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Returning to *Normal?*: Reimagining Study Abroad and Language Learning for a Sustainable and Equitable Future

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Due to health and travel restrictions, COVID-19 has presented unusual challenges to international education. Meanwhile, the pandemic has also become a historical juncture overlapping with other political and cultural moments (e.g., renewed Black Lives Matter movement, resurgence of anti-Asian racism, extreme weather phenomena). These events have propelled a reconsideration of the complex relationship between access to and participation in study abroad, language learning, and social and environmental justice. In this paper, we draw on our collective experiences as practitioners and researchers across three languages (Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish) to argue that study abroad must be a part of equitable and sustainable world language education curricula. We begin by reflecting on existing issues related to access and participation in U.S.-based study abroad and the underlying ideologies that reinforce them. We then provide possibilities – within our spheres of influence – to reconceptualize study abroad from critical and translingual perspectives in an effort to contest ideologies and shift towards a more diverse and inclusive study abroad programming. Lastly, we suggest possible ways to better integrate at home, virtual, and study abroad opportunities in language learning curricula, some of which may serve as alternatives to study abroad, especially in an environmentally and politically volatile world where social privilege shapes access to international education.

INTRODUCTION

Study abroad (SA) has been shown to contribute to language acquisition, intercultural awareness, and personal development, which is why many administrators, educators, and students are eager to return to immersion experiences abroad following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, U.S.-based SA and language education has faced many obstacles due to COVID-19 (e.g., travel restrictions, health and financial well-being of students and their families, decreased enrollments, budget cuts) and other political and cultural events (e.g., resurgence of Black Lives Matter, increase of anti-Asian racism). This begs the question of whether we will be able to return to *normal* pre-COVID times. And even if we could, we can no longer overlook the longstanding

inequities around access to SA and the renewed environmental and political concerns of international traveling. In this paper, we draw on our collective experiences as practitioners and researchers across three languages (Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish) to reflect on how we can create sustainable and equitable SA and language learning curricula for U.S.-based students in an environmentally and politically volatile world moving forward.

First, we discuss existing problems that have created inequitable access to SA, and how COVID-19 has exacerbated this issue. Although recent years have brought attention to the need for financial support and culturally relevant programming to diversify the demographics and experiences of U.S.-based SA students, international education remains inaccessible or challenging for many. The sudden halt to SA during the pandemic has underscored the need for a broader array of language learning opportunities in instances in which SA is not accessible, available, or possible for language learners due to personal, medical, political, and social reasons.

Second, in an effort to confront challenges with regard to access to and participation in SA, we emphasize a need to unpack neoliberal, neocolonial, and monolingual ideologies that underlie the design, implementation, and marketing of SA. Given the shifting sociopolitical reality of current times, this paper draws on critical and translingual pedagogies to offer recommendations for counteracting inequitable ideologies in SA, as well as reframing SA as one part of a constellation of language learning opportunities. This includes holistic integration of learning experiences at home, abroad, and virtually, including engagement with local linguistic communities and making connections between language study and other areas of higher education. While the pandemic and other world events continue to deal many blows to SA, it is also an opportune time to critically and thoughtfully reevaluate the future of SA programming and world language learning more broadly.

ON-GOING AND NEWFOUND CHALLENGES IN SA

In this section, we discuss longstanding and intersectional challenges to the equity and sustainability of SA and ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic, along with other political and social events, has exacerbated these issues.

Racial Disparities in SA Participation

While the U.S.-based SA student population has been diversifying over the past decade (from 22% of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students in 2010/11 to 32% in 2020/2021), the majority are still non-Hispanic White (68% in 2020/2021) (IIE, 2022). Indeed, the prototypical SA participant is traditionally conceived of as White Anglo, English monolingual, able bodied, and from an upper socioeconomic background (Marijuan & Sanz, 2018; Ohito et al., 2021; Sanz, 2021). As a result, SA programming tends to be aimed at this student demographic, overlooking the needs and experiences of SA students (and potential students) from other backgrounds. For instance, researchers have documented racism towards African American participants from both locals and U.S. peers during SA (Anya, 2017; Goldoni, 2017; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Willis, 2015). These findings suggest that part of the reason for Black students' underrepresentation in SA (and world language study in general) is due to a lack of culturally-relevant curricula and microaggressions from locals, teachers, and U.S. peers (Anya, 2020; Ohito et al., 2021). The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement across the U.S. and the world in May 2020 coincided with the COVID-19

pandemic, urging us to reflect on institutional assumptions about language teaching that may also contribute to on-going racial disparities (Anya, 2021).

