Metapragmatic perceptions in native language vs. lingua franca settings

Does target language status during study abroad make a difference?

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Language learning in study abroad is usually analyzed for settings where the target language is the native language, thereby ignoring the growing number of lingua franca contexts in study abroad. To address this gap, this study examined the pragmatic perceptions of 19 English learners studying abroad, comparing students in native-language settings to their peers in lingua franca environments. During their semester abroad following pragmatic instruction, the learners composed essays which elicited their perceptions of the instruction's usefulness, applicability, gains in pragmatic awareness, and (dis)advantages of including pragmatics in the curriculum. The results indicate that the native-language setting offers more opportunities to apply pragmalinguistic strategies taught in class, but the lingua franca environment provides more room for sociopragmatic awareness and negotiation. The lingua franca students valued the instruction more, and they highlighted the importance of pragmatic consciousness-raising to complement pragmalinguistic strategies. Implications for study abroad research and language teaching are derived.

Keywords: study abroad, lingua franca, ELF, pragmatic perceptions, metapragmatic perceptions, pragmatic instruction, acquisitional pragmatics, English as a Foreign Language

1. Introduction

Most students who decide to study abroad go to a host country in which their mother tongue (L1) is not spoken as an official language. Accordingly, they use the sojourn abroad not only to widen their content knowledge in seminars and

lectures, but also to experience a foreign culture and to improve their foreign language (L2) skills. With regard to using English as an L2 during study abroad, learners nowadays do not necessarily need to go to a country in which English is a native language since it has by now gained the status of a global lingua franca and is used around the world as a means of communication by millions of speakers who do not share a first language. This means that study abroad sojourns in countries such as Italy, Korea or Estonia may well contribute to the L2 development of an English learner because she is very likely to use English to converse with professors and fellow students if she does not speak the target language of the host country. Accordingly, the linguistic context in which English learners may find themselves during study abroad can be roughly divided into two categories depending on the status of English in that environment: an English as a native language (ENL) or an English as a lingua franca (ELF) setting.

So far, research into L2 development during study abroad has largely focused on native-language contexts (e.g., Howard, 2001; Kinginger, Wu, Lee, & Tan, 2016) even though the most frequently studied target languages – English, French, and Spanish – are used as lingua francas in many contexts (Godenzzi, 2006; Kennedy, Guénette, Murphy, & Allard, 2015). The lingua franca aspect, in turn, has mostly been studied from a usage rather than an acquisitional perspective and has thus received rather scant attention in study abroad research so far. The present study aims to bridge this gap by comparing the pragmatic perceptions of L2 English learners who spent a semester abroad in an ENL context to those of their peers who spent this period in an ELF setting. Before embarking on their sojourn abroad, both learner groups experienced a semester of pragmatic instruction which targeted the speech acts of disagreement and offer refusals as well as general pragmatic awareness-raising. During study abroad, the learners composed Reflective Essays about the relevance of this pragmatic input in their daily encounters and about any other pragmatic observations of their host environment. This data was analyzed for possible similarities and differences between the two settings to shed more light on the lingua franca component in study exchanges and to add to the knowledge of pragmatic development during study abroad and the kind of instruction that learners need when preparing for this important experience.

2.   Literature review

2.1 Pragmatic perceptions in study abroad

L2 pragmatic development during study abroad has been the focus of a growing body of research, with most studies focusing on the production and/or

comprehension of certain pragmalinguistic features. The largest portion is made up of research into speech acts, such as requests (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Schauer 2009; Shively, 2011), offers (Barron, 2003), compliments (Shimizu, 2009), or apologies (Warga & Schölmberger, 2007). Other aspects include terms of address (Barron, 2006), the comprehension of implicatures (Roever, 2005), and fluency in pragmatic decoding (Taguchi, 2008), among others.

While the majority of the relevant studies attest a positive impact of study abroad on pragmatic competence (e.g., Alcón-Soler, 2015; Barron, 2003; Schauer; 2009; Shimizu, 2009; Shively, 2011), some showed that it improved only certain aspects of pragmatic competence more than the at-home context (e.g., Ren, 2013) or found that it proved not necessarily more advantageous than instruction at home (e.g., Niezgoda & Roever, 2001; Roever, 2005; Taguchi, 2008). What transpired as more relevant in these latter studies was the learners' proficiency level, with a higher proficiency potentially overriding the effect of stay abroad. This points to the complexity of the development of pragmatic competence, which is also illustrated in Warga and Schölmberger (2007). In this study, the Austrian learners of Canadian French became more target-like during study abroad for some aspects of their apology behavior while, for some, they moved away from the target norm. Other studies suggest that for reasons of linguistic identity, learners may deliberately choose *not* to employ target-like forms even when they know them from their exposure abroad (Barron, 2003, p. 248; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004, p. 20), resulting in a marked or even inappropriate pragmalinguistic performance despite an advanced sociopragmatic knowledge.

