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Explicit instruction for the development of L2 Spanish pragmatic ability during study abroad

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of pragmatic instruction and short-term study abroad (SA) on the development of apologies in second language (L2) Spanish. Students who spent four weeks in different SA programs in Spain were randomly assigned either to an experimental group ($n = 9$) or a control group ($n = 9$). Native Spanish speakers from Spain were recruited to provide baseline comparison data. Prior to departure, the experimental group received explicit pragmatic instruction on how to formulate apologies in Spanish. During SA, they performed two task scenarios designed to promote their pragmatic competence. The control group did not receive pragmatic instruction, nor did they perform the tasks. Before departure and during the final week of the program, both groups completed an oral discourse completion task (ODCT) consisting of five apology scenarios. The ODCT data and appropriateness ratings indicate that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in three areas of pragmatic development: appropriateness, strategy use, and speech rate. Findings suggest that explicit pragmatic instruction both before and during SA contributes to participants' L2 pragmatic competence.

1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence refers to "one's knowledge of linguistics, norms, and social conventions, and one's ability to use these knowledge bases in a socially-bound interaction" (Taguchi, 2015, p. 1). Considered a core feature of communicative competence and an important goal of foreign language instruction (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Ren, 2018, 2019), pragmatic competence consists of two components: The first is pragmalinguistic knowledge, or knowledge of the specific forms and linguistic strategies used when performing a speech act. The second component, sociopragmatic knowledge, involves an understanding of the social norms of a culture and their influence on interactional patterns (DiBartolomeo et al., 2019; Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). Together, the development of these two distinct knowledge bases represents a significant yet surmountable challenge for most second language (L2) learners, given that the acquisition of pragmatics is slow and requires considerable exposure to pragmatic input (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Equally relevant is the fact that few instructors integrate explicit pragmatic instruction into their teaching practices (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi & Roever, 2017); this is despite evidence that explicit instruction helps promote the language learners' pragmatic competence (Félix-Brasdefer & Cohen, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer & Cohen, 2012; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006; Sykes, 2013).

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Study abroad (SA) is often considered an important context for developing L2 learners' pragmatic competence because it "offers opportunities to participate in socioculturally bound linguistic practices, which are limited in a classroom context" (Taguchi & Roever, 2017, p. 178). Some of the features of the SA environment that are assumed to promote L2 pragmatic development include opportunities to observe host community interactional patterns, situated practice, and real-life consequences of pragmatic behavior (Pérez Vidal & Shively, 2019, pp. 355–371; Shively, 2011; Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Studies demonstrate, however, that SA participants are often unaware of how to take advantage of the opportunities afforded in the SA environment in order to promote their pragmatic knowledge (Cohen & Shively, 2007; Hernández & Boero, 2018a; Shively, 2010). Researchers have identified several factors that account for the considerable variation observed in outcomes: "quantity and quality of contact with the L2, length of stay, living situation, density of L2 speaking social networks, and individual characteristics" (Pérez Vidal & Shively, 2019, p. 355). At the same time, some scholars have determined that the explicit teaching of pragmatics (e.g., providing metapragmatic information about sociopragmatic rules and pragmalinguistic forms) enhances SA students' pragmatic development (e.g., Shively, 2010). Although SA participants view pre-departure pragmatic instruction as beneficial for their language acquisition, few studies have examined the impact of such instruction (Glaser, 2017). In order to address this issue, the present study investigates the effects of combining explicit pragmatic intervention with short-term SA (4 weeks). Three measures were examined: pragmatic appropriateness, apology strategies, and speech rate. This study is informed by skill acquisition theory (e.g., DeKeyser, 2007b; Li, 2012, 2014), a promising yet underexplored framework in the SA context, that can be applied to situating the role of pedagogical intervention in promoting SA participants' pragmatic competence. The findings provide unique insights that suggest how SA programs might develop students' pragmatic abilities during pre-departure and their time abroad. The paper is organized as follows: first, background information about the speech act of apologizing and L1 Spanish apologies is presented. Next, the development of L2 apologies in the SA context is discussed. Third, studies on pragmatic instruction in SA programs are examined, followed by a brief discussion of skill acquisition theory. The remainder of the paper consists of the methods, findings, discussion, pedagogical implications, and conclusions.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Apologies

