be counterproductive. For some participants in this program, negotiations led to less time finding speaking partners and less time speaking, but more care and thought given to each speaking opportunity. For example, during the last few weeks Austin chose to forego regular speaking activities so that he could better prepare for scheduled speaking appointments and improve his listening comprehension with targeted practice.
Finally, expectations can be part of regular program evaluations, including end-of-program questionnaires for participants or staff. A number of questions can be asked to stimulate program changes for the better:

- Are our program expectations negotiable for our participants?
- Are there aspects of the experience that need more clearly articulated expectations?
- Are there expectations that need to go or be modified?
- What are the expectations on which students get hung up?
- Are there any expectations that seem to contradict each other?
- What expectations are informal and formal, and does that need to change?
- What expectations get the most emphasis from the program?
- Are program activities appropriately balancing accountability for different expectations?

**Conclusion**

**Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study is its qualitative, exploratory nature. The results are not suited nor intended for generalization to a broad population of SA participants. Rather, the negotiating expectations framework emerged as a result of methodological measures intended to provide transferable knowledge to participants and administrators of a wide variety of programs where it may prove practically useful. On a theoretical level, the grounded nature of the results can provide a level of legitimacy to prior research. Also, the primary author’s dual role as administrator and researcher was critical to both data collection and analysis. As the primary “instrument,” his perspective both revealed and concealed aspects of the participant experience. The results, however useful, should be considered with this in mind.
Further Research

Several questions could be pursued related to the negotiating expectations framework. First, is the negotiation of expectations a phenomenon limited to certain participant experiences? Further qualitative investigation of expectations could describe the experiences of participants who did not appear to struggle with speaking. While I anticipate that the negotiation process generally extends to all participants, it may be that it differs in revealing ways for certain subgroups or for participants in different types of programs.

Second, what examples can we give to participants to prepare them for their own negotiation of expectations? While this study touches on a few particular experiences, qualitative inquiry in other study abroad contexts could both provide numerous examples and discover new themes across multiple cases to share with future participants. Creating a large body of successful examples situated in complex study abroad contexts would provide them with the opportunity to see their study abroad experience as experienced leaders and graduated participants might see it.

Third, how does the concept of the program differ from one study abroad to the next, and how does this affect the negotiation process? I recognize that this university’s highly structured program may not represent that of most or even many other programs. As such, further studies using this framework of competing expectations should pay attention to the program structure or nature. They may find that certain study abroad arrangements (e.g., a homestay experience with direct enrollment in a local university) provide a more nebulous program structure, which could possibly alleviate or complicate the negotiation process.

Lastly, can participants effectively begin the negotiation process before going abroad? Pre-departure training, like that described above, may prevent undue stress abroad, but
researchers should also consider the unpredictability of learning contexts, especially intensive abroad experiences. As with the participants in this study, it may be that the negotiating expectations requires context and complexity. Mental work done at home may still need to be followed by emotional work abroad.
References


Badstübner, T., & Ecke, P. (2009). Student expectations, motivations, target language use, and perceived learning progress in a summer study abroad program in Germany. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German, 42*(1), 41-49.


ARTICLE 2

The Ecology of Study Abroad for Language Learning:

Synthesis and Interdisciplinary Insights

Matthew T. Bird

Peter J. Rich

Stephen C. Yanchar

Brigham Young University
Abstract

This report presents a review of study abroad research conducted from an ecological perspective (Kramsch, 2003; Leather & van Dam, 2003; van Lier, 2004) and identifies areas of inquiry that are lacking compared to second language acquisition and other fields (i.e., linguistics, psychology). It identifies value-based views as high-priority area of interest and draws on frameworks in other fields to outline how language learning research could effectively described the moral ecology of study abroad for language learning.

Keywords: study abroad and language acquisition, grounded theory, speaking expectations, learner engagement
Introduction

Language learning research over the last two decades has increasingly turned to an ecological perspective to make sense of the wide variety of learner experiences across different contexts. Several edited books laid a foundation for ecological research in second language acquisition (Kramsch, 2003; Leather & van Dam, 2003; van Lier, 2004), and literature reviews since then have provided updates on the recent undertakings of the ecological movement (Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008; Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017). An ecological perspective of language learning is distinguished by its focus on complex relationships that exist between learners and their environments, as opposed to the isolated, internal workings of individuals’ minds or the simple cause-effect relationships of external forces. Researchers have taken up this approach to provide holistic descriptions that generate new understandings of the learner experience. The result has been the deconstruction of prior assumptions about the process of language acquisition and socialization, agency, and other key concepts commonly considered in second language acquisition research. Language practitioners use the results of ecological research to design experiences that address the complexity of “whole people” learning a language within their “whole lives” (Coleman, 2013).

Ecological perspectives have started to affect language research specific to study abroad. At a time when “there is little consensus still on how to best define studying abroad and how to best study its effects” (McKeown, 2009, p. 106), framing study abroad in ecological terms has helped reframe concepts such as the study abroad context, participants, and the goals of study abroad. This has resulted in numerous field studies describing the relationships between diverse learners and diverse foreign contexts. However, while ecological research in the field of second language acquisition has been repeatedly reviewed (Area 3 in Figure 1), ecological research
Figure 1
The Intersection of Three Fields

- Study Abroad (SA)
- Ecological Research (ER)
- Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Specific to study abroad for language learning (Area 4 in Figure 1) has yet to be reviewed and summarized, which could provide field-specific insights and reveal areas for further inquiry.

Additionally, ecological study abroad research stands to benefit from other fields of inquiry. So far it has drawn heavily on language research in non-study-abroad contexts (e.g., SLA, sociolinguistics), but an ecological perspective also demands the consideration of other fields, since learners’ environments do not consist only of social and linguistic forces. Steffensen and Kramsch (2017) suggest that practitioners should “supplement their linguistic and sociocultural expertise with input from psychology, cognitive science, and the life sciences” (p. 23). Other disciplines can provide ideas and frameworks for answering questions about study abroad that have already started to be addressed in other fields.

In light of these needs, this paper (a) summarizes recent applied research that has taken an ecological approach to study abroad, (b) proposes future directions for ecological study abroad research in light of recent trends in SLA, and (c) presents a value-based approach to ecological research using insights from other fields.

Defining Ecology

An ecology of language learning draws on the image of a biological ecology: an expansive consideration of the organisms and aspects of an environment, with a focus on the
relations of organisms to one another and to other aspects of the environment. Here each part of the ecology of study abroad for language learning is briefly defined: the environments, the people studying abroad in those environments, and the variety of relationships they have with aspects of the environment.

First, environment denotes the broad collection of physical and social resources that people live around. Study abroad research has often referred to “the study abroad context,” but this paper will use “environment” to emphasize the ecological metaphor. The most obvious resources in an environment are often physical and close in proximity (e.g., a cafe down the street), but resources can also be social (e.g., discussing politics with a friend at said cafe) or physically distant (e.g., reading a message from a friend living far away).

Second, different terms have been used to describe people studying abroad. Titles such as language learner, student, or participant are applicable in many cases, but from an ecological perspective these titles focus too narrowly on an individual aspect of the whole person who studies abroad. For this reason, this report will refer to the protagonist of the reviewed research as the “sojourner,” a broader term denoting someone who resides temporarily in a foreign place.

Lastly, the relations that sojourners have within their environments are referred to as “affordances.” Resources in an environment are not affordances in themselves, but they afford certain opportunities for action to sojourners. They are the ways that things, people, symbols, and ideas show up to sojourners. Van Lier (2004) adds that “what becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it” (p. 252). Affordances are just as much about the sojourners as they are about the resources.
Review of Ecological Study Abroad Research

The first step in summarizing ecological research is defining what qualifies as ecological enough for consideration. In a similar review of study abroad (SA) research related to language socialization, Kinginger (2017) found that many qualitative studies reported results that contributed to a socialization perspective, but few studies took on socialization as their primary framework. The same can be said of ecological perspectives in study abroad; a number of qualitative studies have characteristics of ecological research, but few discuss their questions or present their results in an ecological perspective outright. To identify which reports qualified as ecological research, this review uses the characteristics of ecological research identified by Steffensen and Kramsch (2017) as criteria for inclusion:

(1) the emergent nature of languaging and learning; (2) the crucial role of affordances in the environment; (3) the mediating function of language in the educational enterprise; and (4) the historicity and subjectivity of the language learning experience, as well as its inherent conflictuality. (p. 28)

For the sake of space, readers who are unfamiliar with these terms should see Steffensen and Kramsch (2017) for an in-depth definition of each of these criteria.

After identifying these criteria, database searches for English, peer-reviewed publications within Google Scholar, EBSCO, ERIC, and individual journals created a pool of 92 publications, including articles, books, and chapters from edited volumes. These were found using search terms that included variations of the criteria (e.g., subjectivity, subjective, learner perspective) and “study abroad.” Reverse searches of highly-cited articles were also conducted using the same strategy. Finally, each publication was reviewed to see if it was theoretically consistent with all four criteria, regardless of whether keywords were included or not. This resulted in 54
publications for inclusion in the summary. After summarizing each publication individually with regard to the criteria, insights were combined across publications and organized temporally as they might apply to a sojourner.

Figure 2

*Insights from the Ecology of Study Abroad for Language Learning*

The themes that emerged (see Figure 2) describe sojourner experiences from an ecological perspective: (a) the interaction of sojourner and prior environments, (b) the interaction of sojourner and foreign environments, (c) perceiving affordances of the foreign environment, (d) acting on affordances, and (e) the negotiation of difference.

**The Interaction of Sojourner and Prior Environments**

In order to make sense of what happens during study abroad, ecological research has considered how sojourners have interacted with their environments before going abroad. These interactions were as diverse as the sojourners, since sojourners’ personal characteristics (e.g., gender, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, spirituality, religion) interacted with all the unique aspects of prior environments. Research so far has focused on macro-level discourses in which sojourners are embedded before going abroad (e.g., globalization, American exceptionalism, Confucianism, Buddhism, feminism, nationalism). These discourses are composed and communicated to sojourners (often implicitly) by many actors, including
governments, businesses (Jang, 2015), and professional organizations that influence or prescribe standards for language learning; educational institutions that influence and implement policy through curriculum; families and peers who interact most often and closely with would-be-sojourners; and a myriad of other groups and individuals who interact with the would-be-sojourner through service encounters or informally by being nearby.

While it is probably accurate to say that sojourners are more familiar with prior environments than the foreign environments in which they study, they may not be comfortable with or conform to the norms of prior environments, even if they have spent their whole life in a “home” environment with a monolithic cultural view. The discourses that permeate prior environments do not determine sojourners’ perspectives and values, but sojourners do act in relation to them, whether in favor, against, or in some other way. As sojourners travel from one environment to another, the ways that they interacted with aspects of prior environments go with them, so to speak, and inform their interactions within new environments.

For example, Diao and Trentman (2016) saw that some Americans who sojourned in China and Egypt struggled to think of themselves and their studies in ways that did not propagate American political and economic influence. Even those who might have been openly critical of American hegemony “failed to see the connection between the macro discourses they drew upon and the West’s continued power and dominance over the non-West” (p. 47). Even if they can identify some of them, sojourners still may not understand that aspects of their prior environments (e.g., the macro discourse of American exceptionalism) color what they see, do, and become in another environment.
The Interaction of Sojourner and the Study Abroad Environment

Ecological study abroad research reveals that the epicenter of potential cultural, linguistic, and personal growth on study abroad lies at the interaction of the sojourner and aspects of the study abroad environment. Upon arrival the sojourners’ personal characteristics and histories interact with the macro-level discourses and ideologies of the foreign environment (Jin, 2012; Kinginger, 2004; McGregor, 2016; Patron, 2007; Pipitone & Raghavan, 2017). These interactions are often similar to those in prior environments since they are influenced and communicated by similar actors, but substantial differences between old environments and the new can make it difficult for sojourners to act with the same competence and confidence as before (Jackson, 2011).

Not only can new discourses cause discomfort, but discourses from prior environments might become unfamiliar again in the foreign environment. For example, sojourners might go abroad with the intent to become global citizens, transcending one nation or culture. However, sojourners sometimes find that globalization requires more than they are willing to give, as they experience feelings of uprootedness, and rethink taking on a new identity (Bae & Park, 2016; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Globalization and other ideas can be comfortable in one environment, but become newly difficult in another.

Perceiving Affordances of the Study Abroad Environment

At the moment of interaction in a foreign environment, affordances emerge that guide sojourners’ actions. The most widely discussed affordances of study abroad are associated with interactive contact with L2 speakers (Allen, 2010a; Brown, 2014; Liu, 2013; Siegal, 1995; Shively, 2010; Shively, 2016; Trentman, 2013; Umino & Benson, 2016). Researchers reported various kinds of interactive contact, including with host families or roommates, professional and
educational socializing, service encounters, informal conversations with strangers, interest group activities, individual friendships and social circles, and even romantic relationships.

It is commonly thought that interactive contact is ideal for developing cultural and linguistic competence, and as such, study abroad programs have sought to expand opportunities for sojourners to have more of it. However, Kinginger (2010), Allen (2010a), Benson (2012) and Trentman (2013) take an ecological perspective and refute the assumption that useful affordances emerge simply when some level of access is provided to new resources. They argue that affordances emerge for sojourners according to how resources align with their abilities, interests, and the stories they tell to make sense of events. For example, host families or roommates can be physically present yet practically invisible to the sojourner as a linguistic resource. A university campus nearby with thousands of potential speaking partners might only draw the attention of the most outgoing sojourners. Proximity does not, by itself, lead to engaging interactions with L2 speakers, but requires an alignment of interests and other qualities between L2 speakers, sojourners, and the environment where they interact.

Aligning resources in a SA environment with sojourners can be difficult if study abroad programs oversimplify sojourners’ characteristics. For example, even in programs in which the primary focus is on language learning, not all sojourners position themselves as “language learners” (Kinginger, 2008). Researchers have described sojourners with many different orientations to language learning while abroad. In a general way, sojourners sense whether learning the L2 has imminent value for them or not (Allen, 2010c). Upon deeper reflection, they may realize that the value of learning the L2 comes through professional qualification (Jang, 2015), fulfilment of academic requirements, cultural curiosity (Bird, 2021), or societal advancement. In other words, it is an oversimplification to classify sojourners as merely
language learners. They bring other motives with them that are primary to language learning. The L2 is often instrumental to other goals, and if resources are not properly aligned, sojourners may despair or find other ways to reach their goals than through linguistic or cultural advancement.

Another affordance sometimes taken for granted but often discussed in ecological research is the relationship between sojourners and language itself. Language is a necessary but imperfect tool for creating bridges of understanding (Kinginger, 2015; Tan & Kinginger, 2013), entering into social activities (Kinginger & Belz, 2005; Kinginger et al., 2014; M. Kobayashi, 2016), and mediating the creation of new sojourner identities (Diao, 2017; Benson et al., 2012). Language is value-laden (van Lier, 2004), meaning that those who use it have to deal with the social norms, value systems, and history behind the language. The act of choosing to use or not use a language can be full of meaning beyond what is said or written, and even when sojourners interact with others without apparent difficulty, their language acts might assign relevance or value in differing ways, leading to misunderstandings that might be less than obvious (Brown, 2014).

Sojourners in a foreign environment may begin to discover the values behind language as they become familiar with cultural systems and learn to see L2 native speakers signal their positions within those systems. They may begin to see how they can position themselves as well. As they become more familiar with the implicit values that language conveys and the discourses that frame those values, sojourners develop symbolic competence (Shively, 2018) and can present themselves more intentionally and accurately in the foreign environment (Shardakova, 2013).
Acting on Affordances

The language, interactive contact, and many other aspects of the study abroad environment present affordances to sojourners that enable action. Sojourners’ growth depends on how they act on these perceived affordances, but what actions they may take is difficult to foresee, even for sojourners themselves.

Much of the research has described various approaches to study abroad that seem to dispose sojourners towards certain actions. These approaches might be described as basic strategies for interacting with aspects of the study abroad environment. For example, some sojourners have actively avoided the discomfort of foreign cultures by seeking out familiarity abroad through compatriot socializing or communications with friends and family at home (i.e., an avoidance strategy; see Wilkinson, 1998). Some have approached their environments with white gloves on, so to speak, seeking to learn and understand with limited personal investment and risk (i.e., an observational strategy; see Papatsiba, 2006). Still others have engaged the foreign environment head-on, actively seeking to both understand and invest in relationships with L2 speakers (i.e., an integrative strategy; see Isabelli-Garcia, 2006).

Research has also explored how sojourners’ personal characteristics and histories might relate to their use of one strategy or another. For example, a sojourner’s reasons for learning a language (e.g., academic, professional, linguistic, cultural, social) could make one strategy more obvious or sensible than others (Allen, 2010b). As already discussed, discourses in which sojourners have already participated (e.g., orientalism, globalization, educational strategies) can also frame their approach to study abroad even if they do not agree with them.

The strategies that sojourners draw upon may be persistent, but they are not static. On the contrary, sojourners draw on many different strategies depending on how their characteristics fit
the situation in which they find themselves (Allen, 2013). Sojourners can also have conflicting
desires within themselves that ebb and flow, manifesting in contradictory behaviors in a short
period of time (Allen, 2010b; Quan, 2019 Wolcott, 2013). A sojourner might begin one day with
a somewhat distanced, anthropological perspective, but become emotionally engaged in new
relationships by the afternoon because of interactions with L2 speakers on a personally relevant
topic. A sojourner might begin their study abroad with the intent to make close friends with L2
speakers, but retreat to compatriots and class-work because they became uncomfortable with the
perceived values of the foreign society. These changes in motivation and approach can happen
within a day or across months. Participants may drift between approaches from week to week, or
they may have month-long spurts of investment in one strategy broken up by a single experience.

The Negotiation of Difference

Deciding how to act or which strategy to follow involves a continuous process of
negotiation, where the subject of negotiation is the meaning of action, and the intention of
negotiation is for a sojourner’s actions to adequately express preferences and goals that are valid
to sojourners and others in their environments (Tan & Kinginger, 2013). To make this possible,
sojourners also negotiate differences among their own personal values, preferences, and
emotions, especially as they see them in the unfamiliar light of a study abroad environment (Bae
& Park, 2016; McGregor, 2014; McGregor, 2016; Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). The research
has identified several features of negotiation to describe how sojourners become familiar with
new environments and start to act confidently and intuitively.

First, negotiation involves sojourners articulating their own preferences, values, desires,
investments, expectations, and goals (Allen, 2010b; Bird, 2021; McGregor, 2016; McGregor,
2014; Wolcott, 2013; Wolcott & Motyka, 2013; Yang & Kim, 2011). Research has most
commonly seen this articulation when sojourners reflect on the tensions between their own preferences and those of others (Jackson, 2013; McGregor, 2016).

Second, negotiation involves sojourners experimenting with new ways of expressing themselves that may empower them to move forward toward their goals in the foreign environment. They do this by taking what they know about the foreign environment and trying to find common ground. They act within the foreign environment, observe the result, act again, and so on. This is apparent in short-term, repeated tasks (E. Kobayashi & Kobayashi, 2018), and in sojourners’ long-term efforts to learn a language (Bird, 2021).

Third and finally, researchers describe sojourners carving out a 3rd space that makes sense of the home environment and the foreign environment (Kinginger, 2008; Smolcic, 2013). This can involve making creative arrangements in the foreign environment to satisfy sojourners’ goals and desires (Benson, 2012; Bird, 2021), and it can also mean that sojourners adjust or recreate their own identity to fit into existing arrangements (Jackson, 2011). The impetus, perhaps, for the sojourner inhabiting this place between places is the impossibility of expressing themselves in the foreign environment in the exact way as they had done in prior environments. As they are prevented from engaging in the foreign environment as they might have imagined, they are constrained to reimagine themselves with an identity that is compatible with the foreign environment (Barkhuizen, 2017). The negotiation of difference reveals ways to act that reinforce sojourners’ deepest desires while also aligning with the host culture (Bird, 2021; Seo & Korol-Ljungberg, 2005; Trentman, 2013; Wolcott & Motyka, 2013, Yang & Kim, 2011; see also Siegal, 1995).