As this brief review shows, it is vital to complement analyses of production and comprehension with investigations of sociopragmatic awareness and metapragmatic perceptions, i.e., with investigations of the learners' "awareness of how language forms are used appropriately in context" (Narita, 2012, p. 4), their "ability to understand the meaning of linguistic variation in a range of different socio-pragmatic contexts" (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004, p. 19), and their "perspectives about the usefulness and attractiveness of the lesson units that teach pragmatic concepts and strategies" (Pearson, 2006, p. 109). However, learners' pragmatic perceptions during study abroad have received comparatively little attention. When addressed, pragmatic perceptions have in most cases only been conceptualized as awareness of the appropriateness of certain pragmalinguistic choices. In fact, a recent research synthesis by Xiao (2015) defines pragmatic perceptions exclusively as the "knowledge of appropriateness of forms in situation[s]" (p. 135), mirroring the frequent use of pragmatic appropriateness judgments in the literature. Among this type of studies is Schauer (2009), who complemented her request production data gained from German learners of English by grammaticality and pragmatic appropriateness ratings, coupled with post-hoc interviews about the learners' reasons

for these assessments. Niezgoda and Roever (2001) also used grammaticality and appropriateness ratings to compare the awareness of grammatical and pragmatic violations of English learners at home and in study abroad settings. Matsumura (2001) targeted the pragmatic appropriateness perceptions of Japanese learners of English by means of a multiple-choice questionnaire asking the participants to select the responses they perceived as most adequate in the given scenarios. Ren (2015) collected appropriateness judgments from Chinese learners of English studying in China and in the UK, coupled with production data and retrospective verbal reports. Beltrán (2013) asked her English learners of various L1 backgrounds studying in the UK to rate both the grammatical correctness and the pragmatic appropriateness of requests, to explain their choices, and to suggest improvements for inadequate utterances. Similarly, in their study of address forms in L2 French, Kinginger and Farrell (2004) conducted retrospective interviews asking the participants to explain the rationale underlying their choice of the *vous* or *tu* address forms.

A comparatively smaller set of studies addressed learners' perceptions of their host culture's pragmatic conventions, of differences between L1 and L2 pragmatic norms and behaviors, and of their own pragmatic learning, usually connected with impressions of the pragmatic instruction they received before or during study abroad. These aspects have, to my knowledge, received the least attention in study abroad and/or pragmatics research to date, and it is this aspect that the present paper thus focuses on. Previous studies in this category that I am aware of are Halenko & Jones (2011), Henery (2015), and Shively (2008). After instructing 26 Chinese learners of English about requests during their study abroad in the UK, Halenko and Jones (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with two of these learners about the usefulness of the instruction for their daily communication at university. While the students reported that they found the instruction helpful and would appreciate further opportunities for practice, the low number of interview participants and of interview questions illustrates that learner perceptions of pragmatic instruction have not received much attention to date (Glaser, 2014, p. 208). Shively (2008) accompanied seven American learners of Spanish to Toledo, Spain on a 14-week study abroad and collected diary and interview data on the learners' pragmatic development in service encounter requests. In addition to reflecting on their experiences in their host families and naturalistic encounters, some of the learners also commented on their impressions of the small-scale pragmatic intervention of two lessons. While the learners found the explicit instruction to be helpful and three reported explicitly that it had triggered a conscious shift in requesting strategies, the teacher-researcher noticed that the short instruction was not sufficient to "to provide students with greater understanding of the social meanings of language forms used in context" (Shively, 2010, p. 114) and to offset

the limitations of uninstructed learning from mere observation, which in some cases led to misconceptions of pragmatic issues and misinterpretations through the "first culture lens" (ibid.).

The study by Henery (2015) of two American learners of French in France is an encouraging example of a broader conceptualization of metapragmatic awareness. Rooted in sociocultural theory, Henery's analysis focused on the learners' "observations, understandings, and use of [L2] pragmatic practices" (p. 316) in their interactions with local French speakers. While one of the learners received regular pragmatic instruction on the *vous* and *tu* address forms, the other did not. The results show that both learners increased their pragmatic awareness, but they differed in the systematicity and depth of their reflections: while the learner who did not receive instruction kept relying on everyday language to describe her observations and experiences, her peer increasingly referred to concepts and meta-language introduced in class such as power or social distance and "the semiotic and expressive power of language choices" (p. 328). Henery's study thus makes a vital contribution to understanding learners' perceptions, observations and reflections that accompany pragmatic development during study abroad as well as the role that pragmatic instruction can play in this process, which is also the focus of the present paper.

2.2 The lingua franca component in study abroad L2 research

Research on L2 acquisition during study abroad has to date mainly focused on host countries in which the target language is spoken as a native language. Settings in which the L2 has the status of a lingua franca are usually investigated with regard to *features* and *usage* of the lingua franca (e.g., Baumgarten & House, 2010; Breiteneder, 2005; Maíz-Arévalo, 2014), while *L2 development* in lingua franca settings during study abroad has in essence been overlooked (Llanes, Arnó, & Mancho-Barés, 2016). Xiao (2015) even defines study abroad exclusively as "a temporary and pre-scheduled educational stay in a foreign country where the target language is *the native language of the people in the country*" (p. 133, emphasis added). This suggests that a large portion of the study abroad reality is ignored, particularly for English, which is increasingly used as a lingua franca during study abroad in non-English-speaking host countries, especially in the European context (Berns, 2009).