Apologies are expressive speech acts consisting of a "compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S (the speaker) was causally involved and which is costly to H (the hearer)" (Bergman & Kasper, 1993, p. 82). In Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, an apology is considered a face-saving speech act for the hearer, providing support for that person's negative face which has been damaged by a violation. In contrast, an apology represents a face-threatening speech act to the speaker because it damages that person's positive face. Three variables influence the nature of a given apology: the relative power and social distance between the interlocutors, and the relative imposition or seriousness of the offense. In the field of interlanguage pragmatics research, one of the most widely used coding systems for both requests and apologies is based on Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP). In their influential work, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) identified six semantic formulas or strategies involved in the speech act of offering an apology: an explicit Expression of Apology (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, IFID), Acknowledgement of Responsibility, Explanation, Offer of Repair, Promise of Non-Recurrence, and IFID Intensification (e.g., I'm very sorry). Speaker usually employ at least one of these strategies so as to minimize the impact of an offense and to repair the social relationship with the interlocutor. Examples and definitions of Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) six categories of strategies are provided below:

1. Expression of Apology (IFID): The speaker makes the apology explicit by using formulaic expressions (e.g., *Lo siento.* 'I'm sorry').
2. Acknowledgement of Responsibility: The speaker expresses responsibility for the committed offense (e.g., *Se me pasó la hora.* 'I lost track of time').
3. Explanation: The speaker provides an explanation or reason for the offense (e.g., *El autobús llegó tarde.* 'The bus was late').
4. Offer of Repair: The speaker offers to do something about the offense (e.g., *Puedo pagar por uno nuevo.* 'I can pay for a new one').
5. Promise of Non-Recurrence: The speaker promises that the committed offense will not happen again (e.g., *Te prometo que no volverá a pasar.* 'I promise that it won't happen again').
6. IFID Intensification: The speaker considers it important that the IFID be intensified (e.g., *Le pido mil disculpas.* 'I'm very sorry').

2.2. L1 Spanish apologies

In L1 Spanish, several patterns in the speech act of apologizing stand out for their relevance to the present study. The first is Spanish speaker's preference for hearer-oriented forms (e.g., *Perdóneme.* 'Forgive me') over speaker-oriented strategies (e.g., *Lo siento.* 'I'm sorry') (Cordella, 1990; Filimonova, 2016; Rojo, 2005; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Stapleton, 2004; Wagner &

Roebuck, 2010). The second pattern of usage involves the broad repertoire of IFIDs available in L1 Spanish (Shively & Cohen, 2008). In Shively and Cohen's (2008 study, evidence from a baseline comparison group of speakers from several Latin American countries and Spain confirmed the predominance of IFIDs such as *perdón, perdona/perdone* (I'm sorry) and *disculpa/ disculpe* (Excuse me), among others. Extensive use of the agentless construction with the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy (e.g., *Se me cayó.* 'It fell') is the third prominent feature—and one employed frequently in most varieties of Spanish. Considered an important tool for the mitigation of apologies, this strategy allows the speaker to deflect responsibility for an infraction by attributing it to something beyond his/her control (Gómez, 2008; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Wagner & Roebuck, 2010). In a study on L1 Peninsular Spanish apologies, Rojo (2005) identified Acknowledgement of Responsibility as one of the most frequently employed strategies. Explicit IFIDs were the least preferred strategy. Stapleton (2004) reported similar results in her investigation of Peninsular Spanish. The agentless construction with the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy was again identified as one of the most frequently employed strategies, a pattern observed in Uruguayan and Colombian Spanish as well (Gómez, 2008; Márquez Reiter, 2000). The fourth pattern of usage involves the predominance of IFID Intensification (e.g., *Lo siento de verdad.* 'I'm truly very sorry') in most varieties of L1 Spanish, and especially in Peninsular Spanish (Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Although similarities exist, research demonstrates that some of the semantic formulas employed in the speech act of apologizing vary by culture and seriousness of the infraction (e.g., Di Bartolomeo et al., 2019). In Mexican Spanish, for example, speakers may use a greater variety of semantic formulas than speakers from Spain (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2019; Wagner & Roebuck, 2010). Apologies in most of varieties of L1 Spanish tend to be longer for more serious offenses (Rojo, 2005).