This 3rd space may be unique to the sojourner and difficult to imagine beforehand. The results of negotiation will vary for sojourners because those negotiations are mediated by the
unique interaction of their personal characteristics and history with properties of the foreign environment (see Jin, 2012; Trentman, 2013). Sojourners differ in their possibilities to act because what looks like one and the same environment will present different affordances to each sojourner (Jackson, 2008).

**Summary of Ecological Study Abroad Research**

Ecological study abroad research reveals the complex interaction of sojourners with foreign environments, foregrounded by interaction with prior environments and mediated by perceived affordances and negotiations of difference (see Figure 3). Regardless of whether sojourners retreat from or engage with the foreign environment, study abroad can act as a catalyst for change in sojourners’ future paths. Study abroad challenges sojourners to seriously consider and, for a period of time, live out the personal implications of learning a new language and engage meaningfully with a foreign culture. What learners in their home countries might think of fondly as a kind of academic vacation or an on-ramp to global expertise can become an unexpectedly uncomfortable reconfiguration of sojourners’ identities in an unfamiliar foreign environment. Those who retreat when confronted with this reconfiguration settle for a lesser personal change (but not no change), while those who avail themselves of the unique affordances of a study abroad environment might experience
deeper personal change. This change comes about as sojourners make sense of values from prior environments, the foreign environment, and within themselves.

**Future Directions for Ecological Study Abroad Research**

Having summarized existing ecological research for language learning on study abroad, our insights can be compared to other fields. The field of closest interest is that of second language acquisition (SLA), on which many of the reviewed publications have drawn for conceptual support (Kramsch, 2003; Leather & van Dam, 2003; van Lier, 2004). Reviews of SLA research from an ecological perspective have identified some relevant trends that are worth considering here. For example, Steffensen and Kramsch (2017) categorized ecological insights from SLA into different “views,” or lenses, that researchers used in their efforts to better understand learner experiences: (a) an agent-environment systems view, (b) materiality-based and virtuality-based views, (c) identity-based views, and (d) value-based views. Here these views are briefly described, their contributions to the reviewed literature is discussed, and gaps are identified that can be filled through future research.

**An Agent-Environment Systems View**

Ecological SLA research has pushed back on the historical focus on the “language learner” as a bounded unit with mostly static characteristics and clearly defined paths for linguistic or cultural development. The research attempts to view people holistically, including their past history, their present relationships with the environment, and how these present possible ways to act going forward. Similarly, ecological study abroad research challenges static definitions of study abroad environments and participants and describes the interaction of sojourner and environment in all their variety. Both SLA and SALL have drawn on ecological approaches (especially sociocultural ones) developed in other fields that consider the complexity
and variety of experiences of learning a language. Research from this view provides detailed
descriptions of sojourner experiences and highlights conflicts or affordances that would
otherwise remain hidden. Overall, this view has encouraged the stakeholders of study abroad to
consider sojourners on an individual basis rather than providing one-size-fits-all interventions.

**Materiality-Based and Virtuality-Based Views**

Some ecological research in SLA has begun investigations into the affordances of
particular learning environments, such as online social interactions and augmented reality. They
highlight the constraints of different environments and the agent-environment systems that
emerge when people use a second language within those environments. Augmented reality,
virtual reality, and online social platforms merit ecological investigation as much as physical
environments.

Given the recentness of SLA research into virtuality-based views, it may come as no
surprise that ecological study abroad research has not yet provided many publications along
these lines. Shively’s (2010) model for pragmatic instruction identifies possible affordances of
digital tools at different points of a study abroad experience, but research so far has not taken on
the task of deeply describing the material and virtual environments sojourners inhabit. Research
along these lines might benefit sojourners by changing their relationship to technological
resources while abroad. It may be that those who would use social media tools to virtually retreat
from the foreign environment to more familiar relationships and interactions could learn to use
those same tools to approach the foreign environment on safe ground. Virtual environments
might be repurposed as a tool to engage instead of distract.
Identity-Based Views

Recent scholarship in SLA regarding identity was deeply affected by Norton (2013), who challenged the assumption that learner identities are made up of largely static characteristics that interact predictably with other factors. Ecological research in SLA has built on her work and describes learners with multiple identities that emerge from the interaction of micro-level events and macro-level ideologies and discourses (Diao & Trentman, 2016, McGregor, 2016; Shively, 2016).

Ecological study abroad research has made significant contributions to the study of identity along these lines. Sojourners and those supporting their sojourn anticipate that studying abroad will provide numerous, consistent, and intensive interactions. However, the research shows that they sometimes do not anticipate that these interactions will significantly challenge their identities. Study abroad research provides many case studies of sojourners that affirm the findings of general SLA research, that identity is context-dependent and highly dynamic. The negotiation of difference (Block, 2007) has gained traction and been further developed for study abroad environments, where differences are consistently present that require sojourners to take action and potentially adjust their self-perceptions. Given the risks taken and the investments made by those studying abroad, it behooves the field to continue developing a firm understanding of the identity changes that sojourners might undergo while abroad.

Value-Based Views

Finally, recent SLA research has started to explore how the value-laden nature of language weighs on learners as they struggle to balance different expectations and social norms. Within study abroad research many reports have touched on this balance by describing sojourners’ experiences with conflicting ideologies and norms (Bird, 2021; Brown, 2014; Diao,
2017; Kinginger, 2004; Kinginger et al., 2014; Kinginger, 2010; Pellegrino, 1998; Seo & Koroljundberg, 2005), but research in the field has primarily focused on identity as the unit of analysis (i.e., identity-based views) and has not clearly addressed the moral dimension of sojourners’ experiences (i.e., value-based views). Future research could deeply explore the tensions and balances that sojourners maintain while abroad, providing insights relating to the negotiation of difference and sojourner identity.

**Next Steps**

Existing ecological study abroad research has kept pace with SLA research in some areas but less so in others. It has made meaningful contributions regarding agency and the relationship between sojourner and environment, and many authors have contributed to developing a more holistic view of sojourner identity. On the other hand, research focusing on the affordances of material and virtual environments is largely absent, and value-based views are cursory. While further research is probably warranted in both of these areas, some immediate progress can be made regarding value-based views.

As already described, current publications hint at a complex world of values that sojourners must navigate (e.g., ideologies, cultural norms, personal values), but analysis of these issues so far is loosely connected and lacks a clear framework for making sense of what matters to sojourners and what they have to deal with. For example, a critical step to take before conducting research from a value-based view is defining what values are and how to properly investigate them. Fortunately, other fields dealing with similar questions have created theories that conceptualize language and learning from a value-based, ecological perspective.
The Moral Dimension of Study Abroad

To facilitate research from a value-based perspective, this paper will briefly present common insights from two value-based accounts in different fields: Hodges’ (2015) values-realizing theory from ecolinguistics, and Yanchar’s (2016) moral ecology of learning from psychology. To avoid confusion, the words “value” and “moral” in these approaches do not draw on the notions of universal moral imperatives, classical ethics, or current religious or political connotations. Rather, they refer to the inherent meaningfulness of human experience and the concern involved in all human action. The following sections outline a conceptual framework by synthesizing principles presented in values-realizing theory and the moral ecology of learning. The three primary claims are that (a) values are inherent in human practices, (b) participation in practice requires the balancing of values, and (c) balancing as a kind of moral stand-taking. For a more thorough discussion of moral realism, see Slife and Yanchar (2019).

Values are Inherent in Human Practices

A value-based approach to language learning holds that values exist in practices, as opposed to existing in people’s minds as psychological constructs or between people as social constructs (see MacIntyre, 1981/1985). Humans participate in practices, and values make up the “boundary conditions” (Hodges, 2015, p. 715) that give practices form. Two types of values can be identified that help define any practice.

First, there are “moral goods” (Yanchar & Slife, 2017 p. 4) that are the intrinsic reasons for participating in a practice. For example, the practice of studying has the intrinsic good of learning, which could be described more specifically depending on the instance (e.g., memorizing vocabulary, refining a formal presentation, understanding grammar rules). To be clear, doing well on an exam, making friends in a study group, or finding employment are not
intrinsic goods of studying per se, but could be the goods of related practices and commonly realized alongside the goods of studying.

Second, there are “moral reference points” (Yanchar & Slife, 2017, p. 3) that guide participants in their pursuit of the goods of a practice. Some reference points are constitutive of practices, and others might guide people to participate more effectively. For example, one cannot engage in studying without acting in relation to standards that define that practice. A constitutive reference point of studying could be honesty; to the extent that someone plagiarizes, they are not realizing the goods of studying. Non-constitutive reference points might include being well-rested and alert; these are criteria for excellent studying, but people can still study when they are tired, even if it is less effective.

These two types of values, the goods and reference points that are inherent in practices, are “grounds for judgment that people encounter and must deal with in some way as they make sense of, and find direction in, the practical contexts of their lives” (Yanchar & Slife, 2017 p. 4). Without these values, practices would not exist and people would have no bearings by which to make sense of practices and how to participate in them. Just as physical borders and landmarks demarcate countries and territories, values give shape and form to practices.

**Participation in Practice Requires the Balancing of Values**

A value-based approach to language learning recognizes that people commonly deal with multiple practices and values, normally without realizing or reflecting on it. Action requires not just dealing with one reference point at a time, but all reference points that are pertinent to the present practice(s) people are engaged in. To use another physical comparison, walking through a forest entails moving in relation to not one, but many trees, and successfully navigating the forest requires orienting oneself to them. In the same way, a sojourner participating in a direct
enrollment class at a foreign university might participate in group discussion, a practice with a unique landscape of moral reference points. Social reciprocity and time management might be relevant reference points that guide good group discussions, and as such, the sojourner might limit the number of comments he makes in order to respect the invested time of native-speaker students who are taking the class. The right balance of these reference points with others (e.g., speak in the target language often) would lead to realizing the moral goods of group discussion.

In familiar environments and practices, the task of balancing different values is usually smooth and does not require participants to actively reflect on the values involved and how to balance them. Unfamiliar environments (or complications in an otherwise familiar environment) usually require some deliberate consideration of the values involved in a practice. For example, a sojourner may initially act at ease and could even be bored while purchasing groceries in a foreign language environment, but resolving a minor complication could require unusual concentration from those involved, including an explicit consideration of the values involved in the practice of grocery shopping. For instance, if there were not enough change in the cash register, a sojourner might become consciously concerned with how to be a good customer by (a) paying a fair price, (b) acting politely to the cashier, (c) completing the transaction in a reasonable amount of time, and (d) doing all of these things within the limits of their language ability. The cashier, on the hand, might become consciously concerned with being a good cashier by (a) making a profit, (b) appeasing a customer, (c) completing the transaction in a reasonable amount of time, and (d) doing all of these things with someone who has limited language ability. Resolving the situation requires moving forward with a particular configuration of these values, with some of them taking more priority than others. Being a “good customer” or a “good cashier” in this situation requires more than linguistic expertise on the part of the sojourner and
the cashier, but also familiarity with acceptable ways to balance these (and probably other) values in the moment.

This example highlights the balancing of values that might occur within a given practice, but similar balancing acts occur between practices whose goods and reference points may or may not fit together well. The customer in this example may wave the need for change, even if the price is unfair, because generosity is an important part of good citizenship, a separate practice with its own goods and reference points.

**Balancing as a Kind of Moral Stand-Taking**

A value-based approach also recognizes that actions constitute taking a kind of moral stand in a larger landscape of possible actions; “they are one’s judgments, whether tacit or deliberate, regarding practices worth pursuing” (Yanchar, 2016, p. 507). This is especially evident in language use:

> When humans speak and listen, or write and read [...] these actions irreversibly place us. [...]

> To postulate a question, a statement, or even to give a grunt or a groan is to locate oneself, to take a stance with respect to oneself, to others [...] and to the geographies and tasks within which those selves are located. Actions, including those of ordinary conversations [...] cannot be done without pointing to oneself and to the responsibility entailed in speaking or listening. (Hodges & Fowler, 2010, p. 240)

Sojourners constantly situate themselves in relation to the actions of other sojourners, the programs they participate in, and the people who inhabit both prior and foreign environments. At one level, sojourners already distinguish themselves from many other language learners by engaging in the practice of study abroad. Traveling to and living in a foreign environment requires turning down other opportunities (educational or otherwise), which is a statement about
the value of study abroad for sojourners and the kind of person they value becoming. At a more detailed level, sojourners within a specific study abroad experience may align with the program and other participants in some ways, and not in others. A study abroad program might provide general direction regarding how sojourners should go about best achieving the goods of study abroad (whatever those goods are), but each sojourner will take a unique moral stand by virtue of how they manage or balance relevant values to best achieve the good of practice in a given context.

Participating in a practice and how well one performs in it is loaded with value in a larger world of practices and within a person’s life story; they say something about what is worth doing. Situating oneself in a larger moral ecology can be complicated or controversial, but it is also inescapable and potentially beneficial. “We need to disagree and agree with others in a way that moves us to enrich the physical, social, and moral possibilities of our environment” (Hodges, 2015, p. 731).

Implications for Study Abroad Research

The previous section outlines what a moral ecology is made of: practices, goods, reference points, and the stances that sojourners take as they balance competing values. The final questions regarding a value-based approach to study abroad are: how does one go about conducting research from this perspective, and what could this research contribute to the field?

Researching Study Abroad From a Value-Based View

To look at study abroad from a value-based perspective is to see the moral landscape that sojourners inhabit. Different research frameworks could conceivably take on this perspective and reveal the moral ecology of study abroad in insightful ways. Yanchar and Slife (2017) proposed one such framework for exploring the fit of a phenomenon (e.g., attending a direct enrollment
course) in the moral space of a practice (e.g., studying abroad). In this framework they outline four general questions related to (a) the moral significance of practices, (b) the moral demands of practice, (c) the role of practices in becoming, and (d) the moral complexities that emerge within and between practices.

*Moral Significance*

First, what significance does a phenomenon have related to the moral goods of a practice? For example, how does participating in a direct enrollment course enable or hinder realizing the goods of study abroad? Research might reveal that the course was a good fit for sojourners with a particular orientation to the goods of study abroad, whereas others experienced it as a hindrance or distraction. For the former, the course might have enabled a certain kind of study abroad experience that emphasizes certain goods (e.g., developing cross-cultural relationships). For sojourners who took a different moral stand by prioritizing the goods of study abroad in other ways, the course might have been a less-effective use of time spent abroad. Research could compare the direct enrollment course to other activities and discuss how they facilitated or hampered sojourner efforts to excel in the practice of study abroad.

*Moral Demands*

Second, what does the phenomenon reveal about the moral reference points involved in practices? What evaluations do sojourners make about the different ways that people can go about realizing moral goods? Research could investigate which reference points exerted moral demands on sojourners as part of their participation in a direct-enrollment course, such as respect for authority or social reciprocity. Being a sojourner in this context may have involved tacitly prioritizing these reference points among many others. Sojourners may have acted in ways that valued efficient time use more than social reciprocity and respect for authority by speaking more
than other students during discussions, ignoring or interrupting the instructor, and complaining about assignments to be completed on their own time. The way that they went about participating constituted a moral stand in relation to moral demands outside themselves.

However, sojourners’ orientations to moral demands can change over time, perhaps by finding a better way to achieve the goods of practice. For example, sojourners could find that completing course assignments before they attend enables them to participate more fully in class activities and thereby improve their linguistic ability. Yet another reason to change could be that sojourners reoriented themselves to the goods that they pursued. In other words, sojourners may have changed what they think is worthwhile about study abroad generally, which could have changed how the course fit into their experience.

Moral Becoming

Third, what role does the phenomenon play in sojourners becoming a more skillful participant in practice? To offer another example, how does participating in study abroad fit into people’s efforts to become more adept language users? Research could produce a moral narrative describing how their orientation to the goods and reference points involved in language learning shifted over the period of their sojourn. Understanding sojourners’ past experiences, their current efforts, and their future possibilities could frame a story of striving for excellence, with some degree of success, in the moral ecology of their study abroad program.

Moral Complexities

Fourth, what moral complexities do people struggle with in the midst of practice? How do they balance competing moral reference points, or possibly competing moral goods of different practices? If developing cross-cultural relationships is an intrinsic good of study abroad, but if sojourners find that developing meaningful relationships requires more emotional energy
than they are capable of giving on a given day, how do they balance taking care of themselves with their social investments so that they can optimally realize the goods of study abroad? On the one hand, they may find ways to optimize their emotional capacity (e.g., a planned routine with dedicated personal time) and patiently keep looking for new contacts that require less emotional involvement than others they have met. On the other hand, they may retreat to a degree from social life at the expense of becoming close friends with native speakers, while other moral goods of study abroad (e.g., linguistic competence) take greater precedent.

**Potential Contributions of Value-Based Research**

The theoretical foundation and the framework discussed above provide ways of conceptualizing study abroad so that researchers can observe, analyze, and share findings from a perspective that is fundamentally concerned with what matters to sojourners as they participate in practices. Three apparent benefits stand out that this approach might offer to researchers, practitioners, and sojourners. Theoretically, this perspective enriches the ecological concept of the negotiation of differences. From a more practical standpoint, it contributes to the designing of relevant study abroad programs and helps apply insights to specific circumstances.

**The Negotiation of Difference**

The negotiation of difference is a pivotal concept of ecological research that brings together many other concepts (e.g., macro-level discourses, affordances, 3rd space) in ways that reflect the researcher’s phenomenon of interest. The types of differences that have emerged in previous publications reflect the approach of the researchers. For example, research taking an identity-based approach might discover tensions caused by a difference between sojourner personal characteristics (e.g., nationality, gender) and cultural norms in the foreign environment. Not only does this value-based approach give researchers a lens for seeing other types of
differences (i.e., moral complexities), but it also adds more theoretical detail to the process of negotiation itself. Our earlier review of the process presented three parts: (a) articulating preferences, values, desires, etc., (b) finding common ground, and (c) creating a 3rd space.

First, this value-based approach theorizes practices as the context in which preferences and desires (i.e., values) can be naturally articulated, and these values can be described either as practical goods that sojourners pursue, or as reference points that they consider in order to realize those goods. This description of value types and the way they are expressed in practice can provide useful mental scaffolding for sojourners as they reflect on their experiences and compare their own values with different ones in a foreign environment.

Second, finding common ground occurs as sojourners become more familiar with the values inherent in practices performed in a foreign environment. They feel out the contours of a practice (e.g., lecture-style instruction) until they understand its purpose (e.g., knowledge transmission) and common guides for achieving its purpose (e.g., memorization). Becoming somewhat familiar with a variety of practices and their embedded goods and reference points would enable sojourners to see similar practices and values in their own histories. Practices with the most similar values to their own may prove to be ideal for finding common ground.

Third, inhabiting a 3rd space can be described as becoming, a kind of stand-taking regarding what is worth doing. The metaphor of a 3rd space can be enriched by the spatial metaphor of a moral ecology, where sojourners position themselves in relation to other individuals and societal groups by settling on a particular way of studying abroad. Inhabiting a 3rd place is a commentary on what study abroad is good for, and the process of negotiation that sojourners undergo in order to create their own 3rd place is a commentary on how best to go about studying abroad.
A New Metaphor to Guide Practitioners

If practitioners intend to enhance study abroad for the benefit of sojourners, then they must know the sojourners better. Prior research has conceptualized (i.e., known) sojourners using metaphors that approximate human experience, which directly affect the kind of support practitioners provide. A computer-processing metaphor, for example, may draw attention to sojourners’ mental processes and limitations, and may lead to interventions intended to reduce cognitive load or maximize knowledge retention. Many such metaphors have produced significant insights for improving sojourners’ experiences, and considering more than one can be beneficial (Sfard, 1998).