Most of the few studies that have addressed L2 development in lingua franca settings have analyzed it from the perspective of attitudes, identity construction, and language socialization. Kalocsai (2009) conducted field observations and

interviews with Erasmus[1] exchange students from various European countries studying in Hungary and the Czech Republic. Employing the Communities-of-Practice approach, Kalocsai found that the learners began to orient towards the internal communication patterns of their ELF community rather than towards an external native speaker (NS) norm. Most conspicuously, they learned to "cope with 'incorrect' forms and structures… [such as] inventing new forms, borrowing from other languages, or maintaining an accent" (p. 40). Interestingly, they increasingly defined successful communication in terms of accommodation and cooperation, but at the same time kept referring to NS English as "real" and "correct" (ibid.), which suggests that ELF carried some sort of stigma in the learners' minds compared to ENL even though the learners did improve their L2 discourse and rapport-building skills. Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014) conducted research on Turkish learners studying in various European ELF contexts, analyzing the students' beliefs about English language learning in ELF settings before, during, and after their sojourn abroad. Their results show similar ambivalent beliefs: on the one hand, the students started to appreciate the practice opportunities for improving their English, and they changed their views on the role of accuracy for successful communication, shifting from a focus on form to a focus on meaning. At the same time, they continued to consider native speakers as "authorities and native-speaker English as the norm" (p. 363). This highly positive attitude towards native speakers was also found by Dervin (2013) in his analysis of student perceptions of lingua franca use during study abroad in Finland (for ELF) and France (for French as a lingua franca, FLF). Although the France group was not quite as negative towards FLF as the Finland group towards ELF, who characterized it as limited and deficient, Dervin found that all participants displayed a "fetishism of the [NS] norm" (p. 121), often coupled with disappointment that they only got to use their L2 in lingua franca interactions rather than with native speakers. Taken together, these findings suggest that attitudes and beliefs play an important role in L2 development in lingua franca contexts.

One study explicitly looked at linguistic change in lingua franca settings. Llanes et al. (2016) investigated the development of writing skills in Catalonian learners of English during study abroad in various non-English-speaking European countries, measured pre- and post-stay in terms of syntactic complexity, lexical complexity and subordination. While there was no improvement for syntactic complexity and subordination, the learners improved their lexical complexity as well as their overall English language proficiency (measured by the Quick Oxford Placement Test). Accordingly, the authors conclude that study abroad in ELF contexts can be

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1. Named after Dutch philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam, this is a student exchange program established by the European Union (EU) to promote student mobility across EU countries.

conducive to linguistic development in L2 English. To my knowledge, however, no study has attempted a direct contrast of native-language to lingua franca settings for any component of L2 acquisition. The following study seeks to close this gap by juxtaposing the pragmatic perceptions of learners in ELF contexts with those of their peers studying simultaneously in ENL settings, thereby providing a direct comparison of these two learning environments.

3.   Methodology

3.1   Research aims

This study collected and analyzed Reflective Essays from 19 English majors enrolled at a German university who completed a study-abroad semester following an oral skills course featuring explicit pragmatic instruction, either in an ENL or ELF setting. Accordingly, the study addressed the following research question: how did the learners' perceptions of their pragmatic instruction and of their host environment differ during stay abroad in either an ENL or ELF setting? More specifically, the study looked at differences in perceptions with regard to these four aspects:

a.   the instruction's overall relevance and usefulness (Usefulness)
b.   its applicability in real-life encounters during the stay abroad (Applicability)
c.   the learners' gains in pragmatic awareness (Awareness)
d.   the importance of including pragmatics in the English language curriculum (Curriculum)

In addition, the essays were analyzed for additional comments on the lingua franca issue in order to help explain the findings and to shed more light on possible ELF vs. ENL differences.

3.2   Sample and data collection

The study is based on the Reflective Essays of 19 undergraduate students enrolled in the BA program *British and American Studies* at a German university, all advanced learners of English. The essays were composed towards the end of the students' study-abroad semester required by the program. Nine students went to an ENL country while the remaining ten went to ELF settings. For all learners, the language of instruction at their host university was English. All learners in the ENL group were German, while the ELF group consisted of eight Germans, one student from Spain and one from Turkey. The students went to a total of twelve different countries as summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Distribution of ENL and ELF host countries during study abroad

Type of Setting	Host country	Number of students	Sum
ENL[a]	UK: Northern Ireland[b]	4	9
	UK: England	1	
	UK: Scotland	1	
	Republic of Ireland	1	
	Canada	1	
	Jamaica[c]	1	
ELF	South Korea	1	10
	Finland	1	
	Portugal	1	
	Estonia	1	
	Czech Republic	1	
	Germany	5	
	Total Sum:		**19**

a. ENL = English as a native language, ELF = English as a lingua franca
b. The different parts of the UK are treated separately here based on the fact that they may not be entirely homogenous with regard to their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic conventions, as suggested by variational pragmatics studies (Haugh & Schneider, 2012, p. 1018).
c. The status of English in Jamaica is not as clear-cut as with the other countries because of the rather complex sociolinguistic situation (Lippi-Green, 2006, p. 423). For the purpose of the present study, it was grouped among the ENL countries since the student spent their time almost exclusively in the academic sphere, where English is the official language.

The students who remained in Germany were the two non-German students, who spoke very little German and thus used English as their primary means of communication, and three of the German students who had been exempted from traveling to another country for personal reasons. These exemptions had been granted on condition that the students enroll in English-speaking university courses aimed at international students and complete internships in international environments using English as working language in order to make their experience as similar to a stay abroad as possible and to ensure that they had ample opportunities for intercultural ELF exchanges. While incorporating these students may be debated from a methodological perspective, their input was included in this case study as a valuable source of information since their semester following the pragmatic instruction was also characterized by a rather radical change in everyday routines, study conditions and work environments, all set within an intercultural framework and ELF encounters quite comparable to their peers' experiences.

