Surveying pragmatic performance during a study abroad stay: A cross-sectional look at the language of spoken requests

Abstract
This paper documents a cross-sectional look at L1 transfer and L2 contact for learners of English in a UK study abroad (SA) context. The study employed an instructional experimental design over a 6-month period with 34 Chinese students assigned to either an explicitly instructed group or a control group receiving no instruction. Instruction took place prior to departure for the UK and performance was measured based on a pretest-posttest design using an oral computer-animated production test (CAPT). This paper explores the data in two specific ways. Firstly, the request data were analysed at the pre-and delayed test stages (six months into the study abroad period) to analyse the extent to which participants' reliance on L1 request strategies and language changes over time. Secondly, we measured the amount and type of contact with English which participants reported prior to and six months into the study abroad period. Results show that instruction facilitated development of pragmatically appropriate request language over time, with instructed learners showing significantly less reliance on L1 transfer than non-instructed learners. Contact with English increased significantly for both groups on all measures of language production but not all receptive contact with English. When compared, there was no significant difference between the groups' contact with English at each stage, suggesting that instruction did not result in significantly more interaction with English during the study abroad period.

1 Introduction

One way to view the study and practice of second language pragmatics is to consider it the intersection of both language and culture. In other words, pragmatic development necessitates engagement with and understanding of diverse pragmatic behaviours and practices which may vary from one culture to another. . Research into second language pragmatics has typically favoured investigating this relationship between language and culture through speech acts such as requests (e.g. Alcón Soler, 2015; Halenko and Jones, 2011; 2017;, apologies (e.g. Halenko, 2018 Salgado, 2011; Shardokova, 2005) and refusals (e.g. Bella, 2011; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Ren, 2013; 2014). This is because of the need to observe both local linguistic and sociocultural norms in order to carry out these basic functions successfully.

Studying overseas is a key juncture at which L2 learners have the opportunity to develop their language and intercultural skills. It is often the case, however, that learners lack the intercultural readiness to effectively communicate and engage in a second language environment or fail to develop this skill sufficiently whilst they are there (e.g. Barron, 2003; 2007; Felix-Brasdefer, 2004; Schauer, 2009). First language transfer (e.g. Chen, 2015; Halenko and Jones, 2011; 2017 Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009) and the degree of engagement in the L2 environment (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos, 2011; Bella, 2011) are well documented variables which can impact on pragmatic development in SA contexts in positive or negative ways.

This article takes a cross-sectional look at pragmatic performance of spoken request language with a group of Chinese ESL learners in relation to L1 transfer and L2 contact. This snapshot is taken at the point of completing a six-month SA stay in a UK Higher Education environment, where interaction in English with international students and English-speaking staff occurs on a daily basis.. The purposes of this study are twofold. Firstly, we wish to understand how language transfer impacts upon request production once learners are in the SA context following pre-departure instruction. Secondly we wish to understand if language

contact increases in the SA context and how this relates to request production.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:
RQ1. To what extent does first language transfer impact on spoken request production following pre-departure instruction and after a six-month stay in the UK?

RQ2. To what extent does a six-month stay in the UK increase contact with English and influence spoken request production?

2 Literature review

2.1 The importance of pragmatic development in language learning

Second language pragmatics research has allowed us to draw several conclusions as to the need and value of embedding pragmatic development within language learning activities. First, much of the L1 pragmatic knowledge language users possess is intuitive with no codified rules of use for learners to follow (Cook, 2001). In addition, as it is typically only learned through social interaction, developing this competence can be a slow process for L2 learners due to lack of feedback or an awareness of local pragmatic conventions (Cohen, 2008; Taguchi, 2010). In fact, some scholars have even suggested that full pragmatic competence may never be achieved despite permanent residency in an L2 context (Cohen, 2008; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Second, L1 pragmatic transfer may positively or negatively affect L2 communication. Pragmatic transfer is defined by Kasper (1997) as, "use of L1 pragmatic knowledge to understand or carry out linguistic action in the L2" (p. 119). On the positive side, adult learners in particular have access to a considerable amount of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge which can be successfully transferred to the L2.