This value-based approach assumes a very different metaphor than those commonly seen in study abroad literature. Perhaps most centrally, it describes human beings as agents embodied in a world of meaning. It provides a detailed way of understanding human experience without proposing causal mechanisms that control human experience. Yanchar and Slife (2017) propose that “knowing who a person is, from this perspective, is to know his or her moral stance and moral becoming as a kind of commentary on moral goods” (p. 17). In other words, exploring the moral landscape that sojourners inhabit, and knowing where they stand in it, is important to designing and evaluating effect study abroad experiences. While experienced practitioners may already have a sense of these things, research could make their tacit understandings explicit and easier to apply.

Bridging the Theory-Application Gap

Applying the findings of research to a specific program or sojourner is rarely straightforward. Published standards and best practices are intended to guide policies and interventions, but do not often consider the complexities of real life. For example, sojourners
who participate in content courses in the target language during study abroad tend to improve their oral proficiency more than those who do not (Vande Berg et al., 2009). However, a sojourner participating in a content course may feel that recommended preparation for class discussions takes time away from other worthwhile activities, such as hanging out with native-speaker friends. How should the sojourner proceed? Should the course be given absolute priority? Probably not in all cases, but what does an acceptable balancing of priorities look like? This is one question that value-based approaches are well equipped to answer, since moral complexities describe exactly this phenomenon.

A previous example discussed the moral goods and reference points that might become salient when a cashier runs out of change to give to a sojourner customer. However trivial or mundane a matter this is, a thorough investigation of what it means to be a “good customer” or “good cashier” in this situation could reveal moral configurations that are acceptable to both parties. For Yanchar and Slife (2017), the value of these insights is two-fold:

[A] researcher’s moral explication of such situations might not only reveal these moral tensions, thus providing clarification about what is actually happening [...] but also show how others have navigated the balancing process, thus providing a practical bridge between abstract and everyday ethics. (p. 18)

Sojourners, especially those going abroad for the first time, are immersed not only in a different world linguistically and culturally, but also morally. Their growth and development occur in light of moral goods and reference points that they have to deal with in one way or another. Just as sojourners receive linguistic and cultural training before study abroad to prepare them for the linguistic and cultural ecologies they will encounter, seeing how others have effectively (or ineffectively) prioritized values in a similar study abroad environment could help sojourners to
more rapidly familiarize themselves with, position themselves in, and enrich their possibilities within a new moral landscape.

**Conclusion**

This paper outlines ecological research of study abroad for language learning, identifies value-based views as a guide for further inquiry, and proposes a framework for describing the moral ecology that sojourners inhabit. The ecological perspective of study abroad is distinguished by its focus on complex relationships that exist between sojourners and their environments (i.e., affordances), its consideration of sojourners as whole people with histories and changing identities, and its interest in how sojourners negotiate differences between their own values and those of the foreign environment. Understanding how sojourners orient themselves to the values of their study abroad environments is critical to knowing how to support them as they engage with unfamiliar cultural norms and discourses, and a moral ecology framework provides a theoretically powerful but practically simple way for researchers and practitioners to improve study abroad programming.
References


cultural aspects of language learning in study abroad (pp. 155-177). John Benjamins Publishing.


ARTICLE 3

The Moral Ecology of Unstructured Speaking on Study Abroad:

Finding Speaking Opportunities

Matthew T. Bird

Brigham Young University
Abstract

This report describes the moral phenomena that students in an intensive Arabic study abroad program encountered as they tried to find good speaking opportunities for themselves outside of institutional arrangements. The moral-practical positions that participants took on what speaking activities were good for and how to best go about them were accompanied by tensions that they had to deal with throughout the program. They found themselves obligated to consider moral demands such as decisiveness, independence, and fairness as they tried to become better conversationalists, cultural insiders, and friends with the people they met. Additional research using the same analytic framework can reveal deeply practical insights for the benefit of language learners and practitioners.

*Keywords:* study abroad and language acquisition, study abroad programs, hermeneutic phenomenology
Introduction

In Leo van Lier’s (2004) discussion of an ecological perspective for language learning, he said that “there is no value-free or value-less language use” (p. 185). Steffensen and Kramsch (2017) repeated van Lier’s statement and further referenced Bert Hodges (2015), who described “language as a values-realizing activity” (p. 712). These claims have deep implications for language learning research, but examples of empirical research that show what these implications are in practice have not yet materialized, even when similarly difficult and pivotal concepts have received increased attention from researchers in the past decade, such as agency (Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2011; Mercer, 2012; Xiao, 2014) or identity (Barkhuizen, 2017; Diao, 2017; Kinginger, 2015; see also Norton, 2013).

Although language learning research has sometimes addressed the issue of differing cultural values, often in a study abroad context (Kinginger, 2016; Plews, 2015; Seo, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005; Tan & Kinginger, 2013), the object of inquiry tends to be identity, agency, or concepts other than the values themselves. References to values in language learning research often assume that the reader already has some basic understanding of what values are and do not provide further explanation. As such, values are often implicitly defined as something that people have, a cognitive or social construct that is one of many other subjectivities. While research focused on other concepts might not be expected to provide such an explanation, a more deliberate consideration of values is necessary to reveal what van Lier’s and Hodges’ claims mean for language learning. In a discussion of values and morality in the broader field of psychology, Brinkmann (2004) cautioned:

… granted that moral properties are an irreducible part of the human world … we must be particularly careful in first understanding this moral dimension, since moral properties
very easily drop out of consideration, or become reduced to something they are not, when
investigated with the tools of current psychological methodology. (p. 58)

In Bird (2021a) I outlined one way to understand the value-based or “moral dimension” of
language learning by synthesizing insights from value-based approaches to language (Hodges,
2015) and learning (Yanchar, 2016). The three primary claims I synthesized from these
approaches are that (a) values are intrinsic to human practice, (b) participation in practice
requires the balancing of values, and (c) this balancing constitutes a kind of moral stand-taking.
From this perspective, engaging in language learning is a fundamentally moral endeavor for two
reasons. First, it includes practical demands that people cannot ignore if they seek to realize the
intrinsic purposes of language learning. Second, the purposes and demands of language learning
must be balanced with the purposes and demands of other practices, and the way that people do
this constitutes taking a stand of sorts in a moral ecology. In other words, what learners do says
something about what and how things should be done in light of a particular configuration of
values, including the purposes and demands of practice.

Language research from a value-based perspective can contribute meaningfully to various
theoretical discussions, such as providing conceptual details for the negotiation of difference (see
Bird, 2021a) or advocating for a “practice turn” in language learning research. Furthermore,
articulating the values involved in language learning, and describing how people navigate the
moral phenomena of specific contexts, can generate uniquely practical insights for future
learners. Many approaches to qualitative inquiry can produce thick descriptions of participant
experiences and insights that are transferable to other contexts, but detailing how a participant
engaged in a practice and somehow navigated its moral complexities can provide a “practical
bridge between abstract and everyday ethics” (Yanchar & Slife, 2017, p. 18). It may be that
sharing insights along these lines with practitioners and learners may prove more useful, or useful in a different way, than sharing the “best practices” or “rules of thumb” that research tends to promote.

In this paper I share insights related to the value-based, or moral, phenomena revealed in the experiences of university students who participated in a semester-long, intensive Arabic study abroad program in Amman, Jordan. The participants considered here all struggled with an assignment to converse with Arabic-speak-ers on their own time, an activity that I will call “unstructured speaking.” I identified unstructured speaking as an important practice related to the broader practices of studying abroad and language learning. In this particular study abroad context, participants engaged in unstructured speaking to accomplish certain intrinsic purposes. They grappled, more in action than in thought, with moral demands and complexities as they strove to become better Arabic conversationalists. A salient phenomenon relevant to this practice was how participants went about finding opportunities to speak. Consequently, the general research question that guided my inquiry was: what was the moral ecology of unstructured speaking that participants inhabited during study abroad, and how did finding speaking opportunities fit into that moral ecology?

Methodology

Building on the pre-understanding of values and language learning that I presented in Bird (2021b), the analysis for this study uses the framework proposed by Yanchar and Slife (2017). Their framework draws on Taylor’s (1985, 1989) philosophical position of hermeneutic moral realism and, more fundamentally, Heidegger’s (1962, 1971) hermeneutic phenomenology, along with more recent interpretations of his work by others (Dreyfus, 1992, 2014; Guignon, 1983; Hatab, 2000). Hermeneutic moral realism is not concerned with “values” and “morality”
as defined in classical ethical theories or common religious or political connotations. Nor does it define values as fundamentally cognitive or social constructions, as implied in language learning and social science research generally. It is instead concerned with the “ordinary ethics of concrete practices” (Yanchar & Slife, 2017, p. 18), such as the intrinsic purposes of practices, the demands that practices exert on participants, and the moral dilemmas that arise while engaged in practices. Indeed, from this perspective practices are the fundamental access point for understanding human life in general, and values are the boundaries and guides that give practices form. As “moral realism” suggests, values are as real as the practices that they constitute. From social psychology, Hodges (2015) concurs that values are “ontologically real demands, obligations, and opportunities” (p. 715), without which human activity would be shapeless and confused (for more on hermeneutic moral realism see Brinkmann, 2004; Slife & Yanchar, 2019).

One important matter that this framework must briefly address in the context of language learning is the question of culture. Can different value systems found in various cultures be explained as anything other than social constructions? How does this interpretive frame account for cultural differences? The short answer is that hermeneutic moral realism does not claim that individual or social interpretation does not happen, but it is rather concerned with the stuff of practices that “seems to stand or have staying power even when it contradicts preference or prejudice” (Yanchar & Slife, 2017, p. 4). Hickman (2019), who addresses this matter in depth, adds that “these elements that ‘push back’ against us, are not reducible to interpretation” (p. 60, emphasis in original). As will be shown in the results of this study, analysis from a hermeneutic moral realist frame can reveal unique insights regarding issues commonly studied from a sociocultural or feminist perspective (e.g., gender).
Looking at values in the “ordinary” way proposed by hermeneutic moral realism means that people most often understand them only tacitly, examining values only when there is need for troubleshooting or change of some kind. Just as people normally do not have to think about each pen stroke they make while writing a handwritten note, they also implicitly deal with many values in their day-to-day activities of their lives without much reflection. Yanchar and Slife (2017) describe practices as moral ecologies and present an analytic framework for uncovering the tacit moral phenomena that make up these moral ecologies. Their method investigates (a) the moral significance of a phenomenon for a practice, (b) the moral goods and moral reference points of a practice, (c) how people become (or fail to become) good participants in a practice, and (d) the moral tensions or complexities that participants encounter in a practice.

In the context of this study, I used this framework to reveal (a) how finding speaking opportunities was morally significant for language learners as they participated in the practice of unstructured speaking during study abroad; (b) how unstructured speaking had certain intrinsic purposes (i.e., moral goods), and also practical demands (i.e., moral reference points) that were contextually relevant to achieving those intrinsic goods; (c) how participants succeeded or struggled to realize the moral goods of unstructured speaking; and (d) the tensions that participants encountered as they attempted to achieve balance between different moral reference points and between different moral goods.

**Data Collection and Case Selection**

The data for this study come from the experiences of participants in a four-month intensive Arabic study abroad program in Amman, Jordan. The program was run by a large, private university in the U.S.A. and hosted by an Arabic language institute in Amman. I traveled with the students to Jordan as one of multiple administrators and remained with them for the
program’s duration, observing and helping with activities at the institute where they took formal classes. The data were originally collected for a separate analysis (see Bird, 2021b) using an interpretive grounded theory framework (Charmaz, 2006), but the topics addressed and the depth of the information gathered in this extant data set revealed the need for a more in-depth analysis of the moral configurations of practice in this setting. During data collection I adhered to several standards of trustworthiness to improve the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), including triangulation, prolonged engagement, and persistent observation.

I held a first round of semi-structured interviews with each student during the first weeks of the program and reviewed weekly self-evaluations that they wrote during the same timeframe. The content of these interviews ranged a great deal, but I noticed that students’ speaking experiences outside of the institute were a topic of greater concern than others. As such, I decided to narrow the study to those who struggled with these speaking activities in some way. I then selected 9 of the 28 total participants for further data collection based on apparent struggles in their speaking that showed up in their daily speaking logs, weekly self-evaluations, and my interview notes. I arranged to conduct a second round of interviews with these students and reviewed previously collected data for issues to ask about that might explain why they struggled to speak and how they resolved their speaking dilemmas. Meanwhile, I continued to interact with all of the students regularly as an administrator, an instructor, and in many respects as a peer with the same experiences and concerns. The second round of interviews probed participants for their thoughts and experiences related to themes from the first interviews, such as strategies for finding speaking partners or going speaking side by side with other participants. I also occasionally observed participants’ unstructured speaking activities, which helped confirm some of the information that I heard in interviews or read in self-evaluations. After the program ended
the complete data set consisted of interview recordings and transcripts, weekly self-evaluations, daily speaking logs, and observation notes taken throughout the program.

The results of the aforementioned grounded theory analysis provoked questions about the values that participants dealt with during their sojourn, and I decided to analyze the data again using a hermeneutic moral realist framework to see what additional insights could be learned. During an initial review to re-establish basic familiarity with the data, I decided to restrict this analysis to seven of the nine participants for whom I had data (see Table 1). One of these participants was excluded because of a lack of relevant data, and the other participant was excluded because his experience differed so greatly from the others that a separate analysis would be needed to adequately represent it. The final group of participants, identified here by pseudonyms, is described briefly in Table 1. The gender ratio of the participants reflected the overall ratio of students in the program.

**Table 1**

*Participant Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Undergraduate Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle Eastern Studies / Arabic (TESOL minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle Eastern Studies / Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle Eastern Studies / Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle Eastern Studies / Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Middle Eastern Studies / Arabic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The hermeneutic framework described above informed a thematic analysis of the data, similar to a process used in other research from a hermeneutic moral realist perspective (Gong &
Yanchar, 2019; McDonald & Michela, 2019; Yanchar & Gong, 2019, 2020), except that this study used extant data and did not conduct an analysis in tandem with data collection. To improve trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I conducted progressive subjectivity checks and shared early findings with peers who were familiar with the analytic framework.

Familiarization

To begin, I first read through the interview transcripts and self-evaluations for each student in order to become basically familiar with their accounts. During this review I wrote memos to document my thoughts about the data. While other practices were discussed throughout the data, it came as no surprise that “unstructured speaking” was the dominant practice of interest in this data, since participants were selected on criteria related to their speaking experiences. Shortly afterward I decided to focus on “finding speaking opportunities” as an important phenomenon for the practice of unstructured speaking.

Coding

Having narrowed the analysis to a specific practice and a related phenomenon, I began coding participants’ self-evaluations using a set of *a priori* codes that reflected the phenomena described in Yanchar and Slife’s (2017) framework (see Table 2). The intent of these codes was to identify possible moral goods, reference points, and tensions that showed up as participants tried to find opportunities for unstructured speaking. After doing this for each participant’s self-evaluations, I repeated the same process for the interview transcripts. Throughout the coding process I created memos alongside the data to record patterns I was starting to see and other insights for later reference.
Table 2

Moral Configuration Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value judgment</td>
<td>Statements about the worth of something, about whether something was good, bad, ineffective, working well, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral good</td>
<td>Statements that reflect the inherent reasons participants were engaging in unstructured speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral reference point</td>
<td>Statements that reflect how participants went about finding opportunities, engaging in unstructured speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical participation</td>
<td>Statements about what participants did in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>Statements about difficulties, paradoxes, confusions, or complications in practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thematizing and Inferring

After completing coding, I began combining codes according to their similarities or splitting them if they seemed to hide too much detail. This process produced a number of initial themes that I then continued to refine by comparing them with the memos that I took during both the familiarization and coding stages. I also refined them by inferring where they belonged in a moral ecology framework. For example, an early theme had to do with finding speaking opportunities that werelogistically convenient. However, as I tried to place this as a moral good, reference point, or complication led to deleting it as a theme and integrating its components into other themes that fit better into a description of a moral ecology. This process continued until certain moral reference points and tensions appeared to stand out from the rest in the experiences of these participants.

Structuring

The final task of analysis was to organize the themes in such a way that they adequately described a moral ecology. This revealed unique challenges, including some issues related to the
question of culture discussed in the methodology. This led to a re-evaluation of some of my interpretations up to that point and to additional refinement of the themes.

**Case Description**

Before going on to findings, a plainer description of what participation in unstructured speaking looked like will be a useful background for understanding the themes that emerged from the analytic framework. For an in-depth description of the program and its activities see Bird and Belnap (2018). In addition to participating in formal classes at an Arabic language institute, participants were asked to spend at least ten hours each week speaking Arabic with people outside of their regular classes. Two of these hours were provided each week through arranged speaking partners at the language institute, but the participants were responsible for filling the other eight hours with speaking, or at least trying to find people to speak with. While other practices were scheduled and dependable, unstructured speaking required constant flexibility and re-strategizing from participants.

This was clear in the ratio of time spent looking for speaking opportunities compared with actual time spent speaking. On some days participants spent nearly all of their planned speaking time looking for conversations and precious little actually having them. On other days, hardly any looking was needed. Based on self-reported data, the participants in this study spent on average about 10 minutes finding for every 60 minutes spent speaking. Furthermore, it was common in interviews and weekly self-evaluations for participants to reflect on their efforts to generate speaking opportunities for themselves. The question of “how am I going to put myself in conversations with Arabic speakers?” hung over participants day after day, week after week during the program. Those who filled their quota early in the week could afford to set this issue aside for a time but thought still had to be given for the next week’s unstructured speaking plans.
While participants did not often consciously break down the *how* of finding speaking opportunities, the ways that they completed this task might be usefully described by doing so here:

- Who did participants speak with?
- Where did they go for speaking?
- When did they go speaking?
- Who accompanied them, if anyone?

For the sake of clarity and brevity, from here on I will refer to those with whom participants spoke as speaking “partners,” and those fellow students who were with participants during speaking activities as their speaking “companions.”

*Who Participants Spoke With*

At the beginning of their sojourn, participants were quick to speak with anyone who would (literally) give them the time of day. Over time, most participants became more selective of their speaking partners. Service encounters and other captive audiences (e.g., taxi drivers, salesmen) were a consistent source of quality conversations for some, while others looked for Arab peers in the same stage of life (e.g., university students). All but a few participants were limited to speaking with perfect strangers early on, but as soon as they managed to get someone’s contact information, meeting with someone familiar became an option. Participants spoke with their contacts over the phone or texted them to check their availability and set an appointment to meet in person. As they met more people, they could be more selective of who to spend their time with, assuming that their partners were equally interested. Very few participants managed to build a large enough network of acquaintances, or develop strong enough friendships, that finding new opportunities became unnecessary. Most participants had to keep
making new acquaintances in case prior acquaintances became unavailable for some reason. Some participants also found that interacting with families in their neighborhood was socially acceptable and provided opportunities close to home.

**Where They Went for Speaking**

The location of speaking activities varied greatly as well, though it was limited to certain geographical boundaries. Participants could, and sometimes did, travel to more distant parts of Amman, such as the downtown area or neighboring suburbs and towns, but the majority of unstructured speaking took place in regular locations close to the language institute. The University of Jordan was usually a short taxi-ride away, a mall and numerous shops surrounded the host language institute, and an English-Arabic language exchange took place weekly across town. Even if participants found one location more fruitful than another, circumstances often required that they visit a variety of places to get enough speaking time. For some participants, the most comfortable place to speak with Arabs was in the private space of their own apartment or that of other students.