For all 19 participants, the sojourn abroad followed a one-semester oral skills course featuring pragmatic instruction as specified below (Section 3.3). The essays

were submitted by the students as a part of their home university's credit requirement which asked them to reflect on their cultural, linguistic, academic, personal, etc. experiences abroad. It is thus reasonable to assume that the data were created with care and show a high level of reflection and introspection. For the section relevant to this study, the students were asked to answer the following questions:

–   How did you find the things we talked about in class to be relevant in real life?
–   Do you find that people actually use the strategies we dealt with, or is what we discussed pretty much useless for your conversations in English?
–   Have you yourself been able to apply some of the things from our class? If so, which?
–   How do you feel your awareness of pragmatic aspects has improved?
–   Should we continue to teach about pragmatics in our English Language courses? If so, why; if not, why not?

The participants were instructed to address all of these questions but were free to choose the order. In terms of quantity, the students were asked to write about 800 words. The submitted texts were between 719 and 1,013 words in length, with the majority containing between 800 and 900 words.

3.3   Pragmatic instruction prior to sojourn abroad

The pragmatic instruction which the learners received prior to going abroad was included in an obligatory, semester-long oral skills course that met once a week for 90 minutes. Alongside presenting and debating skills, this course featured four 90-minute sessions of explicit pragmatic instruction centered on the two speech acts of offer refusal and disagreement, spread out over the semester. The learners were taught pragmalinguistic strategies to perform these two speech acts that had transpired in the literature as relevant and necessary to teach to L2 speakers of English. For both speech acts, learners were taught about initial and sandwich mitigation (Félix-Brasdefer, 2004), pausing and hesitation (Carroll, 2011), grounders (Chang, 2011), alternative suggestions (Kwon, 2004), and downgrading (Barron, 2003). For disagreement, this was complemented by token agreement (Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004), repetition / uptake (Houck & Fujii, 2006), and clarification requests (Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004); with regard to refusals, the instruction covered positive remarks (Chang, 2011), gratitude / appreciation (Barron, 2003), vague excuses and white lies (Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Kodama, 2011), and refusal postponement / stalling (Gass & Houck, 1999).

These pragmalinguistic strategies were complemented by meta- and sociopragmatic knowledge on speech acts (defined by the instructor for the learners as *an utterance that serves a function in communication such as an apology or a request,*

based on Austin, 1975), face, and situational variation. *Face* was explained to the students based on definitions by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) and Yu (2001, p. 15) as follows: *face is the public self-image that a person wants to claim for him- or herself when interacting with others. Face is understood to mean dignity or prestige in front of others, and when people are embarrassed or humiliated, this is called 'losing face' or 'face-loss'.* To be well-equipped with metalanguage for the class activities and discussions, the learners were further provided with the terms *face threat* (explained as *an utterance's potential to embarrass people*), and *face-saving strategies* (explained as *ways to soften face-threat*). The instruction aimed to convey to the learners that cultures differ in what they consider face threats and face-saving strategies; that, accordingly, different languages express these differently, and that translating politeness strategies directly from one's L1 into the L2 is thus often not felicitous. Sociopragmatic knowledge on the role of situational variables covered power, social distance, imposition, and obligation (Thomas, 1995) and was aimed at raising the learners' consciousness of such factors and the resulting pragmatic variation. It was the first time that an oral skills course at the department contained such a specific pragmatics component, and for the students themselves it was also the first time that they received such pragmatics instruction. For a more detailed description of the lessons' contents and materials, the reader is directed to Glaser (2014).

3.4 Data analysis

The essays were evaluated in a qualitative, bottom-up fashion. In each essay, any comments pertaining to one of the four areas of interest (Usefulness, Applicability, Awareness, and Curriculum) were identified. Subsequently, these comments were evaluated for their overall directionality and coded by means of scalar ratings. Since Usefulness, Applicability and Curriculum can be viewed negatively as well as positively, they were rated on a bipolar scale ranging from −2 (very negative assessment) to +2 (very positive assessment). To give an example, the utterance in (1) was classified as Usefulness and rated as mildly negative (−1), while the Usefulness comment in (2) was rated as very positive (+2):

(1)   Being aware of face-saving strategies is interesting and maybe helpful, but without the lessons I would not have been worse off.

(Usefulness, −1, ENL group)

(2)   I believe that the things we learned and talked about in class are highly important and absolutely relevant in real life. Since I learned about those things in class, I am actually truly glad about my extended knowledge as I find it to be highly important and helpful for all kinds of communication.

(Usefulness, +2, ELF group)

The category Awareness did not have a negative directionality and was thus coded via a unipolar scale ranging from 0 (no gains) via +1 (moderate gains) to +2 (substantial gains). Once all ratings had been assigned, group means and rating distributions for the two groups were established to provide answers to the research question. Lastly, all other learner comments pertaining to matters of lingua franca contexts were identified and analyzed to gather additional information.