Research has also examined the negative experiences of Asian Americans abroad, such as ethnolinguistic discrimination from locals who do not view them as *Americans* or who expect them to sound like a native speaker of an Asian language (Du, 2018; Van Der Meid, 2003). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries experienced a resurgence of anti-Asian racism and even violence. In the United States, there has been a significant increase in violent hate crimes towards the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2021), including the 2021 Atlanta shootings that specifically targeted Asian women. Political leaders have also engaged in racist discourse, such as former President Trump's rhetoric of COVID-19 as the *Chinese flu*. In Spanish-speaking contexts, the circulation of an online volume titled *Sopa de Wuhan* ('Wuhan Soup') (Amadeo, 2020) in which the cover is an image of bats, alludes to the idea that COVID-19 originated from bat soup in Wuhan, China. These assumptions are also found in Arabic-speaking contexts, such as the song "ساب كل حاجة وأكل وطواط" ('Of all the things he ate a bat') on the comedy show Abla Fahita. The vast majority (81%) of Asian Americans feel that violence against them is increasing (Ruiz et al., 2021).

This heightened anti-Black and anti-Asian sentiment can have complicated consequences in language education: learners of these backgrounds may feel simultaneously invisible (in the curriculum) and hypervisible (in terms of microaggressions and hostility that are targeted at BIPOC groups). These vulnerabilities may lead to a reluctance to study abroad in the midst of rising nationalism and racism, and languages associated with these groups and the learning of them may be stigmatized.

Underrepresentation due to Socioeconomic Status and Social Class

Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be able to afford SA, and also to imagine international education as a regular part of their undergraduate experience (Fernández et al., 2021; Kinginger, 2004; Twombly et al., 2012). Although students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may view SA as an opportunity for social mobility (Kinginger, 2004), they may be less likely to see themselves abroad (Fernández et al., 2021; Twombly et al., 2012) and may experience resistance from SA gatekeepers (e.g., professors, program advisors) who expect upper class behaviors (see 'Alice' in Kinginger, 2004). This is partly due to social class, which goes beyond economic means to include one's social identity, or perception and access to material and symbolic goods, such as international travel, healthcare, technology, and education (Diao, 2021). Moreover, underrepresented students may be turned away by programming that does not address their interests or assumes a desire to engage with the wealthy embedded in representations of SA, which oftentimes also intersects with White cultural practices (Anya, 2017; Thomas, 2013). For example, traveling to encounter *exotic* customs and food reflects the fact that these cultural practices may only be exotic for White students with limited intercultural experiences.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in late February of 2022, has complicated traveling and created unexpected constraints on the U.S. economy, such as inflation, job insecurity (due to temporary, seasonal, and gig economy jobs), and lower wages that disproportionately affect the financial situations of working-class families, especially African American (Monte & Perez-Lopez, 2021) and Latinx communities (Vargas & Sanchez, 2020). These increasing financial constraints, combined with

an ongoing labor shortage (Horrigan et al., 2022) and worsening college affordability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), have lowered participation in postsecondary education. According to the National Student Clearinghouse (2022), two-year public/community colleges–which tend to serve the most socioeconomically and culturally diverse students–were hardest hit: a 13.2% decrease in enrollment since 2019. Even prior to COVID-19, community college students were already underrepresented in SA: in 2019/20, only 0.8% of U.S.-based students who went abroad were from two-year/community colleges (IIE, 2022). Also, working-class students may have additional obligations–such as caring for siblings or providing financial support to family–that pose further challenges to their schedules if they wish to pursue higher education at all, let alone SA, during college years (Van Der Meid, 2003).