2.3. Development of L2 apologies in SA contexts

The effects of the SA context on L2 apologies development have been investigated in several languages: L2 English (Kondo, 1997); L2 French (Warga & Scholmberger, 2007); L2 German (Barron, 2006, 2019); L2 Japanese (Beckwith & Dewaele, 2008); L2 Russian (Shardakova, 2005); and L2 Spanish (Cohen & Shively, 2007; Di Bartolomeo et al., 2019; Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Based on these studies, several developmental patterns emerge. First, students who spend time abroad tend to have a larger repertoire of strategies than those students without SA experience (Beckwith & Dewaele, 2008; Shardakova, 2005; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Second, some SA participants may become less dependent on single chunk IFIDs over time (Kondo, 1997; Shively & Cohen, 2008). In Shively and Cohen's (2008) study of SA students in a semester program, for example, the students became somewhat less dependent on the single chunk *lo siento*. On the posttests, most learners began to incorporate a wider range of target-like expressions such as *perdón* (pardon), *perdóneme* (forgive me), and *discúlpeme* (I'm sorry). Explanations have also been found to develop in a SA context (e.g., Hernández, 2018; Kondo, 1997; Shively & Cohen, 2008).

Non-target-like developments have also been reported (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2019; Hernández, 2018; Kondo, 1997; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Warga & Scholmberger, 2007). Among the strategies that may not develop toward native norms, the use of IFIDs, IFID Intensification, and the agentless construction with the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy stand out. Using corpus-based tools, Barron (2019) found that SA participants who spent ten months in Germany maintained their preference for explicit IFIDs and dependency on single routine chunks. In a short-term SA context, Hernández (2018) found that SA students were dependent on the single chunk *lo siento* when offering apologies on pre- and posttests. A similar finding was reported by Di Bartolomeo et al. (2019) in their short-term SA program. The second feature, IFID Intensification, is one of the most difficult apology strategies to acquire for L2 learners, as affirmed by interlanguage pragmatics research (e.g., Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007). In a study of Austrian learners of French who spent ten months in Quebec, Warga and Scholmberger (2007) observed that the SA participants' IFID Intensification moved in the opposite direction of the target norm in two ways: the learners increased their use of the upgrader *très* (very) in the IFID and decreased their use of the upgrader *vraiment* (really). Shively and Cohen (2008) found that their SA students failed to develop IFID Intensification beyond the routine chunk *lo siento mucho* (I'm very sorry). Hernández (2018) found similar results for short-term SA students. Finally, both Shively and Cohen (2008) and Hernández (2018) reported that, compared to native Spanish speakers, their SA participants underused the agentless construction with the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy.

In addition to examining strategy use, researchers have also employed native speaker perceptions of appropriateness to assess L2 learners' pragmatic development in SA environments (Cohen & Shively, 2007; Halenko, 2018; Halenko & Jones, 2017; Hernández, 2016, 2018; Li, 2014; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Among the features used to evaluate pragmatic appropriateness are aspects of language use, level of formality, directness, politeness, word choice, and grammar (Taguchi, 2011). Shively and Cohen (2008) investigated the appropriateness ratings and development of requests and apologies by 67 L2 Spanish learners during an academic semester program. On the five apology scenarios, the SA participants increased their appropriateness scores from 18.00 to 19.38 on the posttest, a modest but statistically significant increase. Employing Shively and Cohen's (2008) written discourse completion task (DCT), Hernández (2018) found similar results for students in a short-term SA context. Gain scores were again modest, however. The SA participants increased their appropriateness scores from 16.83 on the pretests to 18.72 after the program.