4.   Results and discussion

This study's research question asked about possible differences in the two groups' perceptions of four aspects, viz., the overall usefulness of the pragmatics instruction (Usefulness), its direct applicability in their study abroad context (Applicability), their gains in pragmatic awareness (Awareness), and their views on including pragmatics in the language curriculum (Curriculum). Overall, the 19 essays yielded 198 comments pertaining to these four categories. Table 2 summarizes their distribution across categories and groups:

Table 2. Overview of collected comments per category and group

Student group	Usefulness		Applicability		Awareness		Curriculum		Sums	
	n	*avg per essay*	*n*	*avg per essay*	*n*	*avg per essay*	*n*	*avg per essay*	*n*	*avg per essay*
ENL	26	2.9	28	3.1	23	2.6	23	2.6	100	11.1
ELF	27	2.7	18	1.8	30	3.0	23	2.3	98	9.8
Total	53	2.8	46	2.4	53	2.8	46	2.4	198	10.4

After the comments had been rated as described above in Section 3.4, their rating averages were calculated for each group. Figure 1 below visualizes both groups' results for each category.
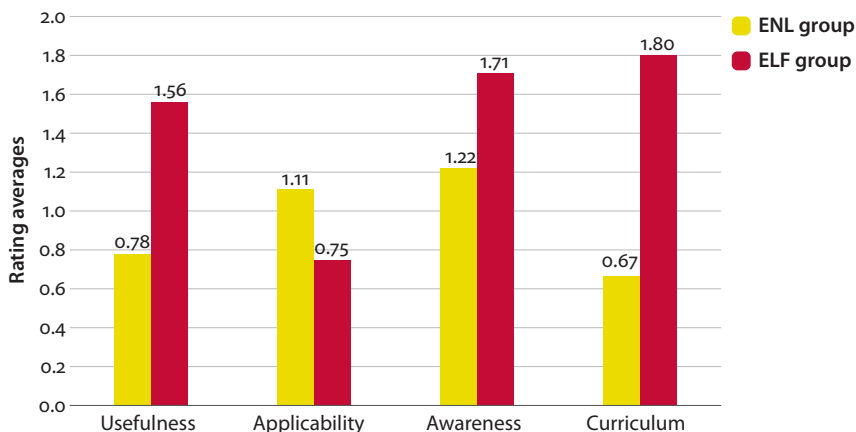
Figure 1. Metapragmatic Perception Ratings per group for Usefulness, Applicability, Awareness, and Curriculum

The numbers in Figure 1 suggest three conclusions. First and foremost, all of the average group ratings are situated in the positive value range even though three of the four categories were bipolar in nature allowing for negative values (Usefulness, Applicability, and Curriculum). This shows that on the whole, the pragmatic instruction was viewed rather positively by the learners, despite any differences that may exist between individuals and/or the two groups. While the essays did contain some negative evaluations as in (3),

(3)   The whole strategy 'system' made me more uncomfortable than anything secure in my communication skills… it is an artificial and constructed mentality pushed upon my character.   (Usefulness, −2, ENL group)

these were very rare compared to the overwhelming number of positive comments. Overall, the three bipolar categories yielded 19 negative (−1 or −2; distributed equally across the three categories) as opposed to 126 positive (+1 or +2) comments, and of the 53 comments in the Awareness category, only one stated that no gains in awareness had been achieved. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the explicit pragmatic instruction was largely appreciated by the learners, stressing the importance and relevance of pragmatics instruction before study abroad sojourns.

Secondly, a comparison of the group ratings in Figure 1 suggests that the groups differed in their intensity of approval. With the exception of the category Applicability, the ELF students expressed more positive views than their ENL peers, which invites the question whether the ELF group's assessments were on the whole more positive than those of the ENL group. A re-analysis of all ratings across all four categories revealed that the ELF group's observations were indeed more positive overall: this group's comments obtained an average rating of 1.486,

while the ENL group's average was .944. A *t*-test showed that this difference was even statistically significant on the .05 level ($p = .040$), allowing the conclusion that the ELF learners perceived the pragmatics instruction as more beneficial overall. A breakdown into the individual categories reveals that for Usefulness ($p = .288$) and Awareness ($p = .089$) this tendency is anecdotal, which is not surprising given the sample size, but for Curriculum it reaches again significance ($p = .043$). This result is quite remarkable given that this category was covered by only 23 comments in each group, and confirms that the ELF learners systematically placed a higher value on the pragmatics instruction for the academic curriculum compared to their ENL peers. The following comments provided by ELF students illustrate this very positive stance:

(4)   In my opinion, not only our University should continue teaching pragmatics but all the Universities should include, at least, one course on pragmatics and cultural knowledge of the language they are teaching.

(5)   The English Department should definitely continue to teach about pragmatics in the English Language courses. This is a very essential part of the English language and since language and culture are closely connected, it also teaches the students much about the English culture.

Per comparison, the following comments by ENL students demonstrate this group's more cautious views:

(6)   I would suggest to continue teaching about pragmatics but not to lay the main focus on it, but to switch to other interesting topics that relate to learning a second language.

(7)   I would find it perfectly alright if it was mentioned and made aware of it, in a lecture or a small part of a seminar, but it is not as necessary to put the main focus upon this topic.

The third and final observation suggested by the results in Figure 1 concerns the seeming divergence of Applicability, which was rated as lower by the ELF students and thus shows an inversed tendency. This seems rather perplexing, especially in conjunction with the high Usefulness ratings obtained by the ELF group – after all, would a learner's judgement of a course's relevance not be directly linked to the contents' applicability in real-life situations outside the classroom? A closer look at the ELF essays as well as additional learner comments on the lingua franca issue shows, however, that this does not necessarily have to be the case. In fact, while many of the ELF students described a lack of opportunities to apply the strategies encountered in class, they found the course to be highly useful with regard to *understanding* their intercultural encounters. The student going to South Korea,

for instance, observed that he hardly ever got to use the strategies taught in class since his status as a foreigner "granted me certain privileges in social interactions" with the locals, especially the absence of disagreements and other verbal conflicts:

(8)   I barely ever had to argue with Koreans about anything, so most of the strategies we talked about in the class never really came into practice with them.

