

"The map with which we travel provides the framework; the contours and nuances of the terrain become apparent only when we feel them beneath our feet." (Phipps & Gonzales, 2005, p. 114)

"As social actors in a new cultural and linguistic environment, language learners find themselves at a great disadvantage to construct a real self that approximates the ideal they uphold." (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 143)

## BLURRY BOUNDARIES: Language Use and Digital Media during Study Abroad

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Resident-Directors Tagung  
Senatssaal, Alte Universität  
Heidelberg, October 26-27, 2012

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## Vorbemerkungen

- How I got involved with this topic
  - Applied linguistics/language pedagogy
  - UCI Study Abroad Center
  - Tensions between applied linguistics and my own experiences as a study-abroad student
- The "So what?" question: Why this matters...



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## Success is not a given

- Success in development of intercultural communicative competence not always the outcome (Kinging, 2008; Papatsiba, 2006)
- Success with language acquisition not always the outcome (Kinging, 2008, 2010; Wilkinson, 1998)
- Pellegrino Aveni (2005) found that students' inclination to engage in second-language communication and engagement with social networks based on:
  - **Control** of one's self and social settings
  - **Status** (social, cultural) relative to others
  - **Safety** through avoidance of threatening situations
  - **Validation** of one's self as a social/conversation partner

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<b>Goals</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe (some of) what I have learned to date about U.S. study-abroad students in Germany:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– communication and language use/choice</li> <li>– uses of digital media</li> <li>– social networks</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Raise questions about (some aspects of) the nature of students' experiences, in particular relating to uses of face-to-face and online social networks and of digital media in general...</li> </ul>			
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<b>Questions</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we (language educators; study-center directors, etc.) facilitate               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– maximal second-language use?</li> <li>– the most optimal sorts of engagement with/participation in German life and culture?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What is the influence of (avid) digital media use during study abroad?</li> </ul>			
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<b>Structure of the presentation</b>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description of exploratory study</li> <li>2. Results:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Language use among the study participants</li> <li>b. Social networks and digital media</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Implications/indications for study-abroad programs</li> <li>4. Discussion: How can study-abroad programs support students and facilitate students' language and social development?</li> </ol>			
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<h2>1. An exploratory study of U.S. study-abroad students in Germany</h2>			
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<b>Exploratory Study:</b> <b>Daily use of language and digital media</b>			
<b>Research interests/questions</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✧ How do students use their languages on a day to day basis: in what settings/contexts, and for what purposes?</li> <li>✧ In what sorts of social networks do students engage while studying abroad?</li> <li>✧ How do students use digital media while abroad?</li> </ul>			
<p>Note: I was also interested in feelings of homesickness and reported difficulties communicating and coping with life in Germany</p>			
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<b>Exploratory Study:</b> <b>Daily use of language and digital media</b>			
<b>The study-abroad program</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✧ Based in small U.S. private college in the Midwest</li> <li>✧ Long-time location in study center across from main building of the a southern German university</li> <li>✧ Study center has computers/Internet, classrooms and meeting/hanging-out space</li> <li>✧ Study center has a German-only rule</li> <li>✧ Students live in dorm or shared apartment</li> <li>✧ Includes required internship experiences</li> </ul>			
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<p align="center"><b>Exploratory Study:</b> Daily use of language and digital media</p> <p><b>Participants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✧ 11 students from different U.S. universities: 6 women, 5 men</li> <li>✧ All raised in monolingual English homes; L2 German</li> <li>✧ All but one German Studies major or minor</li> </ul>			

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<p align="center"><b>Exploratory Study:</b> Daily use of language and digital media</p> <p><b>Data collection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✧ Initial survey about language background, motivation, social networks, language use, digital media use, homesickness</li> <li>✧ "Daily Log" on language use and digital media use</li> <li>✧ Follow up emails with students for more information on survey responses</li> <li>✧ Access to Facebook postings (5 of the 11)*</li> </ul> <p align="right">*Full ethics approval was obtained</p>			

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<p align="center"><b>2a. Results:</b> Language use among the study participants</p>			

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<b>Use of German and English</b>			
<i>Aggregated reported hours speaking English and German in the previous 24 hours for all 109 responses (N=13 students)</i>			
	Hours spent speaking German in the previous 24 hours	Hours spent speaking English in the previous 24 hours	General observation: Students are speaking slightly more German than English on a day-to-day basis
Minimum	0.7	2	
Maximum	7.4	9.4	
Mean	3.1	4.1	
Standard Deviation	1.78	2.05	