One example of this positive transfer is an understanding of social positions of power which affect linguistic choice. For instance, in any given language, we are likely to formulate a request in a different way when we are talking to a stranger (e.g. I wonder if I you could help me?), than we would when talking to a friend (Can you give me a hand?). Conversely, a common assumption made by language learners is that L1 (linguistic or cultural) practices can be directly translated and transferred to L2 communication. This error may be a result of the scant attention paid to avoiding these kinds of strategies as part of pragmatic instruction (e.g. Kasper & Rose, 2002). The incorrect application of L1 practices, known as negative L1 transfer, may result in communication breakdown (Thomas, 1983). Negative first language transfer can be defined as "the projection of first language-based sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features onto second language contexts where such projections result in perceptions and behaviours different from those of second language users" (Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper & Ross, 1996, p. 155). It is widely documented as being one of the primary causes of divergence from L2 cultural norms (e.g. Barron, 2003; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009).

Finally, it is important to note that despite having some pragmatic knowledge, it is not always utilised or applied by adult L2 learners. For the former, Kasper contends, learners will often rely on literal interpretation of utterances instead of utilising inference or contextual clues (1997, p. 3) due to low proficiency or limited exposure to the L2. For the latter, learner agency may be exercised and adoption of the local L2 norms may be rejected because it is an unrealistic or unwanted goal (Ishihara & Tarone, 2009; Kim, 2014). The challenges learners face for developing pragmatic competency may be best addressed through pedagogical interventions

2.2 SA and instructional intervention

SA periods are a prime opportunity to develop one's pragmatic and intercultural competence, since learners have frequent exposure to contextualised, local communicative norms, and have opportunities to practise the target language and gain feedback. Research suggests, however, that there is not always a positive association between the SA experience and improved pragmatic comprehension or production. Studies investigating a range of first and second languages typically report much variability in acquiring target-like pragmatic competence, whilst aspects of non-target-like production often remain (e.g. Barron, 2003; Li, 2014; Ren, 2015; Schauer, 2007, 2009; Woodfield, 2012). In spite of the benefits pedagogical intervention could offer in these cases, there is to date only a handful of studies which have investigated this area. Measuring effects across different L2 contexts (China, France, Spain, UK) and over a range of time periods (eight weeks to one academic year), these intervention studies have reported successful learning effects over a number of areas: pragmalinguistic production (Alcon-Soler, 2015; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Halenko & Jones, 2017; Li & Gao, 2017; Morris, 2017; Winke & Teng, 2010), metapragmatic awareness (Henery, 2015; Morris, 2017), cross cultural understanding (Winke & Teng, 2010), and confidence-building to deal with unfamiliar local conventions (Shively, 2011). Pre-SA intervention studies are even fewer in number. More timely interventions at the pre-departure preparation stage have been found to be effective for lowering SA anxiety and building self-confidence (Halenko & Jones, 2011; Halenko, 2018) and heightening pragmatic awareness (Hernandez & Boero, 2018) and production (Cohen & Shively, 2007; Halenko & Jones, 2017). Pre-SA interventions are clearly an underexplored field of investigation, to which this paper aims to contribute.

2.2 Chinese request strategies and L1 transfer

An interesting line of request investigations within the Asian context have tracked linguistic features of requests in both L1 Chinese and L2 English in order to understand the extent of transfer between languages. Early studies by Lee-Wong (1994), Yu (1999) and Zhang (1995) usefully catalogue L1 Chinese request strategies and provide an important backdrop to then examining the role of L1 transfer. Overall results suggest that, in scenarios of low imposition or transactional interactions, Chinese speakers often display a preference for direct forms through imperatives, direct questions and *want* statements when formulating requests in the L1. This trend is claimed to be attributable to the Chinese cultural preference for linguistic conventions which are economical, clear and explicit, in line with maintaining a positive public self-image, as opposed to the importance of individual self-image proposed through Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theories (Lee-Wong, 1994; Pan, 2000; Zhang, 1995). Observing the findings in Lee-Wong (1994), Yu (1999) and Zhang (1995), as the degree of imposition within the request scenarios increases across the three studies, the percentage of direct requests typically decreases in L1 Chinese in favour of more indirect strategies. For example, Lee-Wong designed request scenarios which mainly involved minimal imposition e.g. asking a shop assistant for help, and found nearly 75% of L1 speakers employed direct request strategies. On the other hand, Zhang and Yu, whose scenario sets involved considerable levels of politeness and deference (e.g. high imposition requests from a neighbour or tutor), reported higher levels of indirectness.
A common finding of these studies, however, is that indirectness was still employed less frequently than in L1 English speakers' request production.