Moreover, the student reported to have been mostly "up front" during his interactions with his Spanish roommate and other Spanish exchange students, which also did not result in many opportunities to apply the face-saving strategies encountered in class. At the same time, the essay is replete with sociopragmatic observations about the host culture and other intercultural encounters which suggest that the course contents aiming at pragmatic consciousness-raising were highly useful and relevant even if the strategies per se could not be put to frequent use.

A similar pattern can be gleaned from an essay by one of the German students experiencing ELF encounters in Germany. Even though she could not go abroad for an entire semester, she had been able to spend the summer vacation directly following the pragmatics instruction in Ireland working on a farm and could thus draw comparisons between her Irish ENL and subsequent ELF conversations. She also reported that the speech act strategies were largely absent from the ELF conversations, and she observed that:

(9)   native English speakers (my country of reference is in this case Ireland…) tend to disagree or give refusal in a way that is most similar to what we have learned in class. I expect that students who went abroad to the UK, Ireland, Canada, or USA will have achieved a considerable improvement of their pragmatic skills – with regard to the speech pattern we have learned in class.

Throughout the essay, this student made a distinction between native-language environments, in which the speakers employ the target strategies frequently, and ELF contexts, which are marked by an absence of such pragmatic behavior. Similar to the learner visiting Korea, for her the usefulness of the instruction became manifest on the level of analyzing and understanding her ELF encounters in terms of an increased "speaker's sensibility" and the ability "to detect and to name deviations from the well-known strategies." This helps explain why the ELF group did not provide enthusiastic testimonies of Applicability while at the same time perceiving the instruction as highly useful nevertheless.

Further support for this conclusion comes from the ELF student going to Portugal, the ENL student going to England, and one of the ENL students visiting Northern Ireland. Their comments are especially enlightening since all three met both native and non-native English speakers during their study abroad, and

all made a clear distinction in the Applicability of the course contents between non-native and native-speaking conversation partners. The ELF student reported:

(10)   From my point of view, the things we talked about in class are relevant in real life. I took advantage of it especially when talking to English native speakers. Here, I could easily apply the rules for polite conversations. When talking to Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish, Polish, Iranian, Mexican or French native speakers, I also paid attention to these rules, but not as carefully as I did as when I was speaking with English native speakers. This can be put down to the fact that people from these countries do not pay so much attention to the same strategies and rules of polite conversations as English native speakers do.

Accordingly, towards the end of the essay she concluded:

(11)   To my mind, people rarely use the strategies we dealt with in class except when they are English. Therefore, I could not always apply the pragmatic strategies we were taught in class in my conversations in English. I was able to observe that people from other countries, even if they use them from time to time, use them less often.

The ENL students shared very similar impressions. For instance, after describing how they observed native speakers use the strategies, the ENL student in Northern Ireland said:

(12)   [T]he other international students, i.e. non-native English speakers such as students from France, Spain and Germany, made rarely use of the strategies. They were quite direct, probably also caused by the fact that they did not focus on social encounters earlier in their studies.

This last impression, i.e., that lingua franca English is characterized by a high degree of directness caused by the *absence* of face-saving strategies, was mentioned by three more students (all ELF). This aligns with previous findings that ELF is governed by different pragmalinguistic rules than ENL, most conspicuously by a relative absence of face-work. Apparently, the coincidence of a (more or less unlimited and unpredictable) multitude of cultures that is characteristic of ELF encounters creates a situation in which the interlocutors cannot draw on a shared 'code' for face-work such as a set of mitigating devices or indirect strategies. Instead, discourse strategies to ensure mutual understanding and create

"alignment" (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 927) play a much greater role, which is visible in a greater amount of content-orientedness, negotiation and collaboration in discourse production (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; House, 2013), resulting from the need to "cope with the unexpected" (Meierkord, 2000, para. 3) and "ensure intelligibility" (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 294). In a similar vein, ELF encounters have been shown to be marked by a heightened concern for clarity and thus for linguistic resources that encode meaning literally and thus directly (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Empirical proof for strong and unmitigated speech act performance in ELF has been provided, among others, by Zhu and Boxer (2012) for disagreement and Kuchuk (2012) for requests, and it seems that the students gathered very similar impressions.

The pattern that thus emerges suggests that the ENL encounters provided ample opportunities to apply the concrete speech act strategies taught in class, while the ELF conversations were marked by a relative absence of these pragmalinguistic features.[2] More support for this assumption can be found in the essay by the student going to Canada, which leaves no doubt that this ENL environment was replete with the strategies:

(13)   Instead of getting confused, when someone would hesitate, use hedging, or request for clarification, I started to recognize all these little pointers… During my stay I found myself smiling whenever I noticed someone using any of the strategies we discussed. They were used plenty of times… The everyday use of language made it easy for me to put some of the strategies from our class to the test.

It is quite striking how this reported richness contrasts with the ELF comments presented in (10) through (12). Some of the ELF students tried to find explanations for this lack of strategy use. Some attributed it to the fact that non-native speakers inevitably follow the linguacultural conventions of their L1, as in (14) and (15):

(14)   I found out that many non-native English speaking students are using aspects of their mother language on the social interaction of their communication in English. For example, some of the students from Latin America, Arabic World, India, Balkan countries and Turkey do not apply any of the strategies with which we dealt in class, and very often, they are expressing their opinion too straight in cases of refusal or disagreement.

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2. This is not to say that ELF discourse is void of pragmalinguistic features – in fact, there exist many descriptions of pragmatic characteristics of ELF (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2011; Kuchuk, 2012). In the present study, however, the learners were asked to reflect on the features taught in class rather than compensatory strategies.

