



Complimenting in Spanish in a short-term study abroad context



J. César Félix-Brasdefer ^{a, *}, Maria Hasler-Barker ^{a, b}

^a Indiana University, USA

^b Sam Houston State University, USA

A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Interlanguage pragmatics
Pragmatic ability
Study abroad
Speech acts
Compliments
Spanish
Individual variation

This study examines the effects of learning context on the production of compliments among Study Abroad (SA) learners of Spanish during an eight-week summer program in Mexico, and a group of learners in an At Home (AH) context. Baseline data from Native Speakers (NS) of Mexican Spanish and US English were analyzed and compared to the learner data. A subset of the SA group provided data for a delayed posttest, four months after learners returned to their home country. Learner data were collected in a pretest-posttest design, using a modified oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT). All participants produced compliments in four situations with equal status but differing levels of social distance. Results indicate that, while evidence of change toward the NS norm was observed in the SA learners, there was also evidence of change that reflected deviation from NS pragmatic norms. This study addresses the issue of individual learner variation, quality and intensity of the input, and the effects of the SA context.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The issue of the context of learning has received significant attention in second language acquisition (SLA). Some of the topics that have been analyzed include learning context (e.g., naturalistic, foreign language, immersion, and study abroad), quality and quantity of the input, length of stay in the target culture, intensity of interaction, acculturation and socialization, the opportunities that learners have to practice in a second language (L2) inside and outside of the classroom, proficiency level, previous contact with the target culture, and the type of instruction (e.g., explicit, implicit) (Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Barron, 2003; Collentine, 2009; DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2011, 2013; Llanes, 2011; López-Serrano, 2010; Taguchi, 2013). The context of learning represents “[o]ne of the most important variables that affects the nature and the extent to which learners acquire a second language” (Collentine, 2009, p. 218). In this article we further examine the effects of context of learning in a SA setting by examining learners’ pragmatic ability to produce appropriate compliments during an eight-week summer program in Mexico. These results will be compared to learners in an AH foreign language setting, who also produced the same speech act under comparable conditions. The present study adopts Martinsen’s (2008) definition of short-term SA programs, i.e., those ‘lasting two months or less’ (p. 504).

* Corresponding author. Indiana University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, 1020 E. Kirkwood, Ballantine 844, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA. Tel.: +1 812 855 9551.

E-mail addresses: cfelixbr@indiana.edu (J.C. Félix-Brasdefer), mhb015@shsu.edu (M. Hasler-Barker).

Pragmatic knowledge, according to [Leech \(1983\)](#) and [Thomas \(1983\)](#), is comprised of two components: (1) *pragmalinguistic competence* – knowledge about and performance of the conventions of language use or the linguistic resources available in a given language that convey “particular illocutions” in contextually appropriate situations ([Leech, 1983](#), p. 11), and (2) *sociopragmatic competence* – knowledge about and performance consistent with the social norms in specific situations in a given society, as well as familiarity with variables of social power and social distance (sociopragmatic knowledge). According to [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#), a compliment may express positive or negative politeness. A compliment such as ‘that sweater looks really nice’ may be interpreted as a positive politeness strategy in the appropriate circumstances because it attends to the interlocutor’s positive face, specifically, his/her wants, interests, and need to be approved of. The most obvious functions of a compliment are to “create or maintain solidarity between interlocutors” and to serve as “social lubricants” ([Wolfson, 1983](#), p. 89). As a negative politeness strategy, a compliment may be used as a face threatening act, namely, by impeding the hearer’s freedom of action and freedom from imposition ([Brown & Levinson, 1987](#), p. 70). According to [Wolfson \(1983\)](#), compliments in American English are realized according to a small set of syntactic structures (e.g., NP is/looks (really) ADJ; I (really) like/love NP; PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP) and a small set of adjectives (e.g., nice, good, pretty, cool). Learning the strategies for how and when to compliment appropriately is challenging for second language learners. In this article we focus on the learner’s pragmalinguistic ability to produce pragmatically appropriate compliments in different situations over a period of two months abroad in order to examine pragmatic development during that time. We also look at retention of the pragmatic target as a result of SA context four months after learners returned to their home country.

This article is organized as follows: we begin with a review of existing research on the effects of study abroad on language acquisition, followed by the research questions for the current study (Section 2). In Method (Section 3) we describe the participants for each group and the data collection procedures, and data analysis. Then we present the results for each research question (Section 4), followed by the discussion (Section 5) and conclusions (Section 6).

2. Literature review

2.1. Study abroad research focusing on the effects of learning context

The effects of the SA setting and socializing opportunities in short- and long-term sojourns were discussed by several authors in [Kinginger’s \(2013\)](#) edited volume. The authors of these studies employed qualitative analysis and mixed-method approaches in longitudinal designs – narratives, questionnaires, field notes, diary data, and Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) – to study the development over time of pragmatic targets such as hedges, address forms, and humor. In a review of SA research, [López-Serrano \(2010\)](#) identifies a second important line of research, comparing two learning contexts: a SA group and an AH control group. These studies have mixed results, with some finding advantages for learners in SA contexts. In some studies, baseline data from a NS group is compared to the learner groups.

[Rodríguez \(2001\)](#) examined learners’ ability to judge the appropriateness of Spanish requests over the course of one semester, and found no significant differences between SA and AH groups in the assessment of request forms. However, in an examination of communication strategies by learners of Spanish in Alicante, Spain over the course of a semester, [Lafford \(2004\)](#) found that, although both groups decreased their reliance on communication strategies (e.g., self-repair, circumlocution, asking for confirmation), learners in the SA group used significantly fewer communication strategies on the posttest than the AH group. The data for this study consisted of extracts and role plays taken from OPIs interviews both before and after SA. A cross-sectional examination of the production of pragmatic routines among Japanese learners of English who had returned from SA ([Taguchi, 2013](#)) showed an advantage for learners with SA experience over learners who had not studied in an English-speaking country.

[Ren \(2013\)](#) studied the cognitive processes of learners of English during one academic year by means of retrospective verbal reports. His results revealed that over time, learners reported paying more attention to sociopragmatics when responding to requests, invitations, and offers in situations of equal and unequal relationships. [Magnan and Back \(2006\)](#) examined the development of pragmatic features of requests for help (address forms, polite forms, and direct and indirect requests) among six learners of French over one semester in France. One striking finding of this study was the change from more indirect requests to fewer direct requests from pretest to posttest.

In their cross-sectional study of the effects of intensity of interaction and length of stay on conventional expressions – using a recognition and a production task – [Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos \(2011\)](#) examined recognition and use of L2 pragmatic devices among international students learning English in the US. They concluded that, while intensity of interaction “had a significant effect on the recognition of conventional expressions and that both proficiency and intensity had a significant effect on production, [...] length of stay did not have a significant effect on either recognition or production” (p. 373).

While these studies focused on gains obtained by the learners at the end of the SA experience, they do not all provide evidence of how production or perception approximated the NS norms. To situate our study, we discuss previous investigations of whether learners move toward NS targets in pragmatic production.

2.2. SA research focusing on approximation to NS norms

Some studies used NS data from the target language to evaluate approximation to the NS norm. In one such study, which utilized a Multimedia Elicitation Task (a type of modified oral DCT) and with data collected during a year-long SA program,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373176>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373176>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)