Additionally, price inflations–especially those associated with the energy sector– further reveal the environmental unsustainability of international tourism, SA included. In the wake of eco-tourism, some countries have begun to require taxes or fees for foreign visitors, including SA students. Bhutan, for instance, mandates a daily $65 Sustainable Development Fee for each tourist (Basnet, 2020). While these measures may help local authorities combat environmental consequences of tourism, these additional fees may make SA even less accessible financially.

Inequitable Participation for Students with Disabilities and Medical Concerns

Making SA accessible and inclusive for students with disabilities, mental health issues, and medical concerns is another on-going challenge. While research on students with disabilities participating in SA and learning other languages is scant, the limited literature provides encouraging possibilities. Warner et al. (2021) show how one hearing-impaired U.S. student (Isabelle), who communicated using both ASL and English, discovered a sense of validation when studying in Italy and the frequent use of body language in Italian communication. Despite Isabelle's compelling story, the percentage of SA students with physical disabilities has declined in the past decade (from 6.9% of SA participants with a physical disability in 2010/11 to 1.7% in 2020/21), as well as those with chronic health disorders (from 23.2% in 2015/16 to 18.1% in 2019/20) and sensory disabilities (from 7.3% in 2010/11 to 3.1% in 2020/21) (IIE, 2022).

As COVID-19 transitions into the endemic stage, effectiveness and accessibility of vaccines, testing, and care will remain a concern for some students and may also determine where students are willing and able to travel to. Consequently, COVID-19 may worsen the divide between students who need or desire closer medical access and those who do not. Even for students without registered disabilities, the anxiety and consequence of contracting COVID-19 for their own personal health and their families' well-being may discourage some from traveling for the unforeseeable future.

Pandemic-related and Other Political Restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges to SA access on a global scale. Mitigation efforts have halted transnational travels, with many countries closing their consular services and not issuing student and travel visas. Even though vaccines, testing and surveillance options, and treatment have allowed many of us living in the United States, Canada, and Europe to gradually emerge from the darkest moment of the pandemic, these resources are not evenly distributed across the world, and COVID-related restrictions have not disappeared yet. Many developing

nations still struggle to obtain the most effective choices available and vaccinate their populations. The discrepancies between each nation's mitigation policies and goals have also led to varying issues of access for SA students. Much of Asia, for instance, has had stricter restrictions. Taiwan and Singapore have until recently required all foreign visitors to go through lengthy periods of quarantine in designated hotels, and Japan stopped all foreign airlines from arrival when the Omicron variant began to surge in early 2022. China has perhaps been the most extreme; its insistence on a zero-COVID policy has effectively halted all short-term study abroad programs until its recent reopening of its borders in January 2023.

Even prior to the pandemic, politically motivated travel bans were already in place. For example, mainland China was not accessible to U.S.-based SA students until its Open Door policy in the late 1970s, while recent wars in Syria and Yemen, and economic instabilities in Lebanon, have prevented U.S. students from studying in these countries. Restrictions on using federal funding to fund SA in Egypt, a previously common destination for U.S. students, have also impacted opportunities in the Arab world. Meanwhile, the ongoing pandemic also overlaps with some of the most potentially consequential geopolitical changes since the end of WWII. Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to impact many aspects of international exchanges, including educational ones. As such, educators teaching a language in which an overseas geographical region may not be accessible to students due to the pandemic and/or sociopolitical reasons have to creatively consider alternatives to SA.

TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE STUDY ABROAD AND LANGUAGE CURRICULA

A way to reimagine SA is to note that current inequities within it reflect larger social structures: as long as wealth continues to intersect with race and ethnicity–which is often the case in the United States– financial aid in SA alone (though still important) will not solve this issue. While issues of wealth distribution and social justice will not be solved immediately or easily, positive developments in these areas can also impact SA, with longer lasting effects than short-term financial aid. For this reason, everyday activism can and does matter. As SA practitioners our sphere of influence is the programs we run, promote, and encourage our students to enroll in; and as language teachers, we also have a responsibility to make SA and language learning opportunities accessible and equitable to as many students as possible.