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<b>Use of German and English</b>			
	USE OF GERMAN PREV. 24 HOURS	USE OF ENGLISH PREVIOUS 24 HOURS	
James	Spoke and listened to <b>german</b> at the library, in the <b>meeting</b> , at my <b>internship</b> , and in class <b>read german</b> in class	<b>watched</b> a james bond movie, talked to my friend in english, and wrote some things on <b>facebook</b> also <b>skyped</b> a friend back home in english	
Amelia	Mostly only used in my <b>German class</b> about society and literature around the turn of the century.	I talked a little bit with some of my <b>classmates</b> before and after class in English, and spoke to my <b>boyfriend</b> later on at night in English, and <b>watch</b> TV/movies in the evening in English.	
Evan	I had two <b>German classes</b> , corrected an essay in German, spoke as much as possible to all friends, including my American <b>friends</b> here	I spent 3 hours at the <b>internship</b> , which is run in English; I spent some time on the <b>internet</b> ; and I spoke mostly English at my <b>friends apartment</b> and <b>the club</b> because there are so many different cultures together there that English works best and because the club was too loud for me to understand German.	
Evan	I read from my <b>powerpoint</b> on Kulturwissenschaft, proofread an essay, and <b>read out loud</b> in class for a grade	Anything <b>online</b> , particularly in the morning and before bed. <b>Talking to friends</b> throughout the day in person.	
Miles	<b>Reading "Ein fliehendes Pferd"</b> for class, and writing a paper on it. Also <b>spoke some german</b> last night going <b>out</b>	<b>Spoke mostly english</b> last night, also <b>watched</b> a few <b>youtube</b> videos in english	

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<b>Use of German and English</b>			
	USE OF GERMAN PREV. 24 HOURS	USE OF ENGLISH PREVIOUS 24 HOURS	
Mia	All evening when we were <b>out with German students</b> , I only used my German	Aside from my <b>praktikum</b> , I used English <b>at lunch</b>	
Mia	I used German while <b>studying</b> for my test and doing <b>homework</b> .	I only used english on <b>FB</b> today!!	
Nancy	Spoke, read and wrote German <b>in class</b> . I have also been working on <b>writing two papers</b> in German today. I also practiced reading German out loud.	Spoke English with English speaking <b>friends</b> . Read and wrote in English <b>online</b> .	
Susan	Spoke a mix of german and english with my friend <b>at the bar</b> .	spoke some english with my friend <b>at the bar</b> , <b>read for a bit</b> before bed. Worked on a <b>personal essay</b> for a few hours. Watched Sex and the City.	
Sam	used it obviously <b>in class</b> and for the afternoon to work on referat and papers	primarily for <b>research</b> and talking with <b>friends</b>	
Mark	used german <b>in class</b> and during <b>rugby practice</b>	talking with <b>friends</b> here and from <b>back home</b> .	

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<b>Use of German and English</b>			
Both important for what students wanted/ needed to do			
Uses of German often determined “externally”			
German often used more for educational rather than the social/subjective experience			
Meaningful social networks remained primarily in the U.S. culture realm, both digitally and non-digitally			
Avid use of digital media for a range of purposes (YouTube, Skype, Facebook)			
Key observation: Both languages used daily			

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<b>A bit more detail: What are some motivations and priorities and code choices in day-to-day interactions?</b>			

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<p><b>SAM:</b> I think it is very important for me because it is the best time to practice my german while I am in Germany. It is frustrating to hang out with mainly other americans from our exchange program and speak mainly english because they don't want to speak german and mess it up. I think we are here to make mistakes and be corrected so we should speak it way more.</p> <p><b>AMELIA:</b> At first, I really wanted to meet people and make friends with a lot of Germans, but then I realized how unfriendly Germans can be to people, and then I realized I'm most likely better off on my own or sticking with the few friends in the program I do have. I just don't trust people very much for various reasons.</p>			
<p>General observations:</p> <p>(1) Even those “frustrated” with English use still used it frequently</p> <p>(2) Students whose frustrations/ anxieties remained high often opted out</p> <p>(3) Note the “performative” orientation of even highly motivated students: Learning German appears to stand above joining German social networks as an ultimate goal <sup>18</sup></p>			

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**General observations about students' language use and language choices:**

Often little apparent linkage between the daily use of English or German and connecting with Germans

For language teachers in the U.S.: Patterns of code choice do not appear to line up with how we generally teach language in classrooms!

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**2b. Results:  
Uses of digital media**

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**Some differences to at-home digital media use**

- Communication with family and friends about activities, and checked in on what was going on back home
- Overall less time on the Internet compared with before study-abroad program
- Frequent communications with fellow study-abroad program participants

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**What were the most frequent uses of digital media?**

Texting

Watching vids (YouTube)

Digital interlocutors/social networks

Media of choice?...

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A thousand words: Loads of pictures!

Having a blast: Depictions of excursions, parties—lots of “fun” presented to the world

Text postings—two main purposes  
Clarify plans for trips or parties  
Comment on each other's photos (local social networks online)

Contact *from* family and friends:  
“How's it going?”  
“I miss you. A lot. Way.”

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**German on Facebook?**

Not much ☹ ...

August 26. SAM Ich wohne in Europa-Haus drei. Ich habe jetzt ein Handy aber keine Minuten, Hoeffentlich, werde ich ein Paar Morgen kaufen.