Direct strategies are extended to situations involving close social relationships, even between status-unequal members. According to Wang (2011) and others, in Chinese, the closer the relationship, the greater the tendency to be direct and explicit when making a request Direct strategies in L1 Chinese are typically mitigated in other ways as a means of marking politeness and achieving indirectness. External supportive moves and small talk preceding the

request are common examples of this, though internal modifiers such as sentence final particles may also serve as internal mitigation. By contrast, English speakers typically rely on internal modification for the same effect (Lee-Wong, 1994; Yu, 1999; Zhang, 1995). Conventionally indirect structures e.g., *could you/would you*, which maximise indirectness in English, are deemed more appropriate in situations involving maximum social distance in Chinese. For Chinese speakers, indirectness, and therefore politeness, is said to be realised through the aforementioned external moves so the necessary face adjustments to others and oneself can be made (Lee-Wong, 1994; Zhang, 1995).

Investigations into L2 patterns of request production by Chinese learners of English appear to largely mirror L1 behaviour and reveal many L1 patterns are frequently transferred to L2 production. A number of common features can be drawn from these investigations. First, direct strategies such as *want/need* statements are employed to a much greater extent than they might be by proficient English users (Chen, 2015; Halenko & Jones 2011; 2017; Lin, 2009; Wang, 2011; Yu, 1999). Second, studies commonly describe an overuse of the modals *can* and *could* to formulate requests in comparison to NS who demonstrate a much wider range of expressions (Jones & Halenko 2014; Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Lin, 2009; Rose, 2000; Yu, 1999). Third, Chinese speakers of English tend to rely on external modification such as the use of explanations, whilst internal modification is employed less frequently by Chinese learner groups (Wang, 2011; Yu, 1999; Zhang, 1995). Lexical modifiers such as the address terms *sir* and *madam*, which may be considered over-polite in daily interaction, are also more commonly found in L2 production (Halenko & Jones, 2017; Wang, 2011). Finally, because-therefore sequencing, where the reason precedes the core request, is the common organisation pattern rather than the preferred therefore-because structure employed by L1 English speakers (Chen, 2015; Halenko & Jones, 2017; Wang, 2011; Yu, 1999). The extent to which these strategies and L1 transfer are employed by speakers is, of course, impacted by the amount of contact they have with English in the study abroad context. This is discussed in the next section.

2.3 Language contact and the study abroad environment

A complex interplay of factors are influential when investigating SA gains in pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). Such factors may accountable for the variability of results within pragmatic studies. Specifically, it is claimed the degree of interaction with the local community is instrumental. For instance, Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) noted the degree of interaction to have a significant effect on recognition of pragmatic conventional expressions for their multicultural participants. Bella (2011) also reported her L2 speakers with shorter lengths of residence but greater interactional opportunities produced more target-like invitational refusals in Greece. In comparison, the participants with longer residences but less access to social contact were much less successful in their refusal production.

Research specifically examining L2 interaction for Chinese learners of English has largely reported contradictory results, documenting a range of barriers to pragmatic development. First, it is claimed social contact is often impeded by heavy reliance on L1 support networks (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Halenko & Jones, 2017; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Such studies suggest the division of in-group and out-group members, a fundamental tenet to relations in Chinese culture and society, means L1 group (in-group) members remain at a preferred closer proximity in the SA setting whilst NS (out-group members) are kept at a distance. Group membership, however, may lead to difficulties establishing networks which require interaction in English (Cheng & Fox, 2008). Second, resistance due to perceived limitations of language proficiency is also reported. Ranta and Meckelborg (2013) attribute lack of self-

confidence to consistently low counts of oral interaction from their Chinese graduate students in Canada. Cheng and Fox (2008) also reported issues of self-confidence as a barrier to SA interaction, though both investigations also note high levels of individual variation within the learner data. Finally, extrinsic motivational goals may too be accountable for infrequent SA interaction. Gao (2006) found once his Chinese learners were free from the exam-driven agendas of Chinese classrooms, many learners did not perceive any specific benefits to the SA experience, beyond fulfilling a course requirement. In fact, several learners reported a motivational decline for English study as the SA setting generally emphasised coursework-based assessment, replacing the more familiar pressures of exam-based learning.