In this section, we offer suggestions to reconceptualize SA as an integral component of the language curriculum in U.S. higher education, and we provide alternatives that can make language learning more inclusive while enhancing the SA experience if the latter is attainable. To do so, we must first unpack ideologies that perpetuate the unequal access and participation within SA that were outlined earlier. By unpacking ideologies of SA, we intend to demonstrate how we should not simply seek a return to the good old times before COVID-19; after all, many of the positive outcomes assumed to be products of a SA experience (e.g., personal growth, intercultural experience, and even language learning) are rooted in, and thus reproduce, inequitable socio-historical processes. Although programmatic interventions in SA have long been recognized as essential to developing students' linguistic and intercultural competencies (Vande Berg et al., 2012), these interventions will fall short of addressing social inequities if the field does not critically reckon with the ideologies of SA (Moreno, 2021; Trentman, 2022).

First, we draw upon critical and translingual pedagogies to contest such ideologies. Then, we offer recommendations for holistically integrating language learning opportunities at home, abroad, and virtually so as not to center SA as the 'pinnacle' experience. In so doing,

we continue to recognize the tremendous benefits SA offers, while also working to broaden its inclusivity and value other language learning opportunities. SA is not always an option, as the COVID-19 pandemic has poignantly shown us.

Unpacking Ideologies of SA

Recent scholarship has highlighted a lack of critical awareness of ideologies—socio-historically constructed beliefs—and the ways in which they perpetuate unjust social structures within SA (Doerr, 2020; Kubota, 2016; Moreno, 2021). Discursively-constructed ideologies of SA often perpetuate social injustices through their roots in institutionalized inequities such as colonialism, racism, and classism (Doerr, 2020; Moreno, 2021; Trentman, 2022; Trentman & Diao, 2017). In particular, critical analyses of SA discourses have revealed the following problematic ideologies of SA: educational tourism, personal transformation, monolingual immersion, professional preparation, and global citizenship.

Ideology of educational tourism
        The ideology of SA as educational tourism links SA to a combination of touristic pleasure and (often non-serious) academic learning. This ideology has its roots in the Grand Tour of Europe, a tradition reaching back to the 17th century, when British aristocrats would engage in an extended period of travel in continental Europe, participating in shared itineraries of viewing classical monuments, experiencing fine art, and attending social events (Gore, 2005). These experiences of pleasure and improvements (Chard, 1997, p. 101) were key to affirming their high social status upon their return. This ideology is still apparent in contemporary SA marketing materials featuring students with tourist attractions or in leisure poses (Michelson & Álvarez Valencia, 2016). It is the source of the emphasis on excursions in SA programming, as well as student expectations for additional travel (Kinginger, 2008). While the excitement of travel is an appealing way to entice students to go abroad, it also perpetuates social injustices. The historic association of travel with wealth shapes student imaginings of SA as an opportunity for the upper classes, both in terms of the financial resources required and the cultural activities expected abroad. In terms of language learning, the ideology of educational tourism can detach language learning from SA, for tourism does not require its participants to have any knowledge in the language or culture of their destination.

Ideology of personal transformation
        The ideology of personal transformation focuses on the pursuit of adventures in foreign lands as a catalyst for personal growth, and emphasizes the ways in which students overcome challenges to emerge as improved individuals (Doerr, 2019; Kinginger, 2019). This ideology appears in pictures that represent students in the foreground or above natural expanses, landmarks, or cityscapes, or engaging in adventurous activities like zip lining. Locals, if they are represented at all, usually appear in traditional clothing, or otherwise clearly distinguished from students. This represents a neocolonial perspective, where experiences rather than resources are extracted from host destinations and centers SA students themselves, with local people and contexts as a dehumanized and exotic backdrop (Angod, 2015; Moreno, 2021; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). It also creates a dichotomous view of home and host countries, where the latter are viewed as isolated and behind the times (Doerr, 2012, p. 258). This perpetuates social inequities through White saviorism (Angod, 2015), obscuring narratives (often racialized and gendered) that do not

neatly conform to the transformation arc (Doerr, 2019; Quan, 2018), and ignoring opportunities for personal transformation in other language learning contexts (Doerr, 2019).