With respect to the development of L2 apologies in SA contexts, these studies demonstrate that SA participants may slightly improve their speech act production and pragmatic appropriateness. At the same time, many SA students fail to develop certain aspects of their pragmatic competence while abroad. Among the features that are most difficult for L2 Spanish

learners to acquire are IFIDs, IFID Intensification, and the agentless construction with the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy. Taken together, these findings suggest that explicit pragmatic instruction may be necessary to help L2 learners acquire some pragmatic features that they would not acquire on their own.

2.4. Pragmatic instruction in SA contexts

Drawing on Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (2001), several researchers suggest that explicit pragmatic instruction may improve SA students' noticing and subsequent acquisition of pragmatic features (e.g., Hernández & Boero, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Alcón Soler, 2015; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Morris, 2017; Russell & Vásquez, 2018; Shively, 2010, 2011; Winke & Teng, 2010). Winke and Teng (2010) found that task-based pragmatic instruction contributed to SA participants' improved use of formulaic expressions in L2 Chinese speech act production. In a study on writing skills in L2 English, Alcón Soler (2015) reported that instruction had an immediate positive effect on the utilization of mitigation in e-mail requests, although this effect was not maintained over time. In another study on pedagogical intervention in the SA context, Cohen and Shively (2007) examined the development of requests and apologies in L2 French or L2 Spanish during a semester program. The experimental group's treatment consisted of pre-departure explicit pragmatic instruction on how to perform speech acts, a self-guide study book, and e-mail journaling. The control group did not participate in these activities. Despite both groups having been rated by native speakers as slightly more pragmatically appropriate in their speech act production on the posttests, no significant differences were found between groups.

Halenko and Jones (2017) investigated the effects of pre-departure instruction on SA students' production of spoken requests. Chinese English language learners were assigned either to an experimental group or a control group. The experimental group received pragmatic instruction; the control group did not. Although pre-departure instruction had a significant effect on the immediate posttests, no differences were observed at the time of the delayed posttest. In a UK-based program for English learners, Halenko (2018) investigated the effects of pragmatic instruction on Chinese learners' ability to formulate apologies. During the SA program, the experimental group received an instructional intervention based on Usó-Juan's (2010) five stages of awareness-raising and communicative practice. Results of pretest, posttest, and delayed posttests indicated that explicit pragmatics instruction contributed to the SA participants' ability to produce appropriate apologies in different contexts. Specifically, the experimental group improved three strategies: Acknowledgement of Responsibility, Promise of Non-Recurrence, and Offer of Repair. The students were also rated as more pragmatically appropriate by native speakers. No changes were observed in the control group.

Employing audio recordings of interactions between SA participants and service providers, Shively (2011) investigated the service encounter requests of U.S. students over the course of an academic semester in Spain. Students received explicit classroom-based pragmatic instruction on making requests during a pre-departure session, and again in the fifth week of the semester. Results indicated that over time, the students shifted from speaker-oriented requests to greater use of hearer-oriented and elliptical forms, in accordance with native norms of usage. Neither the host families nor the service providers offered feedback regarding students' pragmatic choices, as demonstrated in journal entries and interviews. The SA participants clearly identified explicit pragmatic instruction—both before pre-departure and during in-country coursework—as a factor contributing to their pragmatic development. Consequently, SA program directors would do well to adopt a similar, two-stage explicit intervention to promote participants' pragmatic competence.