In summary, investigations have reported interaction to be a key variable to the success, or not, of pragmatic production and Chinese learners may not always take advantage of the opportunities for interaction in a SA environment. With this in mind, it is worthwhile surveying the pragmatic performance of these Chinese participants to assess the extent to which interaction impacts on their request production at the six-month point of a SA stay in the UK.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Thirty four learners (12 male; 22 female) from a Chinese partner university participated in the study. All learners were of Chinese nationality (Mandarin speakers) and had an age range of 20-23 years. The mean amount of prior English learning was between seven to nine years. All students were taking the final year of an undergraduate course in International Business Communication in the UK, having completed two years at the partner university in China. As part of their course, students received English language instruction in China prior to departure for the UK to begin the final year of their programme. At the end of instruction in China, participants were required to successfully complete a standardised test at CEFR B2 level. A learner's competency at this level can be broadly defined as someone who 'can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party' (Council of Europe, 2001, p.24). As only learners of the same nationality, on the same course and at the same level were chosen for this study, this was a homogenous sample, as defined by Dornyei (2007, p. 127). Participants were randomly divided into two equal groups: an explicit group receiving instruction (n=17) and a control group who received no instruction (n=17).

3.2 Data collection

Request response were collected following instruction using a computer-assisted production test (CAPT) and a language contact questionnaire. The participants request responses were collected in China, prior to SA, and then again in the UK six-months into their SA stay. As reported elsewhere (Halenko & Jones, 2017), half of the group (an experimental group) undertook an instructional period whilst still based in China but, once established in the UK, any gains in appropriateness of requests evident from the instruction had all but disappeared. This paper then follows on from the pre departure focus to document pragmatic activity (in terms of L1 transfer and L2 contact) of this learner group once based in the UK after a period of six months. Each method of data collection is described in more detail below.

3.2.1 Instructional intervention

The experimental group received five hours of explicit instruction on the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics aspects of requests over a three-week period, prior to embarking on their UK year abroad stay. The sessions were integrated into their existing general English programme. Two English-speaking tutors delivered the instruction to raise the learners' awareness of the linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of producing appropriate request forms in English in preparation for their SA. Delivery of the input broadly followed Usó-Juan's (2010) lesson staging which prioritises awareness-raising, communicative practice and feedback. Materials specifically developed for the instruction included online audio-visual material to contextualise samples of authentic request language and dialogues for cross-cultural comparisons and discussion.

3.2.2 Oral elicitation instrument

The participants completed oral computer-animated production tasks (CAPT), designed to capture and record the spoken request data. The CAPT was a form of virtual role play embedded into a PowerPoint format, where learners first viewed and listened to short animated speakers, and responded by making a spoken request appropriate for the context. A series of six scenarios were designed to elicit the requests (Table 1). The scenarios presented in the CAPT were those which learners might typically encounter on an academic campus and included familiar interlocutors such as a librarian, a tutor and an accommodation officer. The tests scenarios and interlocutors were similar to those featured in the input sessions. Social distance (how well the speaker and the interlocutor knew each other) was the differentiating variable.

Table 1. Virtual role play scenarios on the CAPT

Scenario 1	Book a study room	+ social distance
Scenario 2	Change your accommodation	+ social distance
Scenario 3	Extra time for homework	- social distance
Scenario 4	Extend library loan	+ social distance
Scenario 5	Speak to noisy group of students	- social distance
Scenario 6	Ask for missing worksheets	- social distance

The CAPT uses computer-animated figures which engage in role plays with the learners, providing a context and spoken prompt to which the learners respond and record their answers. For example, one situation could be 'You are in the university and want to reserve a book. You say? The librarian then says, *Hello, how can I help?* See Appendix A for a complete example. The CAPT has been employed in several studies and found to be successful at efficiently capturing large amounts of data in controlled environments and a motivating data collection tool for language learners (see Halenko & Jones 2017; Halenko, 2018 for further details of the instrument).

After completing the CAPT, each scenario was rated by two English language teachers not connected to the study. Following an initial standardisation phase, the raters used a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate the appropriateness of the requests for each situation (0 = not appropriate to 5 = highly appropriate). The raters were not instructed to look for any particular language forms. The raters' scores were compared using the Pearson correlation coefficient and were found to have high interrater reliability (pretest = .75; delayed test = .79).

3.2.3 Language contact questionnaire

In addition to testing oral request production after six months in the UK, the participants also reported on their productive and receptive English use on a language contact questionnaire. As the learners also completed the same questionnaire in China prior to SA, this allowed a direct comparison to measure any variation in activity. This questionnaire was based on Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz & Halter's (2004) format, which sought to measure the extent to which participants had contact with English (e.g. interaction with reading materials). Learners

were required to choose from a 5-point Likert scale in order to self-evaluate the frequency (0=never, 1=a few times a year, 2=monthly, 3=weekly, 4=daily). The Likert scale was used to record their own productive English use (speaking English with a variety of interlocutors) and receptive English use (reading and listening in English), as represented by the activities on the questionnaire. The activities represented encounters on-campus (e.g. communicating with your tutor) and off-campus (e.g. communicating with service personnel). Whilst we would accept that participants' self-reports cannot be considered fully reliable, this approach has proved a more refined indicator of pragmatic development in a number of other studies (Shively & Cohen, 2008; Matsumura, 2007; Taguchi, 2008). Given previous studies have reported low levels of L2 interaction for Chinese students studying abroad (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Gao, 2006; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013), this was one of the main motivations for investigating language contact. In addition, we also wished to examine how this increased contact interacted with changes in their request language.