Ideology of monolingual immersion

The ideology of SA as monolingual immersion portrays host contexts as monolingual and monocultural settings, in which students will be automatically surrounded by the local language and become proficient simply by being there. This is assumed to lead to rapid improvement in language skills, and as such represents SA as the culmination of, or sometimes even the replacement for, classroom language learning (Kinginger, 2008; Plews, 2018). This assumption of immersion is rooted in monolingual ideologies created to serve European nationalism by linking linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; May, 2014). In turn, these ideologies create an expectation that crossing a national border is both sufficient and necessary for U.S. students to engage in learning languages other than English; these monolingual beliefs simultaneously imagine the United States to be an English-only nation, ideologically erasing linguistically diverse individuals and communities (Doerr, 2019; 2020). This perpetuate the double standard that exists in language education (Pavlenko, 2002): learning languages other than English is a *nice-to-have* for the elite—who can study abroad—while students who speak other languages already should prioritize learning English. It also erases the experiences of learners abroad who use their multilingual repertoires to enhance their language learning and the dynamic plurilingualism that exists in host contexts (e.g., see Diao & Trentman, 2021). Finally, these assumed connections between linguistic and national borders can result in representations of SA students as *citizen ambassadors* tasked with sharing U.S. ideals and practices with countries assumed to be inferior (Moreno, 2021).

Ideology of professional preparation and global citizenship

The ideology of professional preparation casts the positive outcomes assumed by other ideologies of SA as professional skills and commodifies them as necessary for participation or competition in the 21st century global workplace, often through the portrayal of becoming a global citizen (Moreno, 2021). This stems from a neoliberal focus on the commodification of individuals and their diverse skills, including linguistic ones (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Kubota, 2016). Due to neoliberalism, studying critical languages (e.g., Arabic, Mandarin) in non-traditional locations (Trentman & Diao, 2017) or participating in more *authentic* experiences has significant value (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Lewin, 2009). These distinctions are crucial for individuals seeking to develop a professional niche in an uncertain neoliberal economy. At the same time, creating these value distinctions enhances professional opportunities for students who study abroad, regardless of what actually happens. In fact, SA students may not necessarily reflect critically on their experiences nor enhance their intercultural understanding of the host community and their language practices on their own. Therefore, valorizing SA as the ideal way to gain the professional, linguistic, and intercultural skills associated with *global citizens* erases the experiences of those who gain such skills through other means, such as immigration or belonging to a minoritized community at home (Doerr, 2019). Once more this reproduces, rather than contests, existing inequitable social structures.

Counteracting Ideologies for a More Inclusive SA

In an attempt to counteract some of the ideologies presented in the previous section, we recommend the incorporation of critical and translingual pedagogies that take up social justice

and anti-racist issues into our language classrooms from the beginning levels (Tarnawska Senel, 2020), and the use of these approaches to continually interrogate our students' (and our own) conceptualizations of SA (Moreno, 2021).

Culturally relevant and critically oriented SA programming

According to Sweeney (2013), BIPOC students are more likely to participate in SA programs that are led by faculty and staff of color, that are outside of European contexts, and that foster explicit reflection on racial and ethnic issues. Previous research suggests that minoritized SA participants seem to be attracted to and report more positive experiences when studying on programs where there is racial, ethnic, and/or cultural affinity (e.g., Anya, 2017), and where there are critical and social justice curricular components (e.g., Holguín Mendoza, 2021; Ruiz Bybee et al., 2018). For example, Holguín Mendoza and Taylor's (2021) program in Mexico, "Maya communities and social justice in Chiapas," attract a majority of heritage students who identify as Latinx possibly because of the program structure (hands-on projects, excursions to Maya communities, engagement with local experts), location (Chiapas is a predominantly indigenous Mexican state), and topics (social- and environmental-justice issues). Ruiz Bybee et al. (2018) found that the curricular goal of teaching "a holistic understanding of critical issues in education and language in Texas as well as in Guatemala" recruited more BIPOC participants of multilingual backgrounds (p. 347). Nonetheless, such affinity should never be assumed, as heritage students are linguistically and culturally very diverse. In fact, heritage students may experience unique challenges while studying in their ancestral homeland, as they struggle simultaneously with not sounding authentic enough even though they may be racialized as a local (Diao, 2017; Du, 2018).