**When They Went Speaking**

Speaking activities were (nearly) impossible in the mornings, as appointments at the language institute often began at 8:00 AM and were followed closely by classes and other appointments. When their regular commitments ended about 1:00 PM, participants were free to structure the remainder of their day. Walking through the halls of the language institute right after classes ended might reveal some participants grabbing something to eat and resting, some getting a fast start on reading assignments, some heading into scheduled speaking appointments at the institute, some talking with other students about where to go for speaking that day, and others making plans over the phone with a friend. Certain times of day were better for speaking
than others, since some acquaintances had classes during the afternoon, or they had work or other commitments in the evening. Weather played a role as well since summer weather in the early weeks, or winter weather in the later weeks, could make being outside uncomfortable at the wrong time of day. For their safety participants also abided by a curfew and apartment visitor restrictions that made nighttime speaking activities a rare opportunity as opposed to a regular possibility.

**Who Accompanied Them**

One complicated aspect of finding speaking opportunities for participants was going with other students to do speaking activities. During their first days abroad, any time after dark, or anywhere outside the city of Amman, the program required that students travel in small groups for safety. For some participants, this was a temporary crutch that they discarded whenever possible; for them, going alone was the best way to get the most out of their speaking. While traveling together was at times necessary (to follow program rules) or expedient (to share taxi fees), many participants tried to split up from other students after arriving at a location where they might find one-on-one speaking opportunities. When conversations ended they could regroup again to travel back. In the latter half of their sojourn, participants tended to find more intensive speaking opportunities (dinner with a family, wedding parties, activities with a group of Arab friends) that could easily provide good speaking opportunities for multiple students. Even though going speaking with other students was common throughout their stay, very few participants really depended on other students for normal conversational support toward the end of the program.
Findings

Having described how participants went about finding opportunities for unstructured speaking, I now turn to presenting five themes from a moral realist perspective that were related to finding opportunities for unstructured speaking. The interviews and weekly self-evaluations revealed that participants were generally concerned with how effective they were at unstructured speaking, and that they regularly reflected on how they might be more effective by changing how they went about finding speaking opportunities. The findings describe the moral ecology of unstructured speaking that informed participants’ evaluations of what were good or better ways to find speaking opportunities. Specifically, the findings describe the moral goods, moral reference points, and moral tensions that seemed most salient for the participants.

Theme 1: Balancing Moral Goods

Although the students’ program clearly outlined and regularly emphasized a broad range of learning outcomes, some objectives seemed easier for students to grasp and focus on. Not surprisingly, the data clearly put linguistic proficiency forward as one moral good of unstructured speaking that received a lot of attention from participants. However, there were actually multiple moral goods that were intrinsic to this practice. Participants’ engagement in finding opportunities for unstructured speaking inherently involved striving for three moral goods: linguistic proficiency, cultural familiarity, and friendship. In other words, participating in unstructured speaking meant becoming more than just Arabic language users, but also Arab cultural insiders and friends with Arabs.

Although few participants deliberately pursued all of these moral goods, moral goods are not dependent on personal preferences or desires; ignorance or resistance to them does not make them disappear. In fact, one participant’s active resistance to making friends with his speaking
partners provided evidence that friendship was actually an intrinsic good of unstructured speaking, because he could not fully participate in unstructured speaking without pursuing it to some degree. Benjamin was uncomfortable with the idea of making friends with his speaking partners, in part because he felt that real friendships were not possible in the short time of the study abroad program.

“If I could become proficient in Arabic, you know, and not have to go make friends, then yeah… I definitely don’t have any like, at least, perceived prejudices against the people here. I think they’re great and some of the nicest people ever, but the relationships aspect of it is a little different for me. [...] I think if I was like, living living here it wouldn’t be a problem, but the fact that I’m here for a couple of months, it kinda accentuates that for me.”

Benjamin’s negative orientation to friendship as a moral good shaped the way he went about finding speaking opportunities. He was careful not to give speaking partners the impression that he wanted to be anything more than that, a speaking partner. He avoided asking for and giving out contact information, and only met with people repeatedly if they happened to be around when he was looking for speaking opportunities. Perhaps not unexpectedly, Benjamin was burnt out after a couple months of this. At the end of the program, when other students were having some of the most fulfilling and successful unstructured speaking experiences with their Arabic-speaking friends, Benjamin was struggling more than ever to go out and speak with people who he didn’t know.

Another participant, Andrea, took the opposite position. The program’s focus on linguistic proficiency made her uncomfortable with unstructured speaking activities because she prioritized relationships more. “It’s important that I learn Arabic, but. ...I want to focus on
making lasting friendships and bonds with people no matter who they are or what language they speak.” Like with Benjamin, Andrea’s unbalanced orientation to the goods of unstructured speaking turned out to be problematic. While she did make some friendships, her lackluster pursuit of linguistic proficiency limited the number and depth of conversations that she could have with Arabic-speaking friends. Like Benjamin, she found it harder and harder to engage in unstructured speaking as time went on.

Other participants seemed to better balance their pursuit of linguistic proficiency, cultural familiarity, and friendship in practice. For example, Thomas was not satisfied with the speaking opportunities he found early on in the program because they did not yield culturally rich discussions and prospects for close friendship. In his interviews he mentions each of the three moral goods in relation to speaking activities, and in the pursuit of one good he often realized another. After getting to know a few Arabic-speakers with whom he could have culturally interesting discussions, Thomas developed strong relationships and found that language learning opportunities came naturally. About the same time that Benjamin was starting to tire of unstructured speaking, Thomas wrote this entry in his weekly self-evaluation:

This was a great week for speaking, and I had one of my most memorable experiences of the trip this last weekend. A group of us (5 Americans and 3 Jordanians) decided to take a trip down to Madaba on Thursday night. We went shopping, ate mandi, and made a campfire. There was nothing spectacular about what we did, but the company was great and there were many chances to use Arabic in new ways.

Thomas’ balanced orientation yielded progress toward all three moral goods of unstructured speaking. If the speaking opportunities that he found did not afford progress toward all three goods, he evaluated them as inferior and tried other ways to find speaking opportunities.
As in the cases of Benjamin and Andrea, some participants seemed to strive so intently for one moral good that they struggled with all of the moral goods of unstructured speaking. As time went on they found it more and more difficult to participate in unstructured speaking and eventually filled their time with other practices. Participation in practice (e.g., unstructured speaking) requires the balancing of values (e.g., moral goods), and if participants failed to pursue a particular moral good, then they could not balance them effectively in practice.

**Theme 2: Connection and Independence**

Moral reference points are values that act as standards for evaluating participation in practice. Five such moral reference points emerged from the analysis that seemed particularly impactful for finding good speaking opportunities. One reason why some of these stood out was that they were paired or set against one another, and participants were obliged to try to balance them in some way. The first pair of moral reference points that I will consider here deals with how participants’ relationships figured into finding speaking opportunities and successful participation in unstructured speaking. The two reference points are connection and independence.

*Connection* refers to the network of contacts, acquaintances, and friendships that could potentially generate speaking opportunities. The simplest manifestation of this was participants inviting each other to “go speaking” with them at some planned location and time, even if they didn’t have a partner in mind. As participants got to know more and more people, being well-connected meant sharing specific speaking partners with each other with whom they had had success. Eventually they also shared invitations to special events such as dinners hosted by a speaking partner’s family, engagement parties, or touring a nearby city. Another way that connection showed up was when participants made new acquaintances through previous
speaking partners. It was not uncommon for speaking partners to introduce participants to their circle of friends and relatives, for example. As participants met more and more Arabic speakers and gathered their contact information, meeting with someone they already knew became easier and easier. Being well-connected meant that participants would only need to spend a few minutes messaging previous contacts, instead of searching a university campus or other space for new partners.

*Independence* meant that participants were responsible for their own unstructured speaking activities. In regard to holding conversations, it was important to most participants to find speaking opportunities that enabled one-on-one conversations with Arabic speakers. If other Arabic learners were involved in a conversation, responsibility for speaking was dispersed and provided less of a linguistic and social challenge, according to participants. Independence also showed up in the way participants went about finding speaking opportunities. While every participant in this study depended on existing relationships to some extent to find speaking opportunities, participants were also obliged to find some of their own speaking partners if they were intent on getting eight hours of unstructured speaking each week.

Independence was not a straightforward task for participants. In practice they encountered these moral demands most often as they finished their classes at the institute and had to make plans for the rest of the day. If they did not quickly synchronize their plans with other students then they would find themselves disconnected from some speaking opportunities. On the other hand, going out as a group was sometimes not conducive to one-on-one conversations, and decision-making (e.g., agreeing on where to go, when to leave a place) could be less efficient than going speaking by oneself. The few minutes after class when everyone was
Making plans often set the course for participants’ speaking activities, including how connected and independent they would be.

Some participants leaned more heavily on their companions than others to find speaking opportunities, emphasizing connection more than independence. For example, Mitchell often traveled with friends to meet with a group of Arabic-speakers at the local university, an arrangement that was set up through the efforts of another participant. Once the two groups met, Mitchell would try to pair off with an Arabic speaker so that he could have an independent, one-on-one conversation, but his methods of finding speaking opportunities were still reliant on his connection to other participants. Similarly, Benjamin relied on his companions to help initiate conversations with people: “I think it just helps one with approaching strangers, a little bit, with the confidence and legitimacy of it.”

Meanwhile, Andrea found early on in the program that she could not depend on friends from previous Arabic classes to invite her to accompany them for unstructured speaking activities. “I can’t rely on them. I feel like I have to take more responsibility for doing [speaking], and so I’m in that transition.” Judy also sought more independence in her finding activities, in part because she felt that she suffered from performance anxiety while speaking Arabic in front of her American peers. “Being around other classmates simply doesn't work for me. I’m anxious enough already, and I know if I'm around other people I'll inevitably end up letting them carry the conversation and I won't participate as much.” At the time they said these things, Judy and Andrea found that the speaking opportunities afforded from their existing social connections were not as effective as what they could find by themselves. Before drawing on connections for speaking opportunities, they needed to forge some connections themselves.
Most participants seemed to be somewhere in between the extremes highlighted above. Though Mitchell did most of his speaking in connection with other students, he sometimes tried to find his own partners when he could not find one-on-one conversations with the usual group. He also recognized that being too close to certain companions during speaking activities was less effective: “I noticed early on that I need to not go with [a particular companion]. I mean, he unintentionally dominates the conversation. People want to talk to him more cause he’s a little more fluent, so it’s easier [for them] to talk to him [than with me].” From the independent side of the spectrum, Andrea eventually became friends with other program participants who were more reliable as speaking companions. Much like the moral goods outlined in the first theme, unstructured speaking required participants to balance the moral reference points of connection and independence. Conditions sometimes required a shift in that balance, but both reference points were always in play.

In order for participants to most successfully realize the goods of unstructured speaking (see Theme 1), participants could find speaking opportunities through their own efforts and through the efforts of others. On one hand, forming a network of social connections enriched participants’ options for speaking opportunities, allowed them to be more selective about which opportunities to fill their time with, and therefore participate more successfully in unstructured speaking. On the other hand, finding one’s own speaking opportunities all but guaranteed that participants would have conversations where they had to carry their own weight and would not be distracted by the presence of another English speaker. Participants who managed to be both well-connected and independent could enjoy all these benefits if done right in practice.
Theme 3: Decisiveness and Naturalness

Another pair of moral reference points that emerged from the analysis had to do with the moments leading up to conversation. For many participants this seemed to be the apex of complications related to finding speaking opportunities. In Mitchell’s words: “I think once I’m talking, I can talk, I don’t feel anxious or nervous or anything, but I think it’s just the initial… getting the conversation started.” Approaching the start of a conversation was surprisingly complicated for some participants, especially when they were about to interact with someone new. A large array of different moral reference points were relevant for individual participants in these moments (e.g., humility, authenticity, creativity, courage), but here I discuss two in particular: decisiveness and naturalness.

Decisiveness while finding speaking opportunities meant quickly getting past the doubts and hesitations that participants encountered when they came into proximity with potential speaking partners. It meant opening one’s mouth and engaging face-to-face with an Arabic speaker even if they were unsure about where the conversation would go and how well they would perform linguistically. Ultimately, all of a participant’s efforts to find speaking opportunities hinged on whether they could be bring themselves to actually start a conversation, and some participants were more decisive in this regard than others.

Naturalness meant blending in with the environment enough that participants could participate in unstructured speaking as an insider of sorts, even if it was often obvious that they were foreigners from their appearance and speech. Naturalness was a criterion that, once met, made it easier for participants to open their mouths and have meaningful conversations because they were already part of something that was of interest to potential speaking partners. The key here was to approach speaking partners in ways that did not feel overly contrived or pretentious.
For some, approaching speaking partners in a natural way was a cause for hesitation that prevented conversations from taking place, meaning that naturalness and decisiveness were in tension with each other in some situations. As Mitchell approached people he would ask himself: “Is this going to be weird if I go up to this random person?” Even weeks into the program, Mitchell, Benjamin, Judy, and Austin were wary of approaching strangers in order to hold informal conversations, even though they openly talked about the need to be more decisive during their interviews. After consulting a friend, Mitchell realized that the answer to his struggle was to find ways to blend in at the university where he most often looked for speaking opportunities. Others found that they could simply push past feelings of awkwardness, even if they were still uncomfortable with it. In Judy’s words: “There’s no other way other than just like, forcing yourself. Like, honestly, you have to just do it, get a meditation app to calm yourself in the morning, and then go out.”

Other participants found it much easier to open their mouths. One of the more independent (though not extroverted) participants in this study was Chris, who made it a point to initiate conversations with taxi drivers and shopkeepers that he met along his way. Whereas these tended to be low-priority interactions for many participants, Chris was determined to open his mouth with each taxi driver he met and see what kind of conversations could be had. He found that they were very receptive to engaging him in meaningful conversations if he simply went for it and opened his mouth. “As far as they’re concerned, they’ve never met another person in their life, and they’ll tell their entire life story, and they want to know about everything in my life.” Conversations with taxi drivers, none of whom he ever met more than once, turned out to be some of his favorite and most productive unstructured speaking activities.
For other participants, more time and preparation were needed to hold a natural and meaningful conversation. Students discussed strategies with one another for how to approach people naturally. For example, if students were looking for people to speak with on a university campus, they might first observe the area and try to fit in with what was going on there (e.g., studying on a bench along the sidewalk, asking somebody where a nearby building or event was). They would then wait for natural openings for conversation to show up. During a local election, participants received a class assignment to visit with people at nearby polling stations, where many participants found it easier to initiate conversations since they had a common interest with the people there. With a little bit of preparation, they found it natural to speak with complete strangers since they could start with questions relevant to what people were doing at the time.

Decisiveness and naturalness had a different kind of relationship than that discussed in previous themes. Whereas connection and independence were conceptually opposites of each other, naturalness seemed to be more of a potential roadblock for decisiveness than an opposite. If participants could figure out how to naturally approach speaking partners, then they found it easier to open their mouths. Otherwise, they had to take Judy’s approach and somehow force themselves to speak, even if it was initially awkward.

**Theme 4: Treating Partners Fairly**

Another important moral reference point by which participants evaluated potential speaking opportunities was whether they could treat their speaking partners with fairness. Some, though not all, participants expressed that they were uncomfortable speaking with someone if there was not a clear benefit for that someone. Satisfying this moral demand required that participants invest something in speaking activities that made it worthwhile to their partners. I
noticed three different ways that participants did this: financially, linguistically, and emotionally.

The most explicit form of investment was doing business. The possible exchange of goods (e.g., money for travel fare) often enabled conversation because there was a formal reason for interaction. Participants intuited that taxi drivers and shop owners were willing to speak with them to increase their likelihood of buying goods. Chris recognized that this presented a good way to find speaking opportunities: “In the store they don’t get a lot of traffic, and you know they’ll talk.” In practice, the possible exchange of goods seemed to be a good enough investment for many participants to rationalize briefly speaking with a store owner. Upon reflection, though, Chris seemed to understand that there was something unfair about his strategy: “I don’t buy stuff, which is not what they’re hoping for, so maybe it’s a one-sided benefit, but it’s definitely helpful for me.” Most interestingly, he seemed to know that doing right by speaking partners should guide the way he found speaking opportunities, but he took an apathetic stance in relation to this particular moral reference point. Or perhaps he found another way to make speaking practice worth the shopkeepers’ time that I did not observe.

Another way that participants could provide value to their speaking partners was exchanging time spent speaking Arabic with time spent speaking English. Participants found many willing interlocutors at the local university and elsewhere who were trying to improve their English skills, and language exchanges were a quick way to be fair with everyone. Austin and Mitchell both experimented with exchanging English for Arabic, but after a while it became apparent that there were better ways to spend their time. Austin even decided to give his unstructured speaking time to other language practice rather than participate in exchanges: “There's not much benefit. I'll get a little bit of speaking, but it would be way better if I focused
more on some [listening assignments] or something…. I really like the language exchange, but in these circumstances it’s just not helpful to me.” Overall, language exchanges seemed to be a good way for participants to do right by their partners in the short term, but some participants seemed to value their limited time abroad too much to do them repeatedly.

Participants could also bring the possibility of friendship to their conversations. Showing sincere concern for people, taking interest in others’ interests, and expressing a desire to continue meeting were a kind of emotional or social currency that made speaking mutually beneficial. Not all participants were interested in friendship, however, and this sometimes made them feel inauthentic or dishonest when they approached people. Benjamin was especially careful not to take advantage of speaking partners by sending false signals of friendship. “I didn’t want to feel like I was using them because I didn’t have those intentions to carry on a friendship. I was just trying to learn Arabic.” As discussed in Theme 1, Benjamin struggled immensely to find good speaking opportunities in part because friendship was a moral good of unstructured speaking. How could he fully participate in a practice whose intrinsic purpose was to develop friendships, when he felt that such friendships were superficial? All other participants in this study were at least open to the possibility of friendship, even if they did not expect a deep, long-term relationship. Participants’ (minimal) pursuit of friendship as a moral good of unstructured speaking enabled them to offer the possibility of friendship as a way to do right by their speaking partners. Moreover, those who more actively pursued friendship did not seem to rely on financial or linguistic exchanges to find acceptable speaking opportunities.

**Theme 5: Gender**

Each of the themes up to this point has focused on part of the moral ecology of unstructured speaking, including its moral goods, moral reference points, and how these values
sometimes were in tension with each other or created other practical complexities for the participants. This final theme revisits some of the previous themes in light of gender differences that participants encountered as they were finding speaking opportunities and participating in unstructured speaking. Becoming a good conversationalist, a cultural insider, and a friend of Arabs looked different for female participants than it did for male participants. Moreover, they had to deal with moral reference points in different ways than male participants if they wanted to successfully realize these goods of unstructured speaking. Below I present some of the differences that I observed related to (a) balancing moral goods and (b) connection and independence.

**Balancing Moral Goods**

Pursuing the intrinsic goods of unstructured speaking as a male participant involved spending a lot of time with male Arabic-speakers in the public sphere of Jordanian society (i.e., anywhere outside of people’s homes). It meant talking about things that male Arabic-speakers were interested in, seeing Arab culture through their view, and becoming their friend. At times this was less desirable for the male participants in this study. For example, Benjamin described himself as having more female friends back home than male friends, something that he could not replicate in Jordan since he rarely met Arab women and it was inappropriate for him to approach them himself. Several male participants also reported growing tired of some conversation topics that young Arab males would bring up. Thomas was relieved when he found speaking opportunities with a few Arab males who were interested in the same things he was studying at the university. “I think their age and maturity level is the difference, because they talk about more sophisticated and mature things.”
Female participants experienced similar constraints to those of the male participants, but with female Arabic-speakers and more often in the private sphere (i.e., in people’s homes, family life, etc.). Even though she had regular speaking partners that she called friends, Judy wondered whether being limited to female Arabic-speakers had prevented her from having many meaningful conversations about cultural and political topics that were important to her.