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**What are students *not* using FB for?**

Reporting what they're up to (except photos)

Networking with Germans

Writing in German (for practice or communication)

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**3. Implications/indications  
for study-abroad programs:**

**What are the**  
~~BLURRY BOUNDARIES~~  
**and what should  
we do about them?**

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**Multilingual tensions**

Apparent "performative orientation"  
toward German

and

the need for  
control,  
status,  
Safety,  
validation



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**Two conflicting positions?**

1. (Some) Learners untransformed  
or
2. Successful at following through  
on the “performative model” of U.S.  
language pedagogy?

**BLURRY BOUNDARIES**

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**What roles do digital media and  
digital communication serve?**

1. Are they just a “crutch,” a  
distraction, or even broad array  
of distractions? If so, from what?
2. Are students not “in Germany”  
because they are networked in  
complex ways?

**BLURRY BOUNDARIES**

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**Before we dismiss digital media altogether or  
try to put the toothpaste back in the tube...**

**BLURRY BOUNDARIES**

It's not (just) about  
understanding  
the Other abroad,  
it's about having new ways  
of understanding one's self  
*being abroad*

**Language learning and use are just (key)  
components of this social process!**

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<p><b>Symbolic competence</b> (Kramsch, 2009)</p> <p><b>&amp;</b></p> <p><b>“Identity competence”</b> (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005)</p> <p><b>“the ability to establish and maintain the desired level of control, status, safety, and validation, while interacting in the L2 in order to present her or his identity successfully”</b> (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, p. 148)</p>			
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<p><b>An approach to orientation/training</b> <b>(both in language courses and in study-abroad programs)</b></p>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Raise awareness about sociolinguistic power relations in the L2 society</li> <li>2. Foster reflection about students' own position(s) in their home culture and potential positions in the new one</li> <li>3. Facilitate development of students' own “voice” and as active participants who can imagine themselves occupying different cultural, emotional, and physical positions</li> <li>4. Prepare students to deal with linguistic and cultural differences that won't go away just because one is aware of them</li> <li>5. Help students explore ways to “take advantage” of their status as outsiders in the L2 society</li> <li>6. Help learners develop realistic expectations of what they can accomplish with the language and problems they might experience (I know we already do this in orientations, but...)</li> </ol>			
32 (adapted from Pellegrino Aveni, 2005)			

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<p><b>Digital media and social networks: Some considerations for study-center directors</b></p>			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students will engage with complex sets of networks, both face-to-face and digital, and also networks with no distinction between the digital and non-digital: blurry boundaries</li> <li>2. Simply facilitating an internship will not ensure more contexts for German use, especially if English becomes/remains the unmarked language of the internship</li> <li>3. Even if connected with German social networks, students need to feel               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. in <b>control</b> of their communication with other</li> <li>2. that they have a comparable social <b>status</b> to “insiders” (or imagine themselves attaining that)</li> <li>3. that they are “<b>safe</b>” from judgment (or even ridicule) in social encounters with, especially German native speakers</li> <li>4. that they are <b>validated</b> as competent users of German and participants in social networks</li> </ol> </li> </ol>			
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**A tall order for language professionals and for study-center directors!**

Integrating/accounting for the reality of ~~BLURRY BOUNDARIES~~ into

language teaching  
study-abroad program design and administration  
orientations  
student mentoring  
etc.

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**Danke schön!**

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**4. Discussion:**  
**How can study-abroad programs support students and facilitate students' language and social development?**

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<b>References</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Isabelli-Garcia, C. L. (2006). Study abroad social networks, motivation, and attitudes: Implications for SLA. In M. DuFon &amp; E. Churchill (Eds.), <i>Language learners in study abroad contexts</i> (pp. 231–258). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.</li><li>• Jackson, J. (2008). <i>Language, identity, and study abroad: Sociocultural perspectives</i>. London: Equinox.</li><li>• Kinginger, C. (2008). <i>Language learning in study abroad: Case studies of Americans in France</i>. The Modern Language Journal Monograph Series. Volume 1.</li><li>• Kinginger, C. (2009). American students abroad: Negotiation of difference? <i>Language Teaching</i>, 43(1), 1-12.</li><li>• Kramsch, C. (2009). <i>The multilingual subject: What foreign language learners say about their experience and why it matters</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.</li><li>• Milton, J., &amp; Meara, P. (1995). How periods abroad affect vocabulary growth in a foreign language. <i>Annual Review of Applied Linguistics</i>, 107-108: 17-34.</li><li>• Papatsiba, V. (2006). Making higher education more European through student mobility? Revisiting EU initiatives in the context of the Bologna Process. <i>Comparative Education</i>, 42(1), 93–111.</li><li>• Pavlenko, A. (2002). Poststructuralist approaches to the study of social factors in second language learning and use. In V. Cook (Ed.), <i>Portraits of the L2 user</i> (pp. 277-302). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.</li><li>• Pellegrino Aveni, V. (2005). <i>Study abroad and second language use: Constructing the self</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.</li><li>• Phipps, A., &amp; Gonzalez, M. (2004). <i>Modern Languages: Learning and Teaching in an Intercultural Field</i>. London: Sage.</li><li>• Wilkinson, S. (1998). Study abroad from the participants' perspective: A challenge to common beliefs. <i>Foreign Language Annals</i>, 31(1): 23-39.</li></ul>			

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