In order to heighten students' critical consciousness while abroad, SA programs should consider incorporating coursework on multilingualism, sociolinguistic variation, linguistic discrimination, and the use of different repertoires to index an array of identities and stances. Diao (2020) reveals that SA students from disenfranchised backgrounds may discover in another language new possibilities (e.g., pejorative terms for white people in Chinese) to critique American racial politics and express anti-racism. For instance, a SA project may include having students observe and critically reflect on language and culture in the local context. One of the final course assignments in Ruiz Bybee et al. (2018) was a *Language Ecology Project*, in which students had to use an audio recorder and camera to document their learning process as they navigated Guatemala's multilingual and multicultural context. Due in part to this *Language Ecology Project*, Terry, a Vietnamese American student on this Guatemala program, connected her multilingual (Spanish & Kaqchikel Maya) and multicultural SA experiences with her prior linguistic, racial, and class interactions in the United States (Quan & Menard-Warwick, 2021).

Additionally, in an effort to challenge ideologies of global citizenship, SA programs may consider offering opportunities for *critical* community-engaged learning, which differs from volunteer opportunities that frame U.S. students' participation as charity or reaffirm savior-like behavior. Critical community-engaged learning for language learning entails the "examination of the structural, political, and ideological roots and implications of the problems being addressed and foregrounds the role of language" (Leeman, 2014, p. 285). A culturally sustainable and inclusive language curriculum for SA should incorporate these historical and contemporary discourses on social (in)justice, comparatively and translingually.

In sum, efforts towards equitable and sustainable SA participation require SA gatekeepers (e.g., professors, program advisors) to encourage and communicate that international education is a feasible and worthwhile opportunity for *all* students. We then need

to support these claims with critical, culturally relevant language pedagogies that include students from diverse social backgrounds.

Translanguaging pedagogies

Translanguaging pedagogies are another way of creating more inclusive SA environments because they challenge the ideology of monolingual immersion during SA. Translanguaging takes the stance that a learner's entire linguistic and semiotic repertoire, including their L1s, background, and prior experiences, are affordances for further language learning and multilingual becoming (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). In turn, translanguaging pedagogies raise students' critical consciousness about their language and communicative choices, transforming their positionalities in the process. This is especially significant for racialized and minoritized language learners. In Anya's case study (2017; 2021) of Leti, an Afro-Dominican Spanish speaker learning Portuguese in Salvador-Bahia, Brazil, Leti's participation in Black-affirming translanguaging spaces (e.g., Afro-Brazilian culture and history class, Capoeira academy, local community organizations) encouraged her to positively reinterpret and perform her Black identity in a new language and a new sociocultural context, while also reflecting on her prior racialized experiences in the United States and in the Dominican Republic. Therefore, translanguaging as praxis is an act of social justice. On the one hand, it starts with students' existing knowledge and abilities, rather than taking a deficit perspective towards how far learners are from the hypothetical, monolingual *native speaker* (Trentman, 2021a). On the other hand, translanguaging also recognizes and legitimizes the bi/multilingual identities and practices of students and host populations, challenging ideological linguistic hierarchies that denigrate speakers of minoritized varieties (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Adopting a translanguaging approach entails reframing existing monolingual teaching practices. Rather than viewing students' switch to their L1 or to English while using the target language as a failure, we may consider instead how it is a strategic choice or a "mediating tool to cultivate communication and L2 learning" (Al Masaeed, 2016, p. 1; see also Brown, 2021; Trentman, 2021a). A translingual perspective teaches students to view their L1s as additional linguistic resources for meaning-making and language learning, to pay attention to the dynamic role of global and local Englishes as well, and how the ability to translanguage is an asset for communication and a reality in our globalized world (Trentman, 2021b). Therefore, we can encourage translanguaging by employing multilingual and multidialectal texts, integrating the oftentimes plurilingual reality of the host community through linguistic and soundscape projects or critical analyses of ethnographic audio recordings, and explicitly discussing how language practices overlap with sociopolitical issues (e.g., critical multilingualism and social class stratification, linguistic hierarchies, language and political identities) (see Diao & Trentman, 2021).