Maybe it’s a cultural thing. They (Arab women) are just a little bit less inclined to be interested in those things than Arab men, but I can’t go around Arab men, so… Maybe it’s because a lot of Arab women don’t work? I don’t know, because more Jordanian women have college educations than men… I don’t know. Maybe I just didn’t find the right crowd?

Being limited largely to one sphere of Jordanian society, whether the public or private, appeared to constrain the ways that male and female participants could find speaking opportunities, the kinds of people they met, and the topics of conversation they discussed. In a way, male and female participants found themselves in two different moral ecologies during the program, and consequently, their participation in unstructured speaking offered different moral possibilities.

**Connection and Independence**

Being well-connected with other participants was even more critical for female participants if they wanted to find good speaking opportunities in the public sphere. They had to rely on male participants to escort them while traveling around Amman, especially after dark. Still, being with male participants did not guarantee safe or effective access to speaking. In her self-evaluations Andrea recounted difficult speaking experiences: “When we go out at night we go with the guys and that attracts Arab guys. We had a little incident with a couple of really enthusiastic guys hanging around us all night.” She then followed up on these experiences in a
later interview: “It’s just hard to build relationships with [Arab] guys. They’re really great speaking practice… because they wanted to just sit there and talk for hours. But there’s always just a large wall there.”

The private sphere was a very different story. The private sphere was organized by families, including parents, children of different ages, and extended family members who often lived in the same building or neighborhood. Women, especially mothers, were often the gatekeepers of family life, which made it impossible for single male participants to find speaking opportunities in Arab homes. Even if they were invited to eat dinner at a friend’s home, male participants usually remained in a guest dining room for the duration of their visit and would not be introduced to the family as a whole. Female participants, however, were readily welcomed, introduced to everybody, and could participate in Arab family life in ways that were off limits to men. Andrea described one such experience that was a highlight of her time abroad: "I got to go to an engagement party of my neighbor's niece. It was so culturally different than anything I have seen here in Jordan…. It was nice to sit around for hours and eat with them, even if we did get back pretty late…. It definitely dispelled some stereotypes that I had.” Many male participants could barely fathom having such an intimate experience with an Arab family.

**Discussion**

The themes presented here hint at the richness of the moral ecology that participants inhabited during their study abroad. Specifically, the results address the phenomenon of finding speaking opportunities within the practice of unstructured speaking. Using a hermeneutic moral realist perspective revealed that participation in these activities involved traversing a moral landscape of values that simultaneously enabled and hindered participation. In the context of this study abroad program, a balanced orientation toward the moral goods of unstructured speaking
revealed ways of participating that more effectively realized all of those goods. Failing to balance the pursuit of those moral goods seemed to magnify tensions between moral reference points that otherwise would have led to more effective participation. This is not to say that those who achieved a greater balance avoided complexity and tension altogether. On the contrary, each day that participants engaged in unstructured speaking presented new circumstances for finding speaking opportunities and unique challenges to the moral stances that participants had previously taken. It seemed that every time they figured out a better way to find speaking opportunities, new hindrances would emerge. Over time, though, as participants became more familiar with the broader moral landscape of study abroad and consistently evaluated their efforts to pursue the moral goods of unstructured speaking, the severity of hindrances dwindled.

Like any other analysis, this study necessarily reveals a limited view of how participants dealt with hindrances and adjusted their moral stance over time. The results highlight three moral goods and five moral reference points, but there were also many other moral reference points that could not be addressed at length. Thinking of the tensions that participants encountered related to only five moral reference points, the complete collection of reference points that were revealed in the analysis is overwhelming (see Table 3). Again, participants did not explicitly think about all of these values together in practice—an ineffective, if not impossible, task—but their self-evaluations each week reveal that they tacitly understood that these moral reference points were relevant to finding speaking opportunities. Sophisticated participation in unstructured speaking meant somehow managing to satisfy most of these moral demands.

In the remainder of the paper I will discuss how the current findings can help future participants identify and move past moral tensions. I then offer a few suggestions for future language learning research from a hermeneutic moral realist perspective.
Table 3

The Moral Phenomena Involved in Finding Speaking Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral goods</th>
<th>Moral reference points</th>
<th>Moral reference points (cont’d)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic proficiency</td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural familiarity</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
<td>Naturalness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness (doing right by partners)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Naturalness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
<td>Naturalness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calmness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diligence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identifying and Articulating Moral Tensions

An important theoretical connection for this research is to the “negotiation of difference” (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2010), a concept which is particularly salient for study abroad participants who are often in close proximity to people from vastly different backgrounds and cultures than their own. As I explained in Bird (2021b), a critical part of negotiating differences is identifying and articulating those differences. Previous study abroad research has also highlighted how articulating goals and expectations is associated with greater satisfaction and linguistic development. Allen (2010) claimed that participants in a French study abroad program who had specific practical goals (e.g., speaking French with my friend for 30 minutes today) fared better than those with a vaguer sense of what they were working towards (e.g., improving my accent). McGregor (2016) tells the story of Brad, a German learner who made some progress toward his goals but “remained unable to articulate” (p. 26) the expectations that he took on himself by participating meaningfully in a foreign society.
Something similar could be said about the participants in this program in regard to moral phenomena. This research reconceptualizes “differences” as moral tensions that also need resolution, and future discussions of the differences that participants encounter while abroad should keep in mind that sometimes the problems they face may in some instances be better understood in terms of the moral forces with which participants are grappling. If they are like the participants in this study, they may never have identified or considered these forces explicitly before, and participants cannot hope to make much progress toward solving a problem that is not well-described.

I found that participants were rarely cognizant of the values involved in practice. During interviews they seemed to understand implicitly what they were striving for and what was required to succeed, but only occasionally did a participant explicitly consider the goals and criteria of unstructured speaking. Even when they clearly discussed how an individual moral reference point (e.g., independence) was important to their success, it was a different level of complexity to describe the moral tensions they encountered between multiple reference points. They lacked the vocabulary to identify and describe the moral tensions with which they were struggling, and as such, most of the progress that participants made toward the moral goods of unstructured speaking seemed to come about more through trial and error and less by strategy.

**Developing Familiarity**

What change might be seen in the way learners participate in the practices of study abroad if they were more familiar with the moral reference points involved? Can they be prepared beforehand to handle particular tensions between reference points? And if and when they find themselves in the midst of tensions, what can be done?
A significant contribution of a moral realist framework and this research is providing a vocabulary and describing moral tensions in a way that those who did not experience them can learn from. These descriptions are not generalizable in the sense of statistical inferences, but study abroad practitioners and future study abroad participants may find them transferable to similar practices and contexts. The themes of this report can be thought of as a legend on a map that helps travelers identify what they see along their journey and make educated decisions about how best to proceed. Whereas many of the participants in the current study did not have a clear picture of their own journey and the tensions they were facing until the end of the program, if they did at all, future participants can get a clearer sense of the moral tensions they might have to deal with before going abroad. They can also have a better sense of how to handle those tensions if and when they do face them.

Yanchar et al. (2013) might characterize these tensions as the result of “encounters with unfamiliarity” (p. 224), or interruptions to their normally fluid, competent ways of acting. They also describe a few specific ways that learners might handle these encounters and return to competent participation in practice (see p. 225). Here I consider four of their suggestions that could be supported by the findings of this study: purposive study, self-reflection, amelioration, and innovation.

**Purposive Study**

Research has associated pre-program cultural training with improved linguistic gains and greater satisfaction on study abroad (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Such trainings have become a common facet of many programs, and perhaps these deliberate attempts to familiarize participants with cultural norms and nuances could also provide a formal introduction to the moral goods, moral reference points, and moral tensions that they are likely to encounter. This
could help participants even before going abroad to develop a greater “antecedent familiarity” with moral phenomena (Yanchar et al., 2013, p. 223) that could serve as a foundation for becoming familiar in practice later on.

Program leaders and instructors could help their participants to identify the multiple moral goods of unstructured speaking, emphasizing that linguistic proficiency is only one of those goods and is best realized by balancing it with the others. Some programs do emphasize cultural familiarity, but friendship is definitely not a common objective of language programs—not one that would be included in a serious program evaluation, anyway. Adjusting explicit program objectives to more closely match the moral goods of the practices involved in a program could be helpful. For example, I cannot help but wonder if Benjamin could have successfully participated in unstructured speaking if he had begun the program with a basic familiarity of all three moral goods of that practice. Many other students in the program were similarly hyper-focused on linguistic proficiency and might have approached unstructured speaking differently if all of its moral goods were discussed early on and reflected in the program’s objectives.

Self-Reflection

Pre-program training could be complimented by deliberate and regular self-reflection, such as the weekly evaluations that the participants in this study completed. However, it should be expected that self-reflection will be limited to the vocabulary and concepts with which participants are already familiar. Study abroad practitioners might commonly understand that evaluating the language programs that they administer can only be effective if the goals and criteria for success of said program are well-defined. When values are well-defined, program evaluations can have a transformative effect (Norris, 2016), and the same might be true of participants evaluating their own participation in practices. Understanding practices from a
hermeneutic moral realist perspective provides detailed description of the goals of practice (i.e., moral goods) and criteria for success (i.e., moral reference points), empowering participants to evaluate their efforts more effectively. The participants in this study regularly wrote and spoke about their struggles in the terms that program leaders gave them, and future programs may find that if leaders frame participants’ struggles in a moral ecology that participants will find the vocabulary they need to evaluate themselves effectively.

Furthermore, if participants have already been exposed to specific examples of moral tensions that others have dealt with, self-reflection provides a vehicle for identifying those tensions in their own participation and thinking about how to resolve them. Future participants could use the moral reference points discussed in this study to scaffold self-evaluations related to unstructured speaking. They could consider individual reference points, such as how fair they are with their speaking partners, and they could reflect on the degree to which they adhere to reference point pairs, such as connection and independence. On the whole, the more participants know about the moral tensions that can arise as they try to find speaking opportunities, the better.

\textit{Amelioration}

Beyond a conceptual understanding, participants also need to develop a practical familiarity with the moral ecologies that they inhabit. To resolve moral tensions and participate fluidly in a practice, participants can first look to existing solutions. Many of the concerns that participants brought up in their interviews and self-evaluations were dealt with by taking advantage of readily available options or resources. When Andrea saw that she could not rely on her social connections to find good speaking opportunities, an alternative—going out by herself to nearby shops—was immediately available. This was an effective strategy to resolve problems and make progress toward the moral goods of practice, but usually only in the short term. As
time went on some participants sensed that there must be better ways to balance moral reference points that remained undiscovered.

**Innovation**

For the most persistent moral tensions, participants had to find _original ways_ of finding good speaking opportunities. Dissatisfied with current offerings, Thomas discovered a novel way of finding speaking opportunities (i.e., hosting dinner discussions at his apartment) that other participants had not stumbled onto before. This innovation resolved multiple tensions at once and enabled Thomas and others to effectively participate in unstructured speaking, with only minimal interruptions, for the remainder of the program. Coming up with new ways to find speaking opportunities required being practically familiar with unstructured speaking already: Thomas found his new source of speaking opportunities by being well-connected in the first place. Maybe because of this, innovative ways of finding speaking opportunities were uncommon, and several participants simply gave up on unstructured speaking as a practice because they had outgrown existing solutions and could not come up with new ones.

**Future Research**

This study was limited in its scope, not only because it used an existing data set, but because did not address unstructured speaking in its entirety. In fact, it only touched on participants actually _holding a conversation_ as it was directly relevant to themes about finding speaking opportunities. Holding a conversation is arguably a more central phenomenon to unstructured speaking, and additional research could build on the findings of this report and reveal additional moral reference points and tensions related to that particular aspect of unstructured speaking.
Research could do the same for other practices in which language learners participate as part of a study abroad, language class, or a less formal context. MacIntyre (1981/1985) defined a practice as:

… any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity. (p. 187)

Using this definition, a few practices related to study abroad that may merit investigation from a hermeneutic moral realist perspective may include:

- living with native speakers in a homestay or roommate arrangement;
- taking a content course as part of a direct enrollment program;
- interning with a foreign company, government, or other organization;
- maintaining long-distance relationships with friends made while living abroad.

Certainly, many other practices could also be analyzed from this perspective and yield valuable practical insights for language learners who engage in those practices. Also, many specific phenomena could be relevant to these practices, just as finding speaking opportunities was for unstructured speaking in this study.

**Conclusion**

This research takes seriously the statements from van Lier (2004) and Hodges (2015) regarding the value-laden nature of language use and presents a framework for understanding the moral ecology of language learning. The analysis revealed that participants evaluated their participation in unstructured speaking by appealing to certain moral reference points that guided their efforts to find good speaking opportunities. Some of these were salient for participants
because they were in tension with one another (e.g., connection and independence, decisiveness and naturalness) and others were simply ubiquitous (e.g., treating speaking partners fairly, gender). For the participants of this study, the tensions they encountered seemed to obscure how they might successfully participate in unstructured speaking. Some managed to resolve tensions and others seemed to give up on unstructured speaking as time went on. How participants went about finding speaking opportunities and how they dealt with moral tensions illustrated their individual orientations toward the moral goods of unstructured speaking. This study identified three such intrinsic goods, including linguistic proficiency, cultural familiarity, and friendship. Insights from this hermeneutic moral realist framework offer unique ways for learners and instructors to familiarize themselves with the tensions involved in learning a language during study abroad and prepare themselves and others to deal with them.
References


McGregor, J. (2016). “I thought that when I was in Germany, I would speak just German”: Language learning and desire in twenty-first century study abroad. L2 Journal, 8(2), 12-30. https://doi.org/10.5070/L28228930


Plews, J. L. (2015). Intercultural identity-alignment in second language study abroad, or the more-or-less Canadians. In R. Mitchell, N. Tracy-Bentura, & K. McManus (Eds.), Social
interaction, identity and language learning during residence abroad (pp. 281-304).

European Second Language Association.


Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction
This research study is being conducted by Kirk Belnap (Prof. of Arabic), Linnea Belnap (R.N.), Jennifer Bown (Assoc. Prof. of Russian), Thomas Bown (PhD student in Psychology), and Patrick Steffen (Assoc. Prof. of Psychology) at Brigham Young University to determine the effectiveness of biofeedback training to reduce stress and increase performance in a study abroad setting and the relationship between student writing and self-regulation. You were invited to participate because you are a participant in BYU’s 2015 intensive Arabic program.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

• The first of your regular weekly program interviews at the Qasid Institute, which will take place during the first week of the program, will be conducted by one or more of the researchers for approximately twenty (20) minutes about your experience with language learning, your goals, and your experience with stress and self-regulation. Subsequent interviews will periodically be conducted by one of the researchers or Nick Hafen, a research assistant.

• These interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in representing your views.

• Your speaking appointments will be video-taped at least three times and your heart rate variability and breathing measured at the same time; immediately thereafter you will be shown clips and asked to comment on episodes where you appear to be stressed in order to better understand the cause of your stress response. A researcher will seek to assure you that almost all foreign language learners experience some degree of stress and discuss with you how you might more effectively deal with a similar stressful situation in the future.

• Your reading and Oral Proficiency Interview scores, your responses to daily and weekly reports, comments you make in group processing sessions, and your responses to the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale instrument (IES) and the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ), all of which are required of all of this year’s study abroad program participants, will be used as data to help the researchers better understand your study abroad experience and those of your fellow students.

• The minimum total time commitment for you, beyond the usual study abroad experience, will be approximately 60 minutes.

• Six students will be selected to be interviewed and audio and videotaped more frequently. If you are selected and are willing, this will not require any more of your time than the other students, unless you choose to spend more time with the researchers going over your video/heart rate variability/breathing data.
**Risks/Discomforts**
There are no known risks to your participating in this study. You may find it unpleasant, at least initially, to watch yourself on video during stressful moments of your recorded speaking appointment. Researchers will monitor your reaction and terminate a session if you appear to be adversely affected or if you ask them to do so.

**Benefits**
You will likely grow in self-awareness as a result of your participation in this study. It is hoped that this will increase your ability to self-regulate and thereby more effectively engage in learning opportunities while in Jordan and potentially over the course of your life. Based on previous Project Perseverance research results, we anticipate that your participation in this study will help other students to enjoy similar benefits.

**Confidentiality**
The research data will be kept on password protected computers and audio and video files will be stored on hard drives locked in Dr. Belnap’s office. Only the researchers will have access to all of the data. Your identity will be protected by assigning you a pseudonym. If student research assistants are involved in subsequent data analysis, they will know you only by your pseudonym and will not have access to audio or video files. At the conclusion of the study, data will be kept in Dr. Belnap’s locked office and disposed of within ten years.

**Compensation**
There will be no compensation for participating in the BYU-sponsored aspects of this research.

**Participation**
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status, grade, or standing with the university.

**Questions about the Research**
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Kirk Belnap at 801-422-6531 or belnap@byu.edu for further information.

**Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants**
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

**Statement of Consent**
I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed): ____________________ Signature ____________________ Date: __________
**Grounded Theory Data Collection and Analysis**

**Guiding Questions for Data Collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Student Reports| • What concerns do students have as revealed by clear statements (e.g., “I can’t seem to get past simple pleasantries”) and by patterns seen in their daily activities (e.g., repeatedly failing to visit the local university as planned)?  
• How do students differ in the way that they report on their interactions with Arabic native speakers (NS)? |
| Observations   | • How do students interact with Arabic NSs in class around other participants, or in appointments by themselves?  
• What experiences or other information do participants choose to share with each other about their Arabic-speaking experiences (e.g., during the English class)? |
| Interviews     | • What previous experiences have students had learning and speaking Arabic?  
• What expectations do students have for their program in general and their Arabic learning outcomes in specific?  
• How do students approach/with what perspective do they take on their speaking experiences during the program (mentally and behaviorally)?  
• What successes and failures have they had interacting with Arabic speakers? |

**First Semi-formal Interview Protocol**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Context        | • When and where did you first become interested in Arabic?  
• How was your experience learning Arabic before the SA?  
• What do you hope to do with Arabic after SA?  
• How do you define success for your SA?  
• What does learning Arabic do for you? |
| SA Experiences | • What do you do to meet the program requirement to speak for 2 hours a day?  
• What successes and struggles have you had?  
• Do your interactions with Arabic speakers meet your expectations?  
• How are speaking appointments working out? |
• How do you see your expectations and goals for the program reflected in what you choose to do each day?