3.3 Data analysis

To answer research question one, investigating the influence of L1 transfer on spoken L2 requests, a range of explicit non-target-like strategies were selected from the most frequently reported instances of L1 transfer in existing studies employing Chinese learners of English, as reported earlier. These non-target-like strategies can be summarised as follows (examples invented for illustrative purposes):

1. *Want/need* statement e.g. *I want a new worksheet* (Chen, 2015; Halenko & Jones, 2017; Lin, 2009; Wang, 2011; Yu, 1999).
2. Because/therefore sequencing e.g. *Because I don't have one, I need a new worksheet* (Halenko & Jones, 2017; Wang, 2011).
3. Inappropriate alerters e.g. *Teacher! I want a new worksheet* (Wang, 2011).
4. Undersupply of grounders e.g. *I need a new worksheet* (Yu, 1999).
5. Over reliance on can/could e.g. *Can I have a new worksheet?* (Lin, 2009; Rose, 2000; Yu, 1999).

We are not suggesting that 'can, could' are incorrect here but 'over reliance' means that students avoided other possible request forms, particularly 'would' or more complex bi-clausal structures such as, '*I was wondering if…*' for polite requests. Likewise, inappropriate alerters may not in themselves negatively impact a request but may seem overly or unnecessarily polite. These linguistic features were measured in terms of how frequently each occurred in the data prior to SA and after six months' exposure to the L2 **during the SA period.** The intention was to explore the extent to which L1 transfer occurred prior to SA and the extent to which these reduced after a six-month stay.

To answer research question two, examining increases in contact with English and influences on spoken request production, the results from the language contact questionnaire were analysed to determine to what extent participants engaged in English use (embraced or avoided) and whether this had an impact on their request performance vis-à-vis transferring L1 practices to L2 communication. Although, as reported elsewhere Halenko and Jones (2017) were unable to establish significant long-term instructional gains for the experimental group during the SA period, it may be the case that the pre-departure instruction undertaken in China was effective during the SA period in other ways. With this in mind, evidence of L1 transfer and its relationship with L2 contact is examined in this paper with reference to the original experimental and control group division of the participant cohort. Difference in pre-SA and SA scores were measured using within and between group t-tests in SPSS.

4. Results

RQ1. To what extent does first language transfer impact on spoken request production following pre-departure instruction and after a six-month stay in the UK?

An exploration of data produced by the learners allowed us to examine the extent to which their requests show pragmatic development with utterances more closely resembling target-like production post-instruction. The sample requests below give an example of the typical development of learners' request language comparing pre-SA and SA requests in one scenario, based on samples from the same instructed learners. The appropriacy scores allocated by NS raters for each response are shown in brackets (the higher the score, the more appropriate the response).

Sample requests (with raters' scores in brackets)
Scenario: You have been ill this week so you did not attend classes. You go to your tutor's office, whom you know well, to ask for the worksheets. You say?

Pre-SA
P6. *Teacher, that's why I want to borrow your worksheet so I can work hard*. (1)
P15. *Well sorry I missed the class and I work. I want some worksheet which I can study at home and I will finish that.* (2)

SA
P6. *I'm sorry I missed some classes this week but I really want to has the worksheets that I have missed. Can you give it to me? Thank you so much.* (5)
P15. *I'm really sorry to miss my class and er would it be possible to give me some er worksheet, I need to do it more*. (4)

A closer examination of the request data provides supportive evidence for earlier research that L1 transfer may partially explain the more frequent use of particular request strategies (e.g. Chen, 2015; Wang, 2011; Yu, 1999; Zhang, 1995), at least with the participant groups in this study. As in the pre-SA example above, the use of *want* statements and inappropriate alerters are evident. Table 2 quantifies the frequency of L1 transfer in all the learners' requests with regards to common L1 features of Chinese identified earlier. For illustrative purposes, these frequencies are presented in context from the original data, across a range of scenarios on the oral test.