Staying local while abroad

SA practitioners can also take a more critical approach to components assumed to be essential to SA, such as excursions to tourist locations away from the host site. Lee and Lundemo (2021) propose a *regenerative approach* to international education, which emphasizes the kind of travel that "conserves and enhances the natural environment as well as the well-being of the local people at the destination." Their suggestions include a stronger local engagement that focuses on learning about the particular host location within one trip rather than having multiple destinations. While travel to multiple locales is appealing to many, these excursions further raise the cost of SA and contribute to travel-induced emissions and global climate change, while also reinforcing ideologies of educational tourism and personal

transformation. According to Kinginger (2011), SA students oftentimes encounter identity challenges because they do not stay in the host site for long enough to understand local views and/or discourses around themselves as individuals who are socially categorized. Meanwhile, students who stay locally may become more involved in meaningful connections with people in the host site, thereby engaging more in the learning and use of their target languages (e.g., Diao, 2011; Kinginger, 2004). Thus, one possibility is to encourage students to stay within one locale for longer and offer them strategies on how to study its linguistic and cultural nuances in more depth. Meanwhile, the contacts of tourist companies that offer excursions as pre- or post-program options at a variety of price points can be provided to students who have the financial resources and interests to pursue them. This regenerative approach through prolonged engagement with one host location can also combat environmental sustainability concerns related to learners' carbon footprint due to excessive travel (Lee & Lundemo, 2021).

Integrating Language Learning Across Space and Time

SA is and should remain a key component of language curricula. Nonetheless, there are and always will be learners who cannot or do not wish to participate in SA, both due to issues that have already been discussed along with other personal and societal factors. As we consider equitable and sustainable futures for both SA *and* language learning in general, it is imperative that everyone has successful and meaningful opportunities for language learning that occur over time and not only through crossing political boundaries. As such, we support shifting the focus from SA as a *pinnacle* experience for language learning to an approach that views SA as inherently linked to other language learning experiences across a lifetime.

In this section, we describe some of these language learning opportunities–virtual and face-to-face learning, local engagement, and integration of language study with higher education–and suggest further research and practice focused on their incorporation, rather than representing them as separate from, preparation for, or (inferior) alternatives to SA. While substantial research exists across all of these contexts, we believe studies that examine students' experiences over time and how these lead to shifts in their linguistic repertoire may shed further light on the benefits of integrating language learning across space and time. It is worth noting that this shift is unlikely to correspond to the myth of continuous proficiency gains with SA as the final step to fluency, and we need to demonstrate the variety of paths students may pursue in their language learning experience.

Virtual and face-to-face learning

Integrating virtual and face-to-face opportunities at home and abroad can provide valuable opportunities. Research on virtual exchange has long demonstrated the value of this activity for language and intercultural learning, despite the numerous challenges (O'Dowd & O'Rourke, 2019). Collaborative Online International Exchange (COIL) is a prominent model for virtual exchange, albeit one that often is not focused on language learning (O'Dowd & O'Rourke, 2019), and requires significant institutional support (Rubin, 2017). Integrating SA with other types of exchanges and community connections throughout a curriculum can lead to stronger relationships once abroad, particularly in short-term SA (Duffy et al., 2020). In 2016, Trentman organized a short-term SA program to Jordan that consisted of a two-week program abroad preceded by an eight-week virtual exchange. Students reported that getting to know their language partners in Jordan prior to the trip increased their excitement and led to deeper connections, as they had already gotten to know each other on a basic level. These types of

programs can also maximize opportunities for reflection, long recognized as an essential component of heightening language and intercultural learning during SA (Vande Berg et al., 2012; Jackson, 2013), and be the basis for more critical types of reflection that can counteract prevailing ideologies of SA and language learning (Moreno, 2021).

Engaging with communities and languages stateside

SA is built upon the longstanding monolingual belief that language learning can only occur outside U.S. borders, which undermines the multilingual and multicultural realities of the United States and privileges those who can travel internationally. Therefore, we propose looking inward rather than always outward for language and cultural learning which addresses both this ideology of SA and concerns of environmental sustainability.

An example is service learning or community-engaged learning at home, which has been shown to advance students' target language skills, their linguistic and professional confidence, their intercultural awareness, and their critical consciousness of language in society by engaging with local communities (Palpacuer et al., 2018). These partnerships can be mutually beneficial so that community members drive and determine the purpose and outcomes of these collaborations.