Second Semi-formal Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Following up on concerns | • In our first interview I understood that you were dealing with the following concerns… did I understand correctly?  
• How have these concerns changed or stayed the same since our last interview?  
• How have your goals and expectations for the program changed since you first arrived? |
| Experiences        | • What new difficulties or successes have you had?  
• In your experience, what has led to progress or difficulty?  
• How have your goals and expectations for the program shaped your learning choices and interactions with Arabic speakers? |

Grounded Theory Analysis Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Transcription | • Transcribe 1st and 2nd interviews.  
• Begin recording memos regarding transcription content. |
| Open-Coding  | • Assign codes to every statement/idea  
• Continue recording memos, noting repeated codes and other patterns. |
| Categorization | • Categorize codes inductively.  
• Collapse or expand categories by comparing and contrasting their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).  
• Compare categories with corresponding text snippets to evaluate their fidelity to the original data. |
| Themes       | • Explore relationships between categories and identify themes that explain those relationships. |
| Theory       | • Develop a theory explaining participants’ experiences by:  
• considering the themes in context of the passage of time,  
• creating visualizations of themes in relation to each other, and  
• sharing themes with participants post-program for reflection. |
Audit Trail: Grounded Theory Analysis

Program Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Memo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/13/16</td>
<td>Today I ran the averages for speaking time and engagement during the first half of the semester and confirmed a lot of my observations. I also learned some new things, however.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#2 For some reason I have let Thomas slide through the cracks and I haven't interviewed or investigated his case very much. It turns out I should definitely be talking to him about his experiences based on what looks like a struggle with speaking time and speaking quality. He also turned in a very low number of reports, which could skew his numbers, but I think it's a reflection of inactivity rather than carelessness in reporting. He was sick a lot during the first half of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#9 While Jonathan has consistently gone out and gotten speaking time in, the numbers confirm what he has said in person to me and in reports: the quality is lacking. He was not fully engaged in his speaking opportunities because they weren't the kind of conversations and relationships he wanted to have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#11 Chris was someone that I hadn't paid a LOT of attention to because he seemed to be doing well on his h/w during the first half of the program, and didn't cry out for help when it came to speaking. However, it looks like the amount and quality of his time out was lower than most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#14 Andrew, of course, has a low number of reports because he was sick for two weeks straight. His speaking averages reflect that as well. What's interesting is that he doesn't seem to have been doing very well before his sickness, but afterward he may have found a good groove.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#15 Micah only turned in 10 reports during the 1st half of the semester. Even though those reports don't indicate struggle with speaking, I know from personal interactions that there was. Whenever he is active and going out to speak, he is turning in reports. The opposite is also true, therefore skewing the reports' numbers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#18 I wasn't considering Mitchell before, but I think that the low average time spent speaking is worth looking into, even though he seems to be engaging during that time. I also know from speaking and his written reports that he pretty much only goes out with other students to do speaking, which means his time spent one on one with NSs is probably very low. I could run the numbers on this as well from his reports.

#19 Jesse, like Jonathan, has been doing the work but the quality is not what he wanted during the first half of the program. He wasn't finding people that he wanted to see a lot, and the conversations weren't interesting to him. He expressed in the beginning of the program that he was not sure what to expect in a friendly relationship with an Arab, or even with another student in the program.

#20 Andrea has been dealing with problem after problem in her personal life, including drama from back home and issues with her own health. She has been trying valiantly, however, to find a reason to be here and work hard. She values relationships over learning the language, according to her comments, but has struggled to meet her goal of developing strong relationships in addition to meeting program expectations for speaking.

#23 Judy has struggled with developments with her health and homelife as well. She is also very invested in social media issues and politics, which sometimes swallows her attention and efforts I think. She has missed some daily reports, but not a ton, and her time spent speaking and engagement are very low, even among those listed here.

#25 Benjamin seems to be doing alright most of the time, and doesn't ask for help in any way, but it's obvious from his average speaking time that he struggles to get 2 full hours consistently. Personally, I think that this is a matter of his ability and not much else. It may be worth investigating his experience, however.

#27 Lauren expressed concern at the beginning of the semester that people treated her as if she was not American, and therefore were not into her like other people. She may have gotten over that concern, but I want to follow up with her and see if that or other concerns have continued to be an issue that hurt her speaking experiences.
11/17/16  Just finished my second interview with #11 Chris. I noted that he has had some struggles the last week or so and invited him to come in and chat, and it was an great interview. He and his wife were sick last week, but now things are much better. It strikes me how the underlying goals and the perceived way of getting at those goals drives the students' experiences. #11 Chris gives an excellent contrast to some of the other students, notably #2 Thomas. This is strange because they are both married students, they both have issues with social interaction, but they have approached language learning with very different expectations, attitudes, and learning choices. #11 Chris loves Arabic, and is totally fine coming away with no serious relationships with Arabs. He has really enjoyed his experience here. #2 Thomas has really struggled with Arabic, in his perception, but his desire to develop relationships with Arabs keeps him engaging despite struggles. He sees the language as a means to an end. He also really values his experience. These two cases might make for a great comparison in my study.

How can I tell these two students' stories without giving up their anonymity for those who participated in the program, or know them personally?

Post-Program / Transcription Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Memo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/6/17</td>
<td>Lately I have wondered whether I should start putting some ideas down on paper describing the relationships of certain categories, but I think that I need to be a little bit more careful in making sure that my theories are not developed a priori. I think that in order to develop theories based primarily in the data I will need to do more divergent analysis activities involving codes from a lot more students. Open coding, then, will take priority for a while.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I first thought to categorize codes under a heading of "Time Management", but noticed that sometimes other resources (like emotional energy) were at play here as well. I named it Resource Management instead.

While in the middle of interviews and going through the SA, I began to notice that students had different relationships with Arabic. Some of them used Arabic to do something, others were there because they wanted the language itself, and each student had a nuanced position that they used to explain why they did or didn't do things. For example, Austin really emphasized that his disinterest in Jordan, and Jordanian Arabic by extension, was not helping him to get out and talk to people, even though he described himself as very interested in understanding the people on the street. His relationship to Arabic seems to have had an effect on his daily speaking habits and overall performance while on study abroad.

Another something I've noticed while going through the codes today, which has popped up in my mind before, is the importance of understanding the logistics around speaking. Students have resources that they have to manage, and they get a certain return on their investment. If certain speaking opportunities don't yield returns, then it can be hard to keep doing it even if that's the only opportunity.

In relation to students' relationship to Arabic, I'm also noticing that certain students need more context in order to speak with people and develop relationships. It needs to be a friend of a friend, a formal acquaintance, or something pre-determined in order for them to feel comfortable talking to them. It should be interesting to see how this lines up with students' relationship with Arabic. Also with resource management.

I'm also interested in students' relationships and dependence on other American students from the program. Some of them need to have them around always for backup, some don't like going with others at all, and many of them are in between, seeing both pros and cons. This is definitely related to student personality type, but maybe to other things too.
Students will often prefer to use one dialect (MSA or JA) as opposed to both, but there are students who try and balance the two.

Funny how some students seem to have no problem finding people to talk with, and others seem to act like there isn't anyone out there to talk to. This can lead to some people feeling like they got the "Jordan experience" and others feeling like they never left BYU campus.

People's definition of the ideal speaking experience differ in interesting ways. One way I've noticed is that some students are desperate for real relationships while others are not interested in intense relationships at all. They just want to learn the language and develop an understanding of the culture. The reasons for this stretches across a lot of different aspects I think.

9/21/17 I noticed that most every participant gives a description of their ideal conversation topics or experience, and reports on that consistently. After all, it was part of the reporting mechanism in their daily reports, etc.

The logistics of going out and speaking is also tied to balancing the reading and appointment homework with speaking time. It seems that those who do not develop a routine of completing homework at the "right" time struggled to get good speaking in, if they did it at all. It seems that if the ideal speaking was not available, their motivation to go out was not always enough to go out. Then it came down to them finding new resolution to go out, but their original problem of not having their homework routine in place still gets in the way of speaking usually.

A definite category is speaking. The properties of speaking include things like the context, the number of participants (American and Arab), the topics being discussed, and others.

I've been tagging codes with T for topics, as they are related to the quality of conversation. However, it seems like students may see quality of conversation in different ways. Some of them are in it for the topics, and others are there for the relationship, which fundamentally changes what makes a "good" conversation with a NS. NOTE: THIS COULD BE A LEAK OVER FROM MY EXPOSURE TO YANCHAR'S WORK. How I should probably look at this from a theoretically cleaner perspective is to line up another data category with topics.
Looking at participants' relationships and interactions with other students in the program (A for Americans), I see that there are natural categories showing up in my codes. First, their actual actions with students—some of them go out with students for necessity's sake, not because they think it is best. Second, their attitude toward talking while with other As. Third, their general social relationships with other As, as friends and classmates. Some interesting interactions between these categories might include the way some students need social support from their A friends in order to speak with NSs, how they meet people through their A friends, how their schedules have to work together to plan speaking activities, how speaking experiences with others affect their very friendships, and how students identify themselves in relation to the rest of the cohort, and how students compare themselves.

Another interesting possible connection could be how students' motivations for coming on SA and learning Arabic could play into these relationships and activities.

This is just a premonition, but it looks like the trends I see among people are trends that come about when they are faced with trouble, put under pressure, or facing recurring decisions. For example, if Andrea were healthy and doing well in all of her assignments, maybe her prioritization of relationships over learning the language would not be so emphasized, and her primary motivation to get speaking in wouldn't be just to get good grades.

In relation to this, there seem to be categories emerging for the reasons students are learning Arabic and going out to speak. There seems to be a spectrum or axis on which to place their views and actions. One spectrum might be Arabic utility (means to an end, or the end itself), and then placing each student's reasons for being on that part of the spectrum might show some interesting patterns. I'm thinking that I might have enough ideas now to start diagramming and looking for inter-categorical relationships. Once I have some of those understood better I can return to the data and each individual student's background to see if the relationships still make sense.

I have thought about looking at the codes along a timeline of sorts, and I think that there may be more here to look at, but I could be more specific about the time distinction too. I could look at turning points in student activities and attitudes, such as how students may have changed after the Petra trip or after
encountering some kind of setback (sickness, a bad week, etc.). It could also be a first / second half perspective.

From what I'm seeing right now, there are four categories of primary interest to students' speaking experience: (1) reasons for studying Arabic and going on SA, (2) quality of conversations, especially topics of discussion, (3) relationships with other Americans, and (4) relationships with NSs. There is a lot more going on, for sure, but these seem to be the most salient codes that have significant impact on speaking experiences.

10/6/17 I've just noticed something interesting. While I sometimes am tempted to think of students' motivations to learn Arabic according to common frameworks for motivation, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, I just recognized that some students have a chicken-egg problem, where they have invested in Arabic so that they can have a good career, but they really hope that they get to use Arabic in that career, because they actually do care about the language itself. This is worth a little more pondering time.

I think it's time to take note of the things I see as each student's "stumbling block" or difficulty related to speaking:

Andrea: Ability level, many health issues, social drama
Austin: Lack of interest in Jordan, one big health issue
Thomas: Speaking anxiety in front of peers
Judy: Speaking performance anxiety, mental health issues
Benjamin: Ability level
Jonathan: Prioritizing speaking, social differences
Chris: Prioritizing speaking, balancing family needs
Mitchell: Personality, logistics, laziness

10/17/17 It has been hard for me to figure out the theme/category of conversation topics. Student have good and bad experiences speaking both inside and outside of Qasid, and the way that they describe these experiences is different but related I think. Good conversation deal with meaningful, deep topics and have good movement since both sides are contributing and bringing in their own personal, nuanced
perspectives. They are comfortable, usually 1 on 1 conversations with a returning friend. The opposite experience is a conversation dealing in general, impersonal, shallow topics, where neither side really contributes and the talking stalls. Those are held in company of other students, in an anxious state with new contacts. Naturally there are exceptions to these, such as Chris actually preferring not to make close friends and getting high-quality conversations with taxi drivers that he just met.

Turns out that I just noticed two different things going on here that I just separated out naturally as I described them. The conversation content and the conversation context. In the former the talking itself is described, and in the latter the environment and the actors are described. I think that each has its own something going on. The conversation content is what I have been seeing so far in this category and is far more constant across participants than what's going on in the conversation context. For example, while I don't think we can generalize to everyone that they all like talking about complex political topics, we can say that they like conversation movement and mutual participation. Participants were able to accomplish this in a lot of different speaking contexts. Interestingly, however, I think that there has been a lot of focus in the past on putting students in the right environment and hoping that the connection will happen. More data collection about conversation context would need to be conducted before making theories about that I think.

Category Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Memo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic purpose</td>
<td>One of the most interesting categories as it appears to be something students consider when they make decisions about what they do each day. It can flavor the way they go about finding people to talk to, how they prioritize their homework assignments, or motivate them to overcome a difficulty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/13/17 I'm beginning to notice that most of the participants seem to have similar backgrounds with Arabic. There is often a personal relationship with foreigners, a sense of curiosity or interest in the ancient and/or modern ME, and they decide to pursue that in similar ways.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bringing culture</strong></td>
<td>A common role that SA students play in their families and social circles back home is that of a cultural messenger or representative of all things Arabic, Islamic, or ME-related. This sometimes happens whether the student <strong>wants it or not</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BYU AR</strong></td>
<td>An interesting part of this to look at is what cohorts students were in. Did they take the <strong>fast track</strong> or <strong>slow track</strong>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career Plans</strong></td>
<td>Student career plans vary widely. Many of them are not sure what they will do, but tend to lean in a certain direction (govt, teaching, NGOs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Finances</strong></td>
<td>As the program is quite expensive, students sometimes make large sacrifices or rely on help from others (or a scholarship) in order to complete their degrees. This often weighs on their day-to-day activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehension</strong></td>
<td>Students have to organize themselves and find ways to consistently complete assignments, attend class and presentations, and get speaking out of class. Students tend to develop something of a relationship with &quot;the program&quot; as the leaders and peers define it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
<td>Being in Jordan in a strange, new environment makes for lots of difficulties that don't have to do directly with the language. The program and the host culture make for a unique environment for the students to navigate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraints</strong></td>
<td>Students come to speaking with many different expectations, and they value different aspects of a relationship. These may clash with what is normal in the host culture, or there may be simple personal differences or similarities that make conversations good or bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family and Arabic</strong></td>
<td>Part of being &quot;the messenger&quot; is relating what you learn to your family. Some families are supportive, others neutral, others worried and even hostile to the foreign culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Situation: Students come from a variety of family backgrounds.

Foreign Language Experiences: Many students come to Arabic after having studied or even mastered another FL.

Getting speaking with others: Students either go speaking by themselves, with another student, or in a larger group it seems. Students find that each of these has its advantages, and most try a mix of strategies for talking.

Health Issues: I cannot emphasize how important health is to the success of language learning, both physical, mental, and social health.

Hometown cultural experiences: Students usually have some exposure to the foreign culture or the language that predates studying at BYU.

Language Ability: There are as many skill levels within the program as there are students, but usually students tend to struggle with similar things (i.e., comprehension, speaking outside of Qasid, etc.). Some students have a knack for learning Arabic, others don't.

Language Weakness: Students are commonly aware of their language weaknesses, broken down by the four language categories (reading, writing, etc.) and by other things like vocabulary, ammiya vs MSA, etc.

Leaders and Teachers: Leaders often play a pivotal role in how students see their SA and their learning, and they often help students to overcome challenges along the way.

Learning Culture: Most students are introspective about their relationship with the foreign culture. As such they recognize how well they are adjusting, things they struggle with, and when they have made breakthroughs.

Looking up: When students find themselves stuck in a rut, they often find a way to change their direction, reset, or build from ground zero.

Mission: A lot of students have had foreign or intensive experiences before SA, and missions are often the clearest precedent students have to draw on as they navigate their speaking experience.
MORAL ECOLOGY OF UNSTRUCTURED SPEAKING

My time for SA
With all of the money and time and effort used to come on SA, and their career aspirations at stake, students feel a responsibility to themselves and others to use their time well. This can be enabling or debilitating for some.

Neg Events / Conditions
There are all sorts of things that weigh on students as they try to go about "doing the program," ranging from their interest in conversation topics to their self-talk habits, their speaking habits, the nature of people they speak to, and beyond.

Neg Results
As a result of those things that weigh on the students, they do something. They establish a good or bad habit for speaking, they develop relationships or they go stagnant, and they reflect on their actions and feel a certain way about what they've done.

Pos Events / Conditions
Things that encourage and strengthen students to speak.

Pos Results
The positive results of speaking.

Program Cohort
Students come from the fast or slow tracks, but they also break into different classes on SA and develop new friendships or social circles that can empower or hurt them.

Program setbacks
When things get rough for speaking and completing assignments.

Roommates
Roommates can play a very positive or negative role for individual students on the program.

Speaking Acts
Things that students do to speak. Strategies that they use to improve speaking or develop relationships.

Speaking Opportunities
There are endlessly different ways in which students can find speaking to do.

Struggling with the program
It is not uncommon for some students to want to push back on the daily requirements of the program and learn Arabic their own way. Sometimes this has to do with ability, other times it seems to be mostly attitude-related.

Success
Students often describe success in similar ways, as their tasks are related to the programs requirements and suggestions from leaders.
Speaking The only for sure speaking that students have that counts towards their speaking assignment.

appointments Most students (not all) **switch speaking** partners every week so they get differentiated practice opportunities. This tends to be a very different experience, though not totally unrelated, experience from speaking outside of Qasid.

---

*Categories / Time Memos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 3</th>
<th>Memos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Started out expecting to be part of friendship groups that would provide finding and speaking opportunities. When those fell through, felt a little lost about speaking.</td>
<td>Missed out on a lot of speaking in the last part of the program. Had spurts where she could go out on her own without being &quot;tied down&quot; to American friends</td>
<td>PE: valuing independence but feeling desires to make friends with students, get finding in. Change: Moved away from dependence on others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Was going with others, wanted to be independent and be fully immersed.</td>
<td>He made a shift towards MSA away from going out and speaking JA and it paid off for his goals.</td>
<td>PE: Given his health situation, program goals and tactics didn't work out. Turned towards MSA instead. Change: Focused on MSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Went with others and viewed them as empowering.</td>
<td>Struggled to really engage later on, still going out with other Americans. Sacrificed speaking for other hw</td>
<td>PE: program demands wore him down, forced him to sacrifice learnings some things. Change: Grew less engaged with speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Recognized that he should be with other Americans at times, but did speaking mostly on his own due to family needs.</td>
<td>Went with family more than before, limited relationships but still got good speaking</td>
<td>PE: isolated from some program expectations, because family weighed on him more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Strong speaking start, independent of other students in many ways</td>
<td>Speaking often revolves around others in his routine, because of logistics and maybe avoidance of difficulty</td>
<td>PE: not heavily affected, largely independent, though interacts and plans with others regularly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Had some friends she would see by herself, though a lot of speaking was in groups.</td>
<td>More of the same.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Always speaking around others, seen as a need but realized they might be a crutch.</td>
<td>Less motivation to speak later on, felt like going with others was a crutch. PE: felt early on that he should go speaking without others, didn't fully embrace group speaking maybe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Didn't like speaking around others because of anxiety.</td>
<td>Set up a situation in his home where anyone could come and speak PE: didn't figure out home speaking opportunities for a long time, perhaps because of program speaking norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end, teaching in ME</td>
<td>Realized that she would need to prioritize relationships to get them Change: prioritized relationships above Arabic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end, JA a necessary evil</td>
<td>Focused on MSA to achieve his goals Change: Focused on MSA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end, his career</td>
<td>Still a means to an end</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end</td>
<td>Looked beyond grades to his career skills PE: again isolated from program expectations here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Language is interesting enough</td>
<td>Language is still ultimate goal Change: relationship building is necessary for learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end, to understand Arabs</td>
<td>Didn't get relationships she wanted quite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end, helping others</td>
<td>Still a means to an end</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>REL</td>
<td>Interest Description</td>
<td>Change: relationship shift</td>
<td>Additional Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Means to an end</td>
<td>Cultural window into Arab perspectives</td>
<td>Change: more specific interests in Arab relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Wants friendships more than Arabic</td>
<td>Prioritized it</td>
<td>Change: prioritized relationships above Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Interested in immersion service opportunities</td>
<td>Dissatisfied with superficial relationships</td>
<td>Turned away from JA relationships, finding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Not interested in relationships</td>
<td>Feels bad speaking with others just to learn Arabic</td>
<td>PE: Learning has to happen, the program's offered way felt insincere for him because of lack of interest in relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Interested in people, balancing with family time</td>
<td>Limited relationships on purpose</td>
<td>Change: embraced balance and brought family speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>embraced limited relationship conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Interested in immersion for learning's sake</td>
<td>Sees Arab relationships as necessary to learning</td>
<td>Change: &quot;relationship building&quot; becomes a regular activity for him, distinct from a &quot;high quality&quot; speaking experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Wanted close relationships</td>
<td>Disappointed with lack of Arab women interest in politics, etc.</td>
<td>Change: realized she wanted relationships with certain kinds of people. Relationships were a means to speaking about meaningful things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Interested in proficiency for career, not friendships</td>
<td>Difficult to make friends unless in formal contexts, awkward approaching people</td>
<td>PE: speaking to random people was a jump for him that he couldn't do regularly. Saw others making the jump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Change: recognized need for formal contexts, saw other exemplary students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MORAL ECOLOGY OF UNSTRUCTURED SPEAKING

Invested in relationships to understand Arab world
Interested in nuanced perspectives
Change: more specific interests in Arab relationships

Participant Category Memos

Andrea

Andrea sought to develop group speaking opportunities but felt disappointed when her previous friendships proved unreliable. She came to see independence as ideal and worked towards that throughout the program with some success while also developing some supportive friendships with other students.