Table 2. L1 transfer of requests strategies before and during SA

	EXP		Control	
L1 transfer feature with example from original data	Pre-SA	SA	Pre-SA	SA
***Want /need* statement** Example: *I want to change my accommodation, I have some problem with my accommodation*.	38* (39%)	4 (4%)	46 (45%)	15 (15%)
Because/therefore sequencing Example: *I'm sorry because I have I have something at home so I have*	54 (22%)	53 (22%)	64 (26%)	73 (30%)

missed a lot of classes so can you give me a worksheet?				
Inappropriate alerters Example: *Teacher I'm sorry I have missed some classes.*	10 (14%)	14 (20%)	14 (20%)	31 (50%)
Undersupply of grounders Example: *I need more time to finish my homework.*	67 (37.5%)	32 (18%)	74 (41%)	6 (3.5%)
Over reliance on can/could Example: *Can you speak to the students and ask them to be quiet?*	49 (19%)	78 (30%)	57 (22%)	75 (29%)
	Mean : 12.82	Mean: 10.64	Mean: 15	Mean: 11.76

Note: * figures denote the number of instances each L1 transfer feature appears within the entire request data set at each stage. % denote the percentage of the total instances of transfer for each L1 feature.

What such examples show is that in the SA environment, learners displayed a greater sensitivity to the context and made appropriate linguistic choices. Pre-SA, it seems learners tend to mirror L1 behaviour by focusing upon the message to a much larger extent and communicating in a more direct manner, as reported in other literature (e.g. Chen, 2015; Li, 2014; Wang, 2011). In the SA examples, the learners appear to be more sensitive to choice of language and its effect, at least in terms of the forms they produce. This means that they have increased their ability to weigh up pragmalinguistic choices in view of context, which suggests that the study abroad experience has helped learners begin to develop insight into local interpersonal norms and contextually expected language use(Bella, 2011). Such sensitivity is a significant driver of pragmatic competence development.

Examining differences between the two groups at the pre-SA and SA stages, reveals that whilst the control group's request production showed some improvements in their reduction of *want/need* statements and increase in use of grounders which may attributable to the six-month SA exposure (Table 1), overall group comparisons of each L1 transfer feature shows that the instructed group reduced their reliance on L1 during the SA period to a greater extent than the control group in four out of five measures. Table 3 summarises the evolution of L1 transfer employed by both groups before and during the SA period

Table 3. Independent sample t test comparing L1 transfer production before and during SA

L1 transfer feature	Group	N	Mean	SD
Pre-SA Want/need statement	Exp	17	2.24	1.75
	Control	17	2.71	1.79
Pre-SA Because-therefore sequencing	Exp	17	3.18	1.63
	Control	17	3.76	1.92
Pre-SA Inappropriate alerters	Exp	17	.59	.71
	Control	17	.82	1.51
Pre-SA Undersupply of grounders	Exp	17	3.94	1.25
	Control	17	4.35	1.17
Pre-SA Overreliance on can/could	Exp	17	2.88	1.76
	Control	17	3.35	1.77
SA Want/need statement	Exp	17	.24*	.44
	Control	17	.88	1.11
SA Because-therefore sequencing	Exp	17	3.12*	1.57
	Control	17	4.29	1.45
SA Inappropriate alerters	Exp	17	.82*	1.07
	Control	17	1.82	1.15
SA Undersupply of grounders	Exp	17	1.88*	1.32
	Control	17	.35	.49
SA Overreliance on can/could	Exp	17	4.59	1.77
	Control	17	4.41	1.46

Note: * $p < .05$

The results in Table 3 suggest pre-SA instruction had a positive effect on decreasing the experimental group's reliance on L1 transfer since the L1 features of *want/need* statements ($p < .05$), because/therefore sequencing ($p < .05$), inappropriate alerters ($p < .05$) and undersupply of grounders ($p < .005$) appear significantly less in this group's SA request production.

RQ2. To what extent does a six-month stay in the UK increase contact with English and influence spoken request production?