In the short-term (4 weeks) SA context, Hernández and Boero (2018a, 2019) examined the effects of a two-stage explicit intervention on the pragmatic development of requests made in Spain. Prior to departure, 15 SA students received 90 min of face-to-face explicit instruction on requests. In Spain, they performed two tasks aimed at improving their pragmatic competence while increasing their social interaction with native Spanish speakers. Results from DCTs revealed that all 15 SA students made significant gains in appropriateness ratings and in their production of specific request strategies. Retrospective verbal reports showed that they also became more sensitive to sociopragmatic factors that influenced the appropriateness of their pragmatic choices. In a similar study employing role-plays with SA students in Argentina, Hernández and Boero (2018b) found that the positive effects of pragmatic instruction were sustained in delayed posttests five weeks after the conclusion of the program. The authors attributed the gains to the explicit pragmatic knowledge that the SA participants received during pre-departure, and which they had to draw upon to complete practice tasks while abroad.

Finally, DiBartolomeo et al. (2019) investigated the development of compliments and apologies by students who spent five weeks in Mexico. During SA, they received instruction on compliments but not on apologies. Although most of the SA learners improved their production of compliments, few students showed development in their use of apologies. The more equal development of students' compliments compared to their apologies was attributed to the pragmatic instruction. Based on these findings, the authors argued that because short-term SA students do not have ample time to map form, function, and context, explicit instruction plays an important role in developing pragmatic competence.

While some of the studies measuring the effects of explicit pragmatic instruction on SA participants' pragmatic competence employed pedagogical interventions consisting of pre-departure instruction only, others involved both pre-departure and in-country components. Together, the results of these two groups of research suggest that the second approach, combining pre-departure instruction with in-country practice activities, may enhance pragmatic competence more than instruction limited to the pre-departure period only.

Table 1
SA participants' background information.

Participant	Gender	Age	High School Spanish	Highest College Spanish Class
Experimental Group				
E1	M	18	3 years	Fourth semester
E2	F	20	4 years	Third semester
E3	F	19	4 years	Third semester
E4	F	18	4 years	Third semester
E5	M	20	4 years	Fourth semester
E6	F	19	4 years	Fourth semester
E7	F	21	4 years	Fifth semester
E8	F	19	4 years	Fifth semester
E9	F	21	4 years	Fifth semester
Control Group				
C10	F	18	4 years	Third semester
C11	F	21	4 years	Fifth semester
C12	F	21	4 years	Beyond fifth semester
C13	F	20	4 years	Fourth semester
C14	F	21	4 years	Beyond fifth semester
C15	F	20	4 years	Fourth semester
C16	F	20	4 years	Third semester
C17	F	20	4 years	Fourth semester
C18	F	21	3 years	Beyond fifth semester

2.5. Skill acquisition theory in the SA context

In addition to pragmatic knowledge, or knowledge of how to comprehend and produce speech acts, pragmatic development also consists of acquiring the necessary processing ability to use knowledge smoothly and efficiently in real-time communication (Li, 2014; Taguchi, 2012). Skill acquisition theory is one framework that has been used to describe L2 learners' development of processing ability or performance speed in SA contexts (e.g., DeKeyser, 2007, pp. 287–304; Li, 2014; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Taguchi, 2008). Anderson's (1993) Adaptive Control of Thought – Rationale (ACT-R) theory postulates that skill acquisition involves two forms of knowledge: declarative and procedural. Declarative knowledge refers to explicit knowledge that can be reported and that the individual is conscious of. In the case of languages, this declarative knowledge includes the explicit knowledge one may have about how to form a particular grammatical structure in the L2 (Segalowitz, 2003). Performance at this stage is a gradual process characterized by slow and error-prone speech patterns because learners must focus all of their attentional resources on conscious rule application (Li, 2012; Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Thompson, 2018, pp. 30–52). Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge of how to do things and involves using knowledge to perform actions. Skill acquisition is the process by which over time declarative knowledge is proceduralized through systematic practice and application of production rules. Although performance at this stage becomes faster and more accurate, it often does not reach expert levels (Li, 2012). Extensive practice has the potential to lead to automatization, a stage of performance that is often described as fluent, automatic, spontaneous, effortless, and errorless (DeKeyser, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, pp. 287–304).