Andrea saw relationships as the reason why she came on study abroad. Since she was intending to work in the Middle East teaching English, she highly valued making friendships with anyone in Jordan. Upon realizing this she gave up feeling as stressed about not meeting program expectations to get two hours of high-quality Arabic speaking every day and complete her assignments. She still wanted good grades and knew that the program was a good way to learn, but she was better oriented toward her personal goals on a day-to-day basis.

Andrea tired of the usual “in-depth” topics like politics and current events. She struggled to hear sob stories but really wanted to hear people’s stories and perspectives. She wanted to develop friendships, however that could be done.

As a female Andrea had to deal with restrictions on her speaking plans that made group speaking more of a necessity as she figured out a routine for her activities.

Austin

Austin saw other students as a necessary evil going out to speak. He recognized that his speaking experiences were limited by being around others and therefore idealized going out on his own. In the beginning of the program this meant wanting to get into a routine of full immersion after classes, and after he came back from being sick this meant focusing on his MSA opportunities.

Austin’s reason to learn Arabic is so that he can work in Africa with Arab/Muslim peoples. As such, he struggled with desire to learn JA and eventually focused almost exclusively on MSA in order to achieve his program goals with the limited time he had after being sick. Relationships, then, were not a high priority for him. He found what interactions he had to be limited, urban, and trivial even when discussing some high-level topics.

Austin’s interest in Africa colored his conversation topics such that little if anything became interesting. He spoke Arabic in Jordan in order to learn the language for his career, and struggled to engage with topics simply because they had intrinsic value.
Austin didn’t have many restrictions as far his environment, and didn’t discuss the context in detail I don’t think. He did best in his speaking appointments where he could focus on MSA and control the content.

**Chris**

Chris saw other relationships with other students as desirable at the beginning of the program, but eventually he gave up on group outings with them and figured out how to do speaking with his family. The balancing act of finding speaking and his relationships caused him to prioritize.

Chris was not interested in real relationships with Arabs that went beyond being speaking partners. He intentionally limited his friendships to certain physical locales and kept everyone in their sphere. Chris saw Arabic as a means to an end, a tool to help him get a meaningful career that would provide for his family. He enjoys language learning, but it must be useful too.

Despite a lack of deep friendships, he figured out ways to get high quality, engaging experiences for himself by going out with his family and bringing up unique topics, especially with taxi drivers.

Chris needed his relationships to be in their proper sphere in order to be okay. His friends downtown were to be seen there and he would not go eat out with them somewhere else.

**Jonathan**

Jonathan interacted with other students out of a necessity in scheduling speaking opportunities and the logistics of going from one place to the next. He saw himself as a leader of some sorts and a more distant participant in the program than most. He went speaking by himself often, but settled into routines with other students as well.

Jonathan saw relationships with others as a stepping stone on the way to getting high-quality speaking opportunities. His reason for coming on the program was to learn Arabic, and as such the relationships were always second to this. Still, he saw them as closely tied objectives. Get one and you get the other.

As he was focused on the language itself, Jonathan sought ever for more complicated, abstract, and varied speaking opportunities. He never managed to consistently replicate the quality of speaking from his appointments in his outside speaking opportunities.

Jonathan favored situations where he could actively seek to “understand” the language. As such, he sought out high-level opportunities even if he wasn’t speaking, such as sermons at the Greek Orthodox church. High-level listening took precedence over low-level speaking. He discriminated between activities that fit him better and had more appropriate interlocutors for someone like himself.

**Thomas**

Thomas dealt with strong performance anxiety in front of his peers and as such sought to avoid them in his speaking activities as much as possible. However, being dissatisfied with the
results of his independent efforts, he figured out by the end of the program that he could manage
his stress by bringing the speaking into his home and inviting friends to bring their friends.

Thomas was intent on developing relationships and learning from his Arab friends’
unique perspectives. He came on study abroad to get their “nuanced” insights into the region's
problems and events. He favored mature, older friends who had opinions worth mentioning.

Thomas tired of street-talk from younger speaking acquaintances and sought for more
advanced topics in social issues that he was interested in. Relationships and the value of a given
topic are intricately tied for him I think.

Thomas needed a safe space in which to take risks. Classroom presentations or writing at
the board were terrible experiences for him. He eventually was able to learn how to relax in
conversations at home and let the language flow over him for understanding. He was worried
that other students would judge him for his mistakes.

**Judy**

Judy avoided other students while speaking so as to lower her anxiety levels, similar to
Thomas. She was able to fill her speaking time with her own efforts. She did, however, take part
in some group speaking activities like visits to Arab homes for dinner parties, etc.

Judy specifically said that understanding Arabs is her “end,” meaning that she is on study
abroad to be able to talk to Arabs and understand them in ways she couldn’t before. Learning
Arabic is a tool for being able to talk and listen to Arabs. She developed regular friends, but felt
disappointed in the quality of conversation with her friends— they were good girl friends, but
not interested in the same issues as she was.

Judy definitely liked political issues, especially the most prominent regional problems
such as the Palestinian conflict. She found certain topics, like women’s rights, to be particularly
motivating even when she was in a slump before.

The context, as suggested above, needed to be right for her to speak. She struggled to
participate in class because of more dominant students and found it difficult to go speaking with
others because she would give way to them speaking. Her ideal situation was one on one.

**Mitchell**

Mitchell relied heavily on other students to complete his speaking assignments. He
recognized that developing more independence was desirable for learning, but the emotional
support of other students kept him going in groups for the whole program. While his speaking
abilities were not very limited, he preferred to be near other students still. He found ways to
make group speaking work for him by pairing off with Arabs after arriving, or going to the
language exchange events each week.

As an introvert, it was difficult for Mitchell to develop relationships with Arabs, even if
he wasn’t opposed to it. His reasons for learning Arabic were primarily so that he could get a
good job, even if he didn’t use the language as much as he would like. If relationships happened, they were a happy side-effect to getting speaking practice.

Mitchell seemed happy with conversations that moved. He didn’t discuss topics so much as how the conversation was progressing. Continued speaking meant that they were both engaged, and that seemed to satisfy him in his appointments and elsewhere.

As said above, being in the near proximity of other students and in a structured place or event made speaking easier for Mitchell. The logistics of finding speaking often weighed on him so that it didn’t seem worth the effort.

Benjamin

Benjamin saw having other students around for speaking as an enabling influence. He felt that if he were by himself that he could not carry out a successful interaction. He relied on others to be able to figure out what people were saying or to get an idea across. He kept this going the whole program as far as I can tell.

Benjamin was not interested in relationships, and once said outright that if he could learn the language without having to go out and make friends to talk with he would.

Benjamin felt limited by his ability in the topics he could discuss. It turned out that he was happy with conversations on a variety of topics, even some that others might call mundane. It seems that he preferred lower-level topics that were more comfortable for him. A conversation that keeps going is a successful one.

Benjamin had to be with other students in order to speak, so structure and familiarity were preferable it seems. He also liked the language exchange program, as he didn’t have to do the social work needed to find interesting speaking partners.

---

**Advising / Analysis Memos**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Memo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/13/17</td>
<td>I'm a little bit behind on coding, but nothing I can't catch up on today I think. The last participant, Jonathan, had a huge amount of writing in his weekly reports, which slowed me down. This is an interesting part of the data collection and analysis, because the weekly reports vary so much from student to student. Some of them write clearly at great length every week, and others are missing weeks and write summaries or brief thoughts. Either way, they provide a great triangulation point for what I find in the interviews. Usually the same ideas and concerns or events are brought up, but sometimes the perspective or tone changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/18/17</td>
<td>I've completed all of the interview and weekly report coding. I've been memoing some along the way, but I am mostly interested in what categories come out of this. My method of categorizing has varied some, but what I've liked the most so far, and what I intend to do with all of these codes, is to print and cut all of the codes onto tiny pieces of paper and start organizing into piles on the floor. No fans or children allowed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I did this method before with one student's codes, and I found that the categories seemed to emerge more authentically from the codes themselves, as opposed to other attempts where I felt like I was bringing some categories in from the beginning.

10/3/17 This last week I had to spend time making revisions to a book chapter that I submitted with Kirk a few months ago. It is resubmitted and hopefully won't require much more time.

This morning I have made great progress on seeing interesting categories and visualizing trends. For example, I've created two spectrums and places students on them in order to start seeing how much the categories I have make sense, how they relate to other categories, etc.
Lots of memoing going on too.

10/9/17 I've taken the categories that seem most interesting or common and drafted some potential themes. I'm going to take those themes back to the data over the next couple days to see how well they fit.
I've considered holding another round of interviews with participants who are still available in order to follow up on some of these thoughts. I think member checking would help my confidence in the patterns I'm seeing so far.

10/12/17 Today I finished putting quotes from participants with the themes that I've identified. I'm going to start member checking tomorrow by sending some key quotes for each person and asking if my explanation of their experience is correct.
Anything else I should be thinking about to do a good member check without an IRB?

10/17/17 Emails have been sent to each participant with a link to a document that includes four themes (American relationships, Arab relationships, Arabic perspectives, and Conversation topics) and their quotes that fit in each theme. Then I commented on groups of quotes letting them know what I think they mean. So far I have heard back from one student, and if I don't hear back from more soon I'll forward them along again so it rises to the top of their inboxes. 😄

I actually really enjoyed the activity of putting individual students' quotes under each theme. It gave me a different perspective on each individual, helping me to see what quotes or parts of someone's story I was missing after sifting through so many, and I was able to go back into the data and pull out probably 20 more quotes to complete their stories in relation to the themes I'm seeing. This activity also confirmed for me the centrality of these themes in some ways, especially the first 3 that I mentioned. The conversation topics theme is still not clear to me, so I'm going to give that some attention today.

10/18/17 CATEGORY: AMERICAN RELATIONSHIPS

10/24/17 Two sub-categories here: Personal relationships (e.g., roommates, friends in the program) and speaking relationships (i.e., other Americans who go speaking with them out of class). Here are some themes I'm seeing for each:

- Personal relationships have their benefits and problems. They limit and enable participants' speaking opportunities, and they sometimes support or damage them emotionally.
- Going speaking with another student is an emotional choice. Every day students make the choice whether to sacrifice independence and potentially more intensive learning in return for emotional support.
- Group speaking activities are low-risk, low-yield investments generally, but sometimes students make them work to their benefit.
- Speaking independence is an oft-desires but difficult to reach standard. This standard is sometimes set by program leaders and reinforced by items on the student reports.

Looking at American relationships over time, students either stayed with their usual speaking opportunities (going speaking in groups at JU, for instance) or they moved away from this for their own reasons (for example, choosing not to speak on the street at all, or setting up a speaking situation within one's own home). Students who recognized their own priorities (Chris, Andrea, Austin, Thomas) adjusted their speaking practice, whereas those who didn't adjust seemed unaware or unwilling to try out other ways (Benjamin and Mitchell).

The above insight seems prominent to me because it ties the other categories, Arabic perspectives and Arab relationships, together in a coherent way. As students consult their desires (e.g., learn Arabic, make Arab friends, understand Arab culture) and are forced to prioritize because of the program's assignments and expectations, they stand a chance at finding speaking opportunities that fulfill both the program's expectations and their own desires.

This brings up two new aspects: program expectations and personal expectations. This is something that I've noticed and thought about throughout the process but haven't made explicit yet. I'm interested to see what codes are going to reveal about this, if anything.
Here's a fun diagram of where I think the participants are in regards to their end-of-program balance of expectations.

Students on the left kind of floated along with what the program expected, without really pushing back. They eventually struggled to engage with their speaking activities (perhaps because they didn't make it their OWN activities).

Students on the right ended up prioritizing their own expectations to the point that they didn't care much about the program's expectations. There is never a complete break, but they realize that the program wasn't what they asked/were ready for.

Students in the middle have negotiated competing expectations to find a middle ground that satisfies both. They are getting their two hours in, they are working within the rules and opportunities of their social situation and the culture, but they manage to carve out a niche for themselves. It's clear that these students, while they struggled with speaking at some point, succeeded more than the others. I don't know if I want to make causal statements about all this, but these relationships are pretty clearly at play I think.

Time to get some supporting data and start writing.

10/18/17 CATEGORY: ARAB RELATIONSHIPS
- Students' relationships with the Arabs they speak with each week takes up a lot of their time and thought.

10/23/17 The big theme of this category is that:
- Even though everyone struggles (at least initially) to have the Arab relationships they desire, the priority that students give to those relationships is clear and pretty binary; either they prioritize relationships over learning, or they prioritize learning over relationships.

I'm waiting to hear back from a couple participants in particular to confirm my thoughts above. I suspect, however, that while there is a difference in prioritization, the more interesting discussion is in how those priorities work out and are balanced every day.
I'm starting to see less of a binary decision and more of a balancing act between competing interests. Students recognize that talking to Arabs is necessary for learning the language well, so those relationships (whatever they might be) are valuable to them in some way. For others, the story is flipped, perhaps. They see Arabic as the means to developing relationships and understanding the people they are so interested in. How interesting that in each situation the two need each other but are competing at times.

"Making friends" is an implicit program expectation. Leaders and other students ask "have you made any friends yet?" However, a lot of the students come into the program without the assumption that they are going to make real friends. Some of them actively limit their relationships because they don't want to get involved with others (Chris, Benjamin).

In regards to time here, students discover over the course of the program what they want in a relationship in more specific terms. For example, Chris realizes that he doesn't want close friends and describes how he gets good speaking in anyway. Judy realizes that although she has friends, what she was really looking for was people who were interested in politics and current events, so she ended the program a little bit disappointed in that regard. Jonathan realizes the importance of relationship building activities in order to get high-quality speaking opportunities.

Their overall perspective on relationships does seem pretty set, however, over the course of the program. No one came out and said "You know, I didn't care about relationships before but now that's all I'm interested in."

10/18/17 CATEGORY: ARABIC PERSPECTIVES

This category considers how the students view Arabic, specifically their motivations to learn it and come on study abroad. Several important themes to consider:

- Students value learning Arabic to different degrees. Other interests often take priority and regulate how they go about speaking. Some are into the language itself, others (most, it seems) see it as a means to an end.
- While some students are deeply interested in learning Arabic for the language's sake, everyone is invested in the language to some degree. They have made sacrifices to study it and are planning careers where they actually want to use it.

This is the first theme the I noticed during the project, all the way back during the first interviews of Fall 2016. I decided to ask some students about it quite directly during their second interviews and it seemed important to them to figure out. It was like they wanted to know where they stood on the issue, since it was something that they dealt with every day.

As they go through the program they have small and big moments when they recognize their priorities. For more than one student, this mental/emotional work is clearly on display in their weekly reports. Much like the Arab relationships category, there is a balancing act going on here between Arabic and other interests. It's not binary simply by the fact that there are multiple competing ideas, but it is similar to the other category because of the prioritization involved.

There is not a correlation between Arabic prioritization and relationship prioritization, but I think that there is something here worth working out:

It may be said that this category is an answer to the question "why did you come on study abroad, really?" In that sense, it seems to me that the above division between Arabic and other interests is actually embedded in the question about Arab relationships. Arabic is just another interest among others that competes with relationships.

I'm going to rest on this, read some more quotes, and then come back to it.
I think that while the above explanation does make some sense, I'm having a hard time seeing it in the data so far. The way students write and talk about Arabic, relationships, and other ideas arises as I described it before. While that may be a result of the way questions were asked and they are often talked about, that is the logic the data reflects.

Looking at Arabic perspectives over time, the changes here are small and incremental. Almost all the students see Arabic as a means to an end to some degree (except for Jonathan), and their individual reasons for learning the language and coming on study abroad evolve in slight ways, becoming more specific or stronger. Jonathan, however, is focused on the language itself, though he may have moderated some to value relationship building by the end.

10/18/17  CATEGORY: CONVERSATION CONTENT
10/19/17  I had difficulty figuring out this category until yesterday. There are two sub-categories here: conversation content and conversation context. The content describes the communication that takes place, and context describes the environment and the actors. Some themes:

- The ideal context differs widely from student to student. Studying this further would require a lot more data collection focused on this.
- The ideal content is much more consistent across the students. Though said in their own words (e.g., deep, meaningful, nuanced, etc.), I think that they all describe a desire for conversations that MOVE, where multiple parties are actually involved or invested in communication. This is true across all the contexts that I have seen.

As hinted above, I think that conversation context will probably remain outside the scope of this project. It will make a great suggestion in the "further research suggestions" section, especially in relation to whatever findings I have.

I'm going to go back to my data again now that I've abstracted this idea of MOVING conversations. I need to see if there are more descriptions that match this idea which I didn't get in my previous searches. What I'm hoping to do here is make connections with other themes clearer.

Hmmm... Re-reading my comments to each participant on this theme has cast some shade on my previous comments. Now I'm seeing more variety and perhaps some interplay between context and content. For example, one student described how he had anticipated being motivated to speak to people on certain topics, but he lost steam because he kept engaging people outside of his comfort zone. Only later on when he invited people to his apartment did he have successful speaking relationships, because he had both the context and the content under control.

10/20/17  Had a hard day following up on what I've been doing. Seems like I'm a little bit stuck, so I'm going to go back and read some of the GT method articles (including Peter's) to get back on track.

10/23/17  After reading parts of "Inside the Black Box" again, I feel like I have a little bit more direction. Something I've thought about off and on throughout the analysis process has been the progression of events through time, or how things might be different at the beginning, middle, or end of the program for each student and the sample as a whole.

I've started to notice an interesting idea that comes out of my experience with the program as a former student and leader. Towards the beginning of the program, students are more reactive to advice, guidelines, or even just the perspective that the program leadership gives to the study abroad. As the program goes on, students begin to figure things out for themselves-- this means recognizing whatever schisms they may have with the program and reconciling that to themselves somehow. For example, one student spent the first part of the program focusing on getting her 2 hours of speaking in, however painful. At a certain point, however, she decided that her reasons for being on study abroad should prevail over the "requirement" to speak for two hours in Arabic. She agreed, of course, that she would
speak Arabic with Arabs whenever she could, but the focus of her program changed to developing relationships with people and away from checking off program to-dos so she could learn Arabic.

As can be seen in this example, the timeline of the program reveals changes in each category (both Arab relations and Arabic perspectives in this case).

While I wait for member check responses I'm going to look through each participants' codes with this timeline in mind and see if any interesting relationships between the categories and time come up.

Also been reading "Constructing Grounded Theory" by Charmaz, the chapter on constructing theory. It's helped me to conceptualize the kind of theory I'm finding in the data:

"Theories flash illuminating insights and make sense of murky musings and knotty problems. The ideas fit. Phenomena and relationships between them you only sensed beforehand become visible. Still, theories can do more. A theory can alter your viewpoint and change your consciousness. Through it, you can see the world from a different vantage point and create new meanings of it. Theories have an internal logic and more or less coalesce into coherent forms" (p. 128).

10/30/17 I think I'm zeroing in on a theory that fits well with my research question. From my prospectus:

"In what context are participants who struggle to engage with Arabic speakers going on BYU’s SA program, and what more can we understand about those students by viewing them in their specific context?"