Table 4 shows the means for each group in terms of their overall contact with English pre-departure and six months into their study-abroad period.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics: Independent t test showing contact with English

	Pre SA (SD)	SA (SD)
Experimental	17.35 (6.16)	30.70 (5.68)
Control	20.41 (8.58)	30.82 (4.96)

Maximum score = 55 points (11 skill categories x max. 5 points per category)

Overall, a between group independent t test shows no significance in language contact between groups at the pre-SA ($p = 0.241$) and SA test ($p = 0.949$) stages. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations within the experimental and control groups in relation to their contact with English before and during their study abroad period. For ease of reference, significance levels from within-group tests are also given within each table.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics: English contact questionnaire

	Pre-SA (M, SD)		SA (M, SD)	
	Exp (N=17)	Control (N=17)	Exp (N=17)	Control (N=17)
1. Communication with instructor	1.71 (1.40)	1.18 (1.38)	3.06 (.97) **	2.94 (.90) **
2. Communication with friends	.82 (.64)	1.82 (1.24)	2.76 (1.03) **	2.94 (1.09) *
3. Communication with classmates	1.18 (.83)	2.06 (1.39)	3.59 (.62) **	3.53 (1.01) **
4. Communication with strangers	1.24 (.90)	1.82 (1.29)	3.18 (.81) **	2.71 (.69) *
5. Communication in service encounters	1.35(.86)	1.35 (1.06)	2.65 (.93) **	2.47 (.71) **
6. Watching English TV	2.35 (.93)	2.29 (1.26)	2.94 (.56) *	2.76 (.75)
7. Reading newspapers	1.29 (.85)	1.47 (.94)	1.96 (1.25)	2.47 (1.01) *
8. Reading novels	1.00 (.94)	1.71 (1.16)	2.29 (1.16) **	2.18 (1.19)
9. Reading magazines	1.06 (.90)	1.24 (.97)	2.12 (.93) **	1.88 (.99)
10. Listening to English songs	2.88 (1.11)	2.82 (1.13)	3.47 (.72)	3.82 (.39) **
11. Watching English films	2.47 (.80)	2.65 (1.06)	2.88 (.60)	3.12 (.78)

Notes. *=p<.05, ** p<.01
Maximum score = 4 (questionnaire ratings: 0=never, 1=a few times a year, 2=monthly, 3=weekly, 4=daily).

In summary, this data firstly shows that, for both groups, contact with English increased in the English speaking environment and in many cases, this increased contact was significant within each group. Specifically, all productive activities involving spoken communication (activities 1-5 in Table 5) evidenced significant within-group increases on average for both the experimental and control groups between the pre-SA and SA stages. This contradicts the notion that learners resist or lack the confidence to take advantage of the SA context to engage in the target environment, as reported in Cheng and Fox, 2008; Gao, 2006; Ranta and Meckelborg, 2013. The findings in Table 5 show spoken communication is a daily or almost a daily activity on average for both groups by the SA stage. This improvement in productive English use is not mirrored for receptive English use, however (activities 6-11 in Table 5). Experimental group increases are noted for watching TV, reading novels and reading

magazines, whilst control group increases are only found with reading newspapers and listening to songs. This finding does not support Ranta and Meckelborg (2013), who discovered that Chinese learners' oral exposure in the SA academic setting was primarily receptive rather than interactive and who generally exhibited a consistent tendency not to engage in oral interaction.

Over time, there was a general trend for considerably more contact with English in the SA environment. Specifically, most productive and receptive activities at the pre-SA stage occur infrequently, rated as 'a few times a year', on average. Whilst this result is likely to be symptomatic of the Chinese EFL context where fewer opportunities for interaction naturally exist, the low scores are still somewhat disappointing and suggest learners are far from prepared for a SA stay. Contrasting the SA activity, receptive English use is more frequent at the pre-SA stage; free time activities such as watching English TV/films, and listening to English songs are at least monthly activities. This suggests practitioners might capitalise on this intrinsic interest in English-speaking media for teaching purposes and study abroad preparation programmes. In terms of the SA engagement, with the exception of reading newspapers (experimental group) and reading magazines (control group), all activities increased in frequency to at least a monthly **or** weekly activity. All activities failed to achieve an average score of 4 (indicating a clear 'daily' activity). Individual variation was predictably evident, as also reported in Taguchi (2008), amongst others.