(15)   I believe that speakers from the countries, where English is not used as the first language, tend to use linguistic strategies that are typical for their own culture.

Others saw the major reason for this dearth in the fact that pragmatics is often not taught in English courses, which in turn results in the situation that ELF speakers do not have the necessary repertoire of pragmatic strategies at their disposal:

(16)   I also had the opportunity to witness many different situations in which at least one of the speakers was obviously not aware of the existence of speech acts and their strategies. As a result of this, it was interesting for me to follow those conversations with the knowledge that the outcome of those conversations could have been completely different ones if only one of the speakers would have used certain strategies.

Another ELF student also stressed the importance of including pragmatics in language teaching, although this student shifted the focus away from concrete strategies towards a more general pragmatic awareness-raising:

(17)   I suggest that future seminars could also point out that pragmatics is used differently by native English speakers and non-native English speakers. Since many students go to countries in which English is not an official first language, it seems useful to include 'Intercultural Communication' in the seminar schedule; shifting the perspective from a rather rigid pattern of strategies to a diverse way of communicating and understanding.

Comment (17) is, in fact, marked by a rather high degree of astuteness with regard to the lingua franca issue, namely the fact that on a global scale many encounters in English take place between non-native speakers and that this poses specific demands on the pragmatic components of English language courses. The student's suggestions point to the importance of pragmatic consciousness-raising and sociopragmatic skills to complement concrete pragmalinguistic realizations since application opportunities of the latter may be limited, whereas a general pragmatic awareness and the ability to understand intercultural encounters can be applied to virtually any ELF conversation. This is further supported by another ELF student, who also observed the absence of the taught refusal and disagreement strategies and the strong influence of the ELF speakers' L1s. Nevertheless, she concluded:

(18)   I believe that my ability to understand the speaker's intentions has improved and I can better understand what my conversation partner is trying to say.

Hence, we can derive an important finding from the data with regard to preparing students adequately for study abroad. Given that many study abroad settings feature lingua franca components, it is of utmost importance to not only teach

phrases and expressions to carry out pragmatic functions, but to include ample activities for pragmatic consciousness-raising to prepare learners for the high degree of variation in a globally spoken language. The status of the 'native speaker model' is increasingly discussed in the literature on instructional pragmatics, often as a balancing act of presenting a suitable pedagogic target while simultaneously preparing the learners for pragmatic variation (House, 2013; Mansfield & Poppi, 2012). The author of comment (17) above summarized the importance of such flexibility quite succinctly from a learner perspective:

(19)   In the end I can say that there are various ways to produce and to comprehend meanings through language. While it is useful for our linguistic and cultural education to be exposed to a set of rules applied by native English speakers, I think it is helpful to complete the information by stressing that other English speakers may talk differently. To understand, to appreciate and to act accordingly towards people in general means that it is necessary to have a sense for their social and cultural background.

From the data collected here, it thus appears that the ELF students did not only profit more intensively from the instruction's sociopragmatic consciousness-raising components than the ENL students, but also that the lingua franca context in itself provided many more opportunities for ongoing pragmatic awareness-raising.

This conclusion is supported by the results for Awareness (cf. Figure 1), which attest to higher gains in the lingua franca group. At first glance, the high Awareness results for the EFL group may seem somewhat counterintuitive – after all, how can a linguistic environment that is a) devoid of a specific target norm, b) that lacks 'authoritative' native speakers and c) that is marked by an absence of target-like pragmatic strategies, foster pragmatic awareness? As we have seen above, however, it is very conceivable that the reason lies precisely in this heterogeneity and unpredictability of lingua franca encounters and their resulting dynamic nature, which poses more adaptive challenges to the learners than the comparatively homogeneous native-language settings do:

As speakers use LFE [lingua franca English], a lot of learning takes place: They monitor the form and conventions the other brings; they learn to ascribe meanings to their form and conventions; and they monitor their own form and convention to negotiate communication. Meeting different speakers from the vast, diffuse, and virtual community of LFE, one always has to learn a lot – and rapidly – as one decides which receptive and productive resources to adopt for a context.
(Canagarajah, 2007, p. 925)

It goes without saying that this constant learning and decision-making requires and generates a greater deal of metapragmatic awareness. Accordingly, the contact

with a multitude of different (lingua-)cultures fosters pragmatic consciousness-raising despite a relative lack of speech act strategies associated with native-like use. Indeed, the smorgasbord of cultures and home languages channeled through a lingua franca might thus be intrinsically more conducive to fostering pragmatic awareness and appreciation for pragmatic instruction than a native-language environment – despite the fact that the latter seems to provide more opportunities to apply the pragmalinguistic strategies encountered during the pragmatic instruction.