On one hand, we have students' context. Here I have found two important ideas: student perceptions of Arabic (as a means to an end or as the end itself) and program expectations (students are to go out speaking for 2 hours, speaking one on one is preferable, etc). I can break the second one down a little bit I think-- some expectations are explicit (speak 2 hours) and others are implicit (one on one conversations that go beyond pleasantries are preferable). Sometimes these expectations conflict (I need speaking, but I can't get it except in groups, or I need speaking, but I'm falling behind on my other assignments, or vice versa).

On the other hand, we have the speaking experience itself, which is constantly interacting with the context and is made up of four ideas that I have found: American relationships (who do they go speaking with?), Arab relationships (who do they speak to?), Conversation content (what do they talk about?), and conversation environment (in what condition do they do the talking?).

There's still a lot to tease out here. Specifically, I might have to rethink my distinction between context and speaking itself. The relationships categories might not fit nicely on one side or the other.

11/6/17 Some thoughts from reviewing themes with my wife. Not sure that counts as peer debriefing, but maybe. Big change here: Relationships with other students will now be considered as a subcategory of Conversation Context. It makes sense and it is reflected in the data once I thought of it. For example, both Thomas and Judy made changes to their speaking habits because of their difficulties speaking around other students. The other participants are an important part of that context, though not all of it. So a subcategory distinction makes sense there.

After thinking through the above change in light of everything else, I'm going to make another big change. In light of my research question, there are two super-categories to consider that form the "context" or background of a student's speaking experience: program expectations and student
expectations. Program expectations involve some formal commitments that students have to make and a lot of informal, implied expectations that they deal with throughout the program. As for student expectations, these can be broken down into some specific categories that I have been working with before: Arabic perspectives (why are you on SA learning this?), Arab relationships (who do you talk to and why?), and possibly other less salient ideas. Finally, there is the super-category of "speaking" for which the other two are the background. Within this, there are the categories of conversation content and conversation environment (like I said above American relationships fits under the latter).

This is the best formulation I have come up with so far, and now I'm going to try and go back to the data and put the students that I have through this theory to see if it holds up. I'm hoping to find some negative cases here, make an adjustment or two, and expand these categories in light of the whole. That will make it easy to organize a discussion of the findings and focus on the most unique insights of the theory. Then on to the referential adequacy sample for testing.

12/4/17 Taking one step back so I can hopefully take five steps forward over the next couple weeks.

I feel like I made a mistake pushing forward with the framework that I came to a couple weeks ago. Now that I look at it again after having written about it a lot, I am seeing the importance of informal program expectations and how they make frameworks possible which I thought lacked substance before. The framework that I am working with now and which feels so much more... parsimonious than the other is a straightforward table with expectations listed across the x-axis and the other categories listed on the y-axis. The interesting insights come from looking at the gap between program and personal expectations for each of the categories in the y-axis. There may also be some interesting cross-categorical insights built on those first insights I suspect.

Fortunately, the write-up is going well, so I'm not too worried about meeting my end of semester deadline. Here's to writing!

12/7/17 I've come to a realization of what the "big takeaway" is for this research project: while abroad students engage in a process of negotiating between the expectations they bring and those given them by the program. This process can be seen in three categories that emerged from the data, and we can find some insights from the negotiations that students made. Some insights are individual, others are generalized.
APPENDIX D

Audit Trail: Moral Configuration Analysis

This audit trail outlines the progression of my initial research interests and assumptions as I became more familiar with the data and completed an analysis of the moral configurations present in the data. The audit trail in Appendix A should also be considered as an earlier part of my experience analyzing the data.

Pre-Analysis Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Memo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/4/17</td>
<td>The current project is built on the work of a previous research project done from a grounded theory perspective. The data was collected with a specific goal in mind: understanding participants’ speaking experience in view of their study abroad context (previous learning, family, career aspirations, motivations, ability, friends, etc). Today I created a new folder that contains the transcripts of Andrea’s two interviews, the audio files of the interviews, interview notes, and this audit trail. I now plan to consult Dr. Yanchar’s job aid for conducting a hermeneutic analysis from a moral ecology perspective, then begin coding the transcripts according to that perspective. Based on my first look at the job aid just now, I see that I should also gather any other artifacts or observation notes that I have for Andrea so I can understand them and the interviews in the same light. Once I have the data collected, the first step is explicating my assumptions about what makes a study abroad participant “good.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My generic research question is: How does speaking with Arabs fit into the moral ecology of Arabic study abroad as a situation of practice? And what is revealed about speaking with Arabs and Arabic study abroad when studied from this moral realist perspective? Why does speaking with Arabs matter in the moral space of Arabic study abroad, and what is uniquely revealed about speaking with Arabs and Arabic study abroad when studied this way? To answer this question, I will (1) describe the participant’s practices on Arabic study abroad, with a focus on their speaking experiences with Arabs abroad, (2) generate a thematic moral structure that makes sense of their practices, and (3) identify the unique insights of viewing their practices in light of this moral structure.

I definitely have some assumptions about what a good study abroad student does and how speaking fits into that practice. To think about these somewhat intelligibly, I have been in connection with the study abroad program from several perspectives, or in several roles: first, I participated in the program as a married student who brought his wife and newborn child to the program in 2012; second, I returned to the program as a T.A. after scoring Superior on the OPI a few weeks before; third, I became a researcher of the program by working with professors, presenting at conferences, and eventually writing a book chapter about the history and design of the program; fourth, I returned...
again with my family to T.A. the program in 2016, where I collected the data for this study; and fifth, I am currently a fourth-year graduate student whose dissertation (and career, by extension) depends entirely on this data and the insights that can be drawn from it. I am still very much a student of Arabic, but I also belong to a distinct category since I am a graduate student who is also on the teaching and researching side of things. These are my positions in relation to the study abroad, and my assumptions about what a good study abroad student does are tied up with these identities and experiences. I may have other identities that also affect the way I see study abroad participation, but I think that considering the above identities that relate directly to the program will provide the most insight as I carry out the data analysis and present findings.

The more I’ve looked at my research question, the more I think that I want to look first at the moral ecology of study abroad before looking specifically at speaking’s role within that ecology. However, since my data is more focused on the speaking aspect, I think I will stick with my original question. After working through the first stages of analysis based on the moral configuration aid, I find myself somewhat satisfied with the interview data that I have so far. There are things that I would like to go back and ask the participants, of course, but I think that the data is holding up for now.

I’ve identified some potential moral reference points for participants on Arabic study abroad generally and related to speaking to Arabs specifically. Here goes nothing:

Participants on the Arabic study abroad program take a stand daily in relation to several more reference points. First, participants must buy into the structure and goals of the program, which consists of a large checklist of assignments and preparations that are to be done every weekday. Giving their time to these activities can create tension with the participant’s personal expectations for their time abroad. Andrea saw her time abroad as preparation for future trips to the Middle East, and the Arabic language was only a part of that preparation.

Second, participants balance their time effectively between different responsibilities, especially the daily two-hour speaking requirement and the daily two-hour reading translation assignment. Despite the highly structured nature of the program, participants do choose how to spend their time—sometimes to their detriment. They choose whether to attend class or to take a “personal day.” They choose when and how much time to spend preparing a writing assignment. Most pertinent to our discussion here, they choose how to spend their time after classes end; will they go home and take a nap after lunch, then hit their books before going speaking in the afternoon? Or will they go out to speak right away, intending to complete their reading assignment later on?

Third, participants engage with Arab culture and Arabs themselves. While this might seem obvious for everyone coming on the program, they often find it more difficult to carry out than expected. Participants’ linguistic ability may preclude them during the first weeks of the program from having long, interesting conversations by themself. Even once their ability improves they may find themselves unsure of how to pursue a relationship with an Arab considering the new cultural environment and their unique situation as a guest learner in a foreign country. Furthermore, different cultural expectations for how males and females interact can complicate and preclude friendships that participants had originally thought possible or desirable.

Fourth, participants share the load of the study abroad with their fellow cohort members. As co-participants they are to help one another do well abroad. Roommates are expected to support and take care of each other, male participants are often asked to accompany female participants to certain events or areas of town, and classmates are expected to give each other a fair chance to participate. They are instructed that unity can lead to greater learning and a better experience for everyone involved.
### Codebook for Initial Moral Reference Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description / Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| authenticity  | Chris went for taxi drivers because he found it easy to be authentically connect with them.  
Judy, Mitchell, and Benjamin were sometimes reluctant to approach people because it would be inauthentic to just to have a conversation with them without being genuinely interested in friendship.  
Mitchell’s roommate found it easier to authentically engage people in conversation if he were embedded in the activities going on in an area (e.g., doing h/w at the university). |
| calmness      | Judy was anxious about speaking because she might not understand anything.  
Thomas was anxious about speaking in front of other people, especially his American peers. |
| comfort       | Benjamin needed the comfort of having another student nearby who could help him communicate with Arabic-speakers.  
Mitchell was uncomfortable speaking with unfamiliar people.  
Thomas was comfortable speaking with certain types of people, inviting them to his home. |
| commitedness  | Chris was unwilling to commit to a close friendship, preferring that his contacts stay in their primary sphere (i.e., downtown, the pizza shop).  
Mitchell was excited to have a committed, permanent speaking partner at the university that he could meet with. |
| connection    | For the sake of this project, connectedness refers to the relationships that participants made with other students. Having this connection led to speaking opportunities that participants would not have had on their own, but other factors often made these opportunities less valuable than they could be.  
Andrea struggled to let go of emotional connection with other students as she went out speaking. When she felt left out, this discouraged her from going out speaking. On the other hand, friends in the program often came with the benefit of socializing with friends of friends, being invited to events, etc.  
For Benjamin and Mitchell, connection was crucial to speaking because they felt inadequate going looking for speaking by themselves. They relied on group activities to get into conversations.  
Chris was uninterested in using connections with other students to enable his speaking. He recognize that lots of people like that, but that he had all the "buddies" that he needed in each sphere of his life.  
Judy (and other female participants) regularly relied on their in-program connections to have meaningful speaking experiences.  
Thomas did not participate in group finding activities that were going on, but eventually he used his in-program connections to meet the kind of people he was comfortable speaking with and having over to his home for activities. |
| consistency   | Benjamin valued the language exchange as a consistent speaking opportunity, and he would try to be in places at the same time and place as previous weeks to meet the same people. |
Chris valued going to certain areas of town because he could count on people he had met before to be there in their shops.

Judy had a friend that she met with multiple times a week because it was consistent, even if the topics of conversation weren’t exciting to her.

Mitchell went to the university regularly because he and others had contacts who provided consistent speaking practice there, sometimes with friends they hadn’t met before too.

Andrea found that speaking with everyone led to meeting friendly people she could speak with.

Austin looked down on speaking activities (going up to random people) that would involve courage, though not because he was afraid, from his perspective.

Benjamin was afraid to go out by himself since he might not be able to understand and communicate on his own.

Judy felt trepidation about going out to speak, but forced herself to do so. At times her anxiety would hold her back.

Mitchell held back in conversations were he was unsure of what to say (+connectedness).

Andrea struggled to come up with ways to meet and be around female Arabs to have the kinds of speaking experiences that she saw was possible among males.

Participants sometimes had class assignments that helped them come up with situations that would produce good conversations (e.g., election polling stations, going somewhere they could fit in).

Austin and Mitchell struggled early on to come up with creative ways of initiating conversations.

Austin was not decisive about initiating conversations even when others around him were.

Benjamin and Mitchell found that once they actually got into a conversation that they did alright, but actually going out to speak and starting conversations was difficult at times.

Austin reflected on the quality of his speaking activities and decided to pivot towards MSA and his scheduled speaking activities instead.

Benjamin was unsure of how to prioritize his speaking and his assignments when he was unable to do both effectively.

Judy knew that her speaking activities fell short of what she wanted, but felt like she couldn’t "find the right crowd."

Mitchell noted that some speaking activities were more worthwhile than others.

Thomas made distinctions in the kind of people that he spoke with, preferring older college graduates who had experience with westerners.

Chris and Benjamin were conflicted about going up to people to speak with them when they didn't have any intent of developing a real relationship or benefiting the other person in a direct way. (authenticity)

Related to fairness. Participants felt like they were being dishonest by using people to get speaking practice.

Judy, Benjamin, and Thomas realized that in order to progress they would have to be okay with looking stupid sometimes.

"I need to just be bad until I can get better" (Benjamin)
independence All of the participants expressed that speaking independent of other students was valuable, especially when they could not easily split off from groups if they normally went out together. That being said, some people were not concerned with this, either because they were already doing speaking mostly on their own, or because they were dependent on others in conversations.

motivation Mitchell, Austin, Thomas, and Benjamin expressed that at times they felt lazy or unmotivated to go out speaking.

naturalness Mitchell felt like he was unable to constantly find natural ways of interacting with people to practice speaking. Thomas enjoyed having friends who would introduce him to their friends as a natural way to meet people and speak.

networking Participants were aware of the value of having a "bigger friend base" to draw on for speaking opportunities. They knew they were doing well when their friends were introducing them to new friends, creating a network of acquaintances that they could speak with on a regular basis. The quality of these contacts were better usually, because they were vetted by other friends.

neutrality May be the same as "restraint." Benjamin was concerned with maintaining neutrality with his speaking partners, because he didn't feel that going speaking was about making friends. He didn't want to give them the wrong idea.

obligation Mitchell was obligated to speak when there was an expectation set with someone to meet at a time and place.

openness Chris realized that his decision to keep his world closed off to the people he spoke with was possibly hurtful to his speaking ability. Andrea saw success finding people to talk to in the short term by being open to talking to anybody. Judy felt that she could not be totally open with her acquaintances, because they were not interested in the same things she was.

perceptiveness Mitchell's roommate spent time just sitting and watching, blending in, looking for the right opportunities. Mitchell and Thomas looked for opportunities while they were out doing other non-speaking activities, like traveling or site-seeing.

persistence Austin and Mitchell had experiences where they persisted trying to speak while out and about, even when it didn't pan out. Benjamin struggled to keep going out with the intent to do speaking. Chris found that persisting past "hello" in a taxi led to good speaking opportunities, even though he would never see them again or become their friend. Mitchell found it hard to persist in meeting with people who would trade 30 min English for 30 min Arabic, given the time investment in meeting, etc.

planning See committed

predictability See consistent

preparedness Andrea, Judy, and Mitchell reported feeling more satisfied with speaking experiences they found when they had something structured or prepared to bring into their unstructured speaking experiences.
privacy
Mitchell and others were careful not to intrude on other people with their finding tactics.

(intrusive)

relatability
Participants were more likely to keep going to speak with someone if they felt that they had something in common, something about the other person that they could relate to.

respectability
see familiarity

restraint
Andrea and Benjamin felt that having to show restraint around Arabs of the opposite gender prevented them from having good speaking experiences. Benjamin felt it important to restrain his activities with people if he didn't intend to become buddies, wasn't comfortable giving them his contact information. Chris felt similarly, and liked keeping people in the sphere in which he originally met them. Judy, Austin, and Mitchell restrained themselves from speaking with people when they felt like it wasn't natural or justified. See also Authentic.

safety
Benjamin, Thomas, Judy, and Chris valued their (and others') social safety when thinking about who to speak with. A kind of face saving, perhaps?

spontaneity
see openness, perceptiveness

strategy
Participants looked for strategies that would make speaking opportunities available. Benjamin tried to replicate speaking opportunities at the university by looking closer to home. Andrea was frustrated that she forgot to get peoples' phone numbers so she could meet with them again. Austin struggled to figure out a "way into people’s lives so that I can hang out with people always."

Many participants found going to certain events to speak was a good strategy (polling booths) Thomas used his neighborhood position to make friends with neighbors, a close-by opportunity.

support
Benjamin found that having the support of another student while speaking enabled him to have conversation that he couldn't carry by himself. Mitchell did the same, to a lesser extent maybe. They both found that this became something of a crutch for them later on, however.

variety
Mitchell found that he tired of having the same speaking routine week after week, and needed to have something different thrown into the mix. Thomas said that in order to get a cultural survey of Arabs from his speaking, he would need to speak with a variety of people, not the same few.

Initial Themes and Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Memos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical convenience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New and old acquaintances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking initiative and blending in
Men and women

Asked Dr. Yanchar (12/18/20) about his thoughts on gender from this perspective

There are many definitions of culture shock across study abroad literature, from many perspectives. Understanding culture shock from this perspective could provide some very practical insights.

This will be important for this article, because it is only the first part of unstructured speaking, and actually engaging in conversations is the central, second part. Finding and conversation share the moral goods of unstructured speaking, so how do they work together as sub-practices with their own reference points? Is this the way to talk about this? Maybe ask Dr. Yanchar.

Relevance to time of day (logistics), order of doing things.

An example of relieving tension, finding a unique balance that others struggled to find

Participants found that they could not simply ignore how their speaking with someone affected that someone. Finding the right speaking opportunities meant acting in accordance with reference points that would respect the people with which they spoke.
The progression of the articles in this dissertation reflects a timeline of developing thoughts about language learning on study abroad. The first article began with grounded theory, which sought to allow an original understanding of the participants’ struggles to emerge without undue influence from existing theories. The preeminent finding of this analysis was that the troubles that some participants dealt with pertaining to speaking could be understood in terms of differing expectations, whether their own or from the program. The proposed solution for this tension was the “negotiation of expectations,” which suggested close theoretical connections to the “negotiation of difference” (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2010) in ecological research.

The second article explored ecological research for study abroad as a conceptual home for the negotiation of expectations. Summarizing the relevant literature revealed certain activities that drive negotiation toward the resolution of difference: identification and articulation of differences, experimentation with new strategies, and finding a satisfactory position in between (i.e., a third place; see Kinginger, 2008). A subcurrent of this literature was the subject matter that needed negotiated: different values (e.g., cultural practices, norms, ideologies). Considering this, the lack of value-based views in language research was striking, and I turned to frameworks from other disciplines which then helped conceptualize what research from a value-based view would look like for language learning on study abroad.

The third article made good on the promise of the second by revisiting the data collected for the first article using one of the proposed value-based frameworks (Yanchar & Slife, 2017). As hoped, the results presented a different story than the first article. The first article understands participants’ struggles as differences between personal and program expectations, whereas the third article reveals their struggles as a function of tension between specific moral phenomena.
Each of these stories about participants’ struggles has its own strengths and can be useful in different circumstances as people participate in speaking activities on study abroad or language learning more generally. First, the negotiation of expectations contributes to ongoing language research, and study abroad research in particular, that emphasizes that participants are “whole people” with “whole lives” (Coleman, 2013, p. 17), as opposed to merely language learners whose only interesting function is to develop linguistic (and perhaps cultural) competencies. The first article adds that one part of being a “whole person” on study abroad is having a relationship with the program that brings you there, a relationship partially expressed through expectations. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only research that addresses how program expectations affect participants in any real depth.

The moral configuration analysis of unstructured speaking offers an entirely new perspective through which to view study abroad and language learning. While some theoretical ecological research has made claims about the value-laden nature of language use, empirical research of study abroad from a value-based perspective does not exist. The second and third articles together constitute a challenge to commonplace, undisclosed understandings of value and morality in the field by presenting and demonstrating a way to systematically explore the moral dimension of language learning. Previous articles have tended to gloss over values and morality as one of many human subjectivities, but presenting this research using a hermeneutic moral realist framework shows that values can be meaningfully discussed without assuming cultural relativism, appealing to religious moral codes, etcetera.

The ultimate combined effect of this dissertation research is two-fold: first, it questions commonplace understandings of language learners on study abroad, including the nature of the
challenges they face; and second, it provides two new approaches that show promise for exploring aspects of study abroad that have not been adequately considered before.
Dissertation References