When measured to check whether there was a link between increased scores and L2 contact, no significant correlations were found between the language gains and contact with the L2 environment. This is a finding mirrored elsewhere (Dewey, 2004; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Taguchi, 2008), demonstrating the complexities involved in measuring this relationship. For this study, it is plausible that although we can observe a generally significant increase in English contact for both groups, this contact may not have always linked directly to the type of scenarios captured in the CAPT, or learners did not always capitalise on the opportunities for practising requests which the environment may have provided. Communication in service encounters, for example, was significantly increased for both groups but this can of course include a range of situations within and around the academic setting. It is also possible a longitudinal study of longer duration may yield different results and that the six-month period may not have been sufficient for a positive correlation to be found for this particular speech act.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study show that pre-SA instruction can have a positive effect on decreasing reliance on L1 transfer. Results show that for the experimental group only, non-target-like features (*want/need* statements, because/therefore sequencing, inappropriate alerters, and undersupply of grounders) all appear significantly less than at the pre-SA stage. This result shows that instruction before SA can lead to greater sensitivity in regard to choice of forms and specific contexts where interaction takes place. Put simply: instruction seems to lead to a heightened awareness of which forms to use for the best pragmatic effect. We would argue that such sensitivity is a valuable tool which can help students as they develop pragmatic awareness. In this case, the awareness was developed in an English as an L1 context but we would argue that this can be of value in any context where English is used as it can help to facilitate successful interaction.

The results also show that there was a significant increase in the contact with English which

both groups report, when we compare pre-SA and in the SA abroad environment. For both groups, all forms of production increased and some receptive uses also increased. This was expected to a certain extent but the lack of significant increases in receptive contact in English (such as watching films) also contradicts some previous findings. Ranta and Meckelborg (2013), for example, discovered that Chinese learners' oral exposure in the SA academic setting was primarily receptive. Comparison between the groups did not show any significant differences in their reported contact with English. This suggests that, in this study at least, pre-SA instruction did not lead to significantly higher levels of contact with English when compared to no instruction. While this is disappointing, a more finely grained analysis obtained via interviews would be needed to discover the exact nature of the contact with English which students have and how they may or may not be making use of the instruction in the SA context. This is something we would suggest for future studies.

The findings of this cross-sectional study appear to concur with existing literature that the study abroad environment can be a valuable arena for pragmatic development (e.g. Ren, 2015; Taguchi & Roever, 2018) but without targeted support to maximise this experience, gains may be marginal and development, slow (e.g. Cohen, 2008; Schauer, 2009; Taguchi, 2010). In order to maximise learning and provide targeted support to exploit the SA setting, learners could be encouraged to undertake more extensive communicative practice in their own time. They could be given the role-play scenarios to repeat over time and to record samples of these for a teacher to check, or simply undertake these with a classmate and compare them to a model recording or transcript. These task-based learning activities could also promote more engagement and language contact opportunities. Although participant group differences could be attributable to lack of pragmatic knowledge in general, there is evidence to suggest that L1 transfer could be one influential factor in explaining non-target-like production of speech acts such as requests. This finding suggests that intercultural comparisons between learners' first language(s) and the target language (and culture) are also a good place for instruction to begin. Such discussions could take place pre-SA and in the SA environment and help to develop language and cultural awareness.

Once in the SA environment, on a preparatory English course, it may also be productive to introduce work which targets the contact learners are having with English and link instruction to this contact. For example, learners could be asked to keep a simple diary which allows them to recall situations where they have needed to undertake requests, what they said in the scenario and how successful they felt it was. The aim here is to encourage students to recall previous instruction and to notice how they are (or are not) able to make use of it in the SA environment. Problems or difficulties can then be discussed and a teacher can target further instruction to assist learners. This kind of "experience talk" (McConachy, 2014), where critical pragmatic incidents are explored, promotes intercultural reflection and encourages learners to continue to develop this skill as a learning tool outside of the classroom.

Such interventions have also been found to produce positive effects in the SA context if preparation is undertaken pre-departure and followed up during the SA period. Hernandez and Boero (2018), for example, offered instruction on requests for Spanish L2 learners prior to a SA period. This was then followed up with students recording themselves undertaking request scenarios in the SA period and comparing this to Spanish speakers. They were also asked to keep diaries at different stages of the SA period to reflect on their contact and interaction in Spanish. This was followed up with interviews at the end of the SA period. Results showed that the learners developed pragmatic competence and that instruction contributed to a more successful SA experience, as noted in previous studies too (Alcon-

Soler, 2015; Halenko & Jones , 2011; Henery, 2015; Hernandez & Boero, 2018; Shively, 2010; Morris, 2017; Winke & Teng, 2010). We would suggest that future studies could also seek to further develop this research model in other contexts.

Appendix A

Sample of CAPT test

Scenario

You have been ill this week so you did not attend classes.
You go to your tutor's office, whom you know well, to ask for the worksheets.
You?

"Thanks for coming. Take a seat. I was wondering why you missed some of the classes again today."

Learners read the scenario, click on the animated figure above, listen to what the figure says and then respond.

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