Although several studies have examined skill acquisition theory in promoting L2 pragmatic performance (e.g., Li, 2012, 2013; Taguchi, 2007), few have reported on its relevance to speech act production by SA students; this is despite the fact that researchers often consider automaticity an important pedagogical goal of foreign language instruction (Segalowitz, 2003). In the SA context, Li (2014) examined the development of pragmatic knowledge (as measured by appropriateness ratings) as well as processing ability (as measured by planning time and speech rate). In this investigation, students in both an Intermediate and Advanced group were rated as more appropriate in L2 Chinese request production after SA. Neither group reduced planning time. In contrast, the Advanced group improved their speech rate, whereas the Intermediate group did not. In a classroom study, Li (2012) investigated the effects of practice on the development of accuracy and fluency in L2 Chinese request recognition and production. Explicit metapragmatic instruction on request forms was given to the learners to develop their declarative knowledge. Next, they received a large amount of input practice activities. Results demonstrated that the input-based practice enhanced speed of recognition and accuracy of production. No changes were observed for fluency, as measured by speech rate. Li (2013) examined the amount of practice needed to promote accurate and speedy recognition and production of L2 Chinese request forms. While four instances of processing target pragmatic features were found to be sufficient to improve pragmatic accuracy, more than eight instances were required for the development of performance speed.

With regard to skill acquisition theory, previous studies show that accuracy and speech rate may improve as a result of targeted classroom practice. In addition, SA appears to increase speech rate in academic semester programs. No studies have examined the combined effects of pedagogical intervention and short-term SA on students' pragmatic knowledge and speech rate.

3. Research questions

Previous research suggests that students participating in SA programs—particularly those in short-term SA—may not develop their pragmatic knowledge fully (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Although some pragmatic features can be acquired during the short-term abroad, others may well require a longer stay (Ren, 2018, 2019). In some cases, SA participants might benefit from pedagogical intervention that helps learners notice and practice the host culture's pragmatic features (e.g., Hernández & Boero, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Shively, 2010, 2011). Because pragmatic competence contributes to successful interactions between SA students and the host community, the present study investigated the effects of explicit classroom-based pragmatic instruction both before and during SA in three areas. These are pragmatic appropriateness, apology strategies, and speech rate. No other studies have adopted skill acquisition theory to measure the impact of pre-departure and in-country pedagogical intervention on both pragmatic knowledge and speech rate in a short-term SA context. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in pragmatic appropriateness ratings between SA students who receive pragmatic instruction and those who do not?
2. Do differences exist in the strategies employed by SA participants who receive pragmatic instruction and those who do not?
3. Do SA students who receive pragmatic instruction improve their speech rate more than SA students who do not?

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

Participants were 18 U.S. students recruited from different 4-week SA programs in Spain (Córdoba, Madrid, and Valladolid). Students were randomly assigned to one of two groups: an experimental group (mean age: 19.44 years; 2 males, 7 females; $n = 9$) receiving pragmatic instruction or a control group (mean age: 20.22 years; 0 males, 9 females; $n = 9$) who did not.[1] In addition, six native Spanish speakers from Spain (mean age: 21.33 years; 0 males, 6 females; 4 were from Andalucía, 2 were from Madrid; $n = 6$) who were undergraduate exchange students at the researcher's home institution were recruited to provide baseline comparison data. Table 1 provides the participants' background information.

The SA participants were L2 learners of Spanish. English was their L1; no heritage Spanish speakers were members of either group. Sixteen out of the 18 SA students studied Spanish for four years in their respective high schools. The other two studied the language for three years. Students reported a wide range of college majors. Only four students were Spanish majors—each declaring Spanish as their secondary major field. A total of 12 students identified Spanish as their minor. To participate in the study, students were required to have completed three or more semesters (or the equivalent) of college Spanish prior to their SA program. Five students had completed 3 semesters of college Spanish; six students 4 semesters; four students 5 semesters; and three students reported having completed more than 5 semesters. While abroad, the participants enrolled in two Spanish courses. Cultural and academic excursions conducted in Spanish complemented classroom instruction in all three programs. All students lived with host families. No student reported having had previous SA experience.

4.2. Data collection instrument

An oral discourse completion task (ODCT) consisting of five apology scenarios was used to collect the data. A sample scenario is provided in Appendix A. The scenarios, including the social and situational variables, were adapted from Shively and Cohen's (2008) DCT. The ODCT used in this study began with exam instructions and a practice scenario. For the five scenarios comprising the exam, participants read a description of each on a computer screen while listening to an animated interlocutor describe the task. Once the description ended, participants had 7 s to prepare their response and 25 s to respond. A pilot study determined that these time frames were sufficient for participants to respond fully to each scenario. The order of the scenarios was reversed on the posttests to discourage students from memorizing their responses.

Table 2
Description of ODCT (adapted from Shively & Cohen, 2008).

Scenario	Relative social status of interlocutor	Social distance	Seriousness of offense
SA excursion	High	Mid	High
Friend's book	Equal	Low	High
Spilled wine	High	High	Low
Babysitting spill	Low	Mid	High
Meeting friend	Equal	Low	Low

The ODCT employed in this study was created with nawmal.com software; it employed computer-animated figures to engage students in single-turn spoken interactions. This method of data collection addresses some of the disadvantages of traditional written DCTs, such as authenticity of interaction and learner response (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2017; Halenko & Jones, 2017). An additional advantage of this instrument is that, similar to DCTs, it allows researchers to compare participants across similar scenarios (Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler Barker, 2015).

The features of each of the five situations required the SA participants to consider social and situational variation in the production of their L2 apologies. The interlocutors in the scenarios were a SA director, friend, friend's host mother, host sibling, and classmate. Table 2 describes the scenarios, relative social status of the interlocutor, the social distance between the speaker and the interlocutor, and the seriousness of the offense.

The SA participants took the ODCT one week prior to their departure for Spain, and again at the end of the program. To make baseline comparisons with the SA students' data, the six native Spanish speakers from Spain also took the same ODCT.

4.3. Pragmatic instruction

4.3.1. Pre-departure

Employing skill acquisition theory as its framework, the pedagogical intervention began with explicit instruction of declarative pragmatic knowledge followed by authentic input and awareness-raising activities. Explicit instruction (i.e., metapragmatic information provided to the learners about sociopragmatic rules and pragmalinguistic strategies) was chosen as the preferred instructional method because it is considered more effective than implicit instruction (i.e., learning without awareness of what is learned) in drawing learners' attention to target pragmatic features, thus increasing intake and subsequent acquisition (Schmidt, 2001, pp. 3–33). After the explicit information was provided, authentic-input and awareness-raising activities, output practice, feedback, and reflection activities aimed at developing procedural pragmatic knowledge were introduced (Fig. 1).

During the first stage of the treatment, which took place after the pretest and one week prior to the SA program, the experimental group received a self-access PowerPoint presentation designed to raise their awareness of apologies in Spanish. Students were told that the materials would take approximately 75 min to read and practice. The PowerPoint began with an introduction to pragmatics followed by information about the speech act of apologizing. Participants read about power, social distance, and seriousness of offense as three factors that influence the appropriateness of the grammatical forms a speaker uses to perform the speech act. Next, they were introduced to the pragmalinguistic strategies involved in the speech act—that is, the strategies that a speaker uses when offering apologies in Spanish (e.g., IFIDs, Acknowledgement of Responsibility with the agentless construction, Explanation, Offer of Repair, Promise of Non-Recurrence, and IFID Intensification). In addition, important cross-cultural differences between English and Spanish were also presented (e.g., explicit information was provided about the many IFIDs available to Spanish speakers to encourage the SA students to shift away from dependence on *lo siento*, which previous research has identified as overused by L2 learners). Examples were given in Spanish of low, mid, and high seriousness infractions. Students were asked to consider each situation and formulate an appropriate response based on the information in the presentation. Next, the SA participants were given a sample response from a native Spanish speaker from Spain and were encouraged to compare and contrast their own response to the one provided. Important strategies employed by the native speakers were bolded in order to draw learners' attention to them. Students were also given explicit information about the use of the agentless construction in the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy. The experimental group was then given four scenarios so that they could practice using their declarative pragmatic knowledge—each involving a range of social and cultural features designed to encourage reflection about language and context. Scenarios were described in English. The fourth scenario, which was a listening comprehension task, was designed to help learners to become more aware of native speech patterns at the discourse level. For each scenario, students were asked to write their response in Spanish. Finally, the learners compared their answers to sample responses from the native Spanish speakers who had previously completed the same scenarios.

4.3.2. In-country

The second stage of the experimental intervention, which took place in Spain, consisted of four major features (Fig. 2).

The experimental group was given two scenarios to perform during the second and third weeks of the program. It was estimated that each scenario would take 45–60 min to complete. The scenario themselves were designed to encourage social

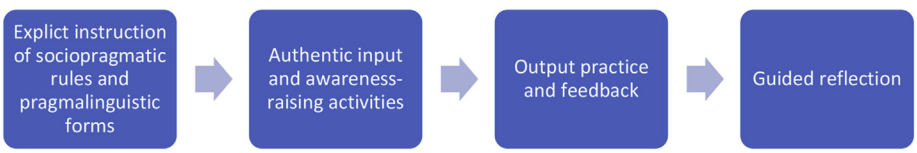

Fig. 1. Pre-departure pedagogical intervention (based on Shively, 2010, pp. 117–119).

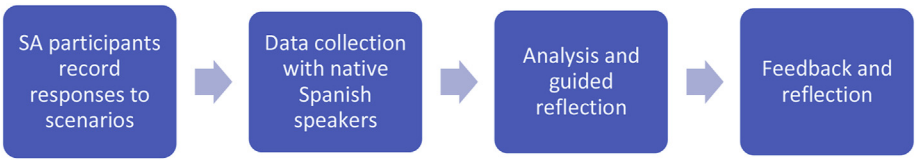

Fig. 2. In-country pedagogical intervention (based on Shively, 2010, pp. 117–119).

interaction with native Spanish speakers and promote opportunities for learners to produce output, notice gaps in their pragmatic knowledge, reflect on form and function, and receive targeted feedback for subsequent modification and production of pragmatic features (Swain, 2005). As such, the scenarios sought to provide the SA participants with multiple opportunities to practice and develop their procedural pragmatic knowledge.

After reading the scenario instructions, the SA participants recorded their responses to each. In doing so, students were asked to draw on the declarative knowledge of pragmatics acquired during pre-departure instruction to inform their responses. Next, they asked native Spanish speakers from the host community to record what they would say in each situation. In order to facilitate the students' data gathering activities, the researcher and his research assistant prepared the scenario directions in Spanish for the host culture members. The SA participants transcribed their responses and those of the native Spanish speakers. They answered a series of questions designed to strengthen form, function, and context mapping (see Appendix B). All responses to the questions, a short reflection, as well as audios and transcriptions were submitted to the researcher and his research assistant. They in turn gave explicit feedback to the SA participants by e-mail, with the aim of drawing their attention to form and context. Special attention was given to the information outlined in the pre-departure intervention. Relevant strategies used both by the students themselves and the native Spanish speakers were bolded and discussed. In contrast to the experimental group, the control group did not participate in any of the activities involved in either the first