5.   Summary, implications, and conclusion

The present study analyzed 19 Reflective Essays written by advanced learners of English at the end of their study abroad semester in either an ENL or an ELF setting. The study abroad took place after explicit pragmatic instruction on two speech acts complemented by pragmatic consciousness-raising. The study examined the learners' views on the instruction's usefulness, applicability, inclusion into the curriculum, and gains in pragmatic awareness as well as additional input on the lingua franca issue. It yielded the following insights into the learners' metapragmatic perceptions of the two environments:

1. Overall, the pragmatic instruction was viewed positively by the learners. The learners appreciated being familiarized with such rules of social talk before starting their study abroad.
2. The groups differed with regard to their appraisal of the Applicability of the strategies taught in class. While the ENL group reported encountering the strategies frequently, the ELF students experienced fewer opportunities to put their newly acquired speech act strategies into practice. Further comments from the essays revealed that many students found the ELF conversations to lack these face-saving strategies and to be marked by a rather high degree of directness. The learners attributed this to pragmatic transfer from the speakers' L1s as well as to a lack of pragmatic training in the other ELF speakers.
3. The ELF group viewed the instruction more positively than the ENL students for Usefulness, Awareness, and Curriculum. This difference is statistically significant across all comments as well as individually for Curriculum. Even though the ELF students found the Applicability of the strategies taught in class more limited compared to the ENL participants, they reported to have found the instruction especially relevant with regard to understanding the encounters and the intentions of their communication partners, which in turn made them more enthusiastic about the necessity of including pragmatic

instruction into the academic curriculum. The ELF group's greater gains in pragmatic awareness are attributed to the greater cultural diversity inherent in the EFL setting, whose variability and hybridity provides more opportunities to observe the 'clash' and ensuing negotiation of the different sociopragmatic conventions that the speakers bring to the ELF arena.

The findings suggest a number of implications for the foreign language classroom and for pragmatics instruction prior to or during study abroad. First and foremost, the study underscores the usefulness and hence necessity of pragmatics instruction in study-abroad preparation, as indicated by the participants' overall appreciation of the pragmatic intervention. Accordingly, it adds to the growing body of literature that advocates the inclusion of pragmatics as an integral part of any language teaching curriculum alongside the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Pullin, 2015).

Secondly, the study shows that the individual components of the pragmatic instruction differed in their relevance, depending on the target language status in the host country: while the ENL students found the actual speech act strategies most applicable, the ELF students perceived the pragmatic consciousness-raising as most relevant for their settings. This echoes previous recommendations to pay equal attention to both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge in the teaching of pragmatics (Kasper, 1997; Shively, 2010; Thomas, 1983), especially when preparing learners for diverse study abroad contexts. Accordingly, instructors need to devote sufficient time not only to the imparting of certain surface realizations, formulas and phrases, but also to the discovery and explanation of the reasons underlying pragmalinguistic choices and the impact that such choices can have on the interlocutor, the speaker's identity, the situation and the interpersonal relationship. Such sociopragmatic understanding takes time to develop since it requires a change in perceptions of the world, including one's own culture. Allocating sufficient time in the curriculum and/or spreading the pragmatic instruction out over a longer period of time is thus key to pragmatic development through the generation of metapragmatic awareness.

Thirdly, the study reveals that the two different linguistic contexts pose different demands on pragmatic consciousness-raising activities. For learners going to an ENL setting it seems most important to learn about the target linguaculture and possible differences to the learners' own sociopragmatic norms, while students headed for an ELF context need to be prepared for the potential diversity and variability of norms they might encounter. In other words, rather than learning about one specific 'yardstick variety', they need to be trained to successfully navigate the hybridity and unpredictability of ELF encounters, including the constant negotiation and co-construction of meaning and understanding that this entails. Hence,

in order to train learners to "activate complex pragmatic strategies that help them negotiate their variable form" (Canagarajah, 2007, p. 926), flexibility in dealing with interlocutors of diverse cultural backgrounds must be as important a goal in pragmatic consciousness-raising as the awareness of the pragmatic conventions of a select native speaker norm (McConachy, 2013). As comment (17) above showed, this need for cross-cultural pragmatic competence has not only been noted by researchers, but also the students perceived the necessity to learn about "diverse way[s] of communication and understanding," as the learner put it, to succeed in the variety of potential study abroad situations out there.

Naturally, despite these important findings, the study comes with a number of limitations, the most conspicuous of which is its small sample size of merely 19 essays. Due to this low number, some of the observed contrasts could only qualify as trends rather than significant differences. Needless to say, more research into these issues with larger sample sizes is highly necessary and welcome. Overall, however, it is interesting to note that the students provided so many comments on the lingua franca issue even though it was neither explicitly mentioned in the course nor part of the essay instructions. Hence, it seems that these observations reflect very genuine impressions and that these ELF characteristics must have been rather conspicuous in order for so many students to notice them and to feel compelled to report about them unsolicitedly. A second weakness is connected to the use of learner reflection data. Although it is among the best tools available to date to tap into learner perceptions, learner reflections have the disadvantage of revealing only those aspects which the participants are aware of at the time of the self-report and which they are willing to share. In addition, self-reports can be subject to faking and to social desirability bias (West, 2014). While the latter can never be fully ruled out, the study tried to address the former concerns by the use of a range of obligatory essay questions to ensure comparability of the reflective essays across learners and learner groups. A third limitation is the fact that both the ENL and the ELF group were treated as a homogeneous unit each, even though they represented many different host countries and thus a great deal of variation. Connected to this limitation is the above-mentioned fact that three participants collected their ELF experience while staying in Germany. Finally, due to the absence of a pre-test of the learners' pragmatic perceptions at the beginning of their stay abroad, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that the differences between the two groups reported here already existed prior to the study abroad.

These limitations notwithstanding, the study's strong point is the analysis of authentic learner perception data to address questions that have hitherto received only scant attention in study abroad research, most importantly the direct comparison of lingua franca and native-language settings. The observations made here point to several issues that are relevant for the lingua franca debate, for analyses

into pragmatic, linguistic and intercultural development in different study abroad contexts, and for the teaching of pragmatics prior to study abroad.

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