Another are study-away programs that take advantage of the diverse communities that we have throughout the United States. Holguín Mendoza and Taylor (2021) describe a study-away Spanish-immersion program in which University of Oregon students work and learn about agroecology, social justice, and Latinx literature and social movements on a 30-acre transitional farm in the Willamette Valley, approximately two hours from campus. While Spanish is the largest minority language by number of speakers in the United States, this program design can still have implications for other languages that also have significant populations and communities domestically (e.g., Mandarin in the Flushing area in New York City).

There are also domestic immersion programs, such as Middlebury Language Schools and Concordia Language Villages. While there are criticisms surrounding these programs–enforcing monolingualism using a language pledge, high tuition costs, limited cultural context–research does suggest their effectiveness in improving students' proficiency as well as their overall confidence in the target language (Isabelli-García & Lacorte, 2016; Segalowitz et al., 2004).

By incorporating local learning, we challenge the ideology that non-English languages and their speakers are perpetually *foreign* and, therefore, require learning across international borders.

Integrating language study into higher education

For many U.S. colleges and universities, language instruction primarily happens in language-specific departments, programs, labs, or centers; Thorne (2013) refers to this as the *silo problem*. Yet, most college campuses have the potential to be multilingual spaces given the number of international students and faculty, diverse community members, and students who have returned from abroad. We can, therefore, create an environment where plurilingualism is the expectation, contesting the notion that English knowledge is sufficient or that language study is secondary to disciplinary knowledge.

There are two models for better integrating language study with the rest of higher education. First, the Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum (CLAC) model is an example of how language, culture, and content knowledge can be integrated (https://clacconsortium.org/). According to the CLAC Consortium By-laws, their mission is to "develop students' critical thinking skills and enhance their translingual and transcultural competence by promoting opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of languages

and cultures in meaningful ways, and in a variety of curricular contexts, outside of the traditional language classroom" (2010, p. 1). There are various approaches to implementing CLAC: from dual degrees where students earn a degree in a language and one in a content area like engineering (e.g., University of Rhode Island) to the modularized model whereby students in an English-taught content course may enroll in an additional discussion section conducted in a language other than English (e.g., University of Utah). International students may also participate in these class discussions to further facilitate cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspectives on the course content (e.g., Duke University). While CLAC has its benefits, there are also criticisms, one of them being that language learning continues to be viewed as an add-on to another major or content area rather than a pursuit worthy of study on its own. Language educators should continue to explore possibilities to disrupt the language/content ideological divide using the CLAC model while striving for an enhanced focus on language development.

Second, there is the Language-Integrated Knowledge Education (LIKE) project in which all university students design and develop discipline-specific language portfolios in English and other languages (Thorne, 2013). For instance, an English-dominant biology student would identify, produce, and reflect on Biology/STEM-specific discourse (e.g., lexis, morphosyntactic features, genre specific conventions) in English, and then include Biology/STEM-specific discourse in subsequent languages that they are learning or know. The goals of the LIKE project are: a) to connect language learning with other disciplinary learning; b) to encourage further language study; and c) to develop students' academic discourse competence, or awareness of linguistic practices and features in their field of study.

Integrating language study across disciplines may lessen ideological divides that separate language learning from other areas of study, like STEM, and that contribute to student demotivation to pursue language learning at the post-secondary level (Diao & Liu, 2020). It also institutionalizes opportunities to use the target language, which may be of interest for students preparing to go or returning from SA, for those who may not wish or be able to go abroad, and for multilingual students (e.g., heritage speakers, international students) who already have a working knowledge of a language other than English.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 brought forth many new challenges to SA and language instruction, but it also shed light on existing ones that had always been present, but that we—as a field—perhaps had been reluctant to confront. In an attempt to address these challenges in SA, we believe a reckoning with ideologies is necessary along with a shift in perception: one that no longer positions SA as the singular, culminating language learning experience. Instead, we insist on the incorporation of critical and translingual pedagogies in SA curricula, and we reframe language learning as an on-going, lifelong trajectory that can be holistically integrated across local, virtual, and abroad spaces. In so doing, we aim to overcome the obstacles that our profession faces in hopes of a more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive future for *all* language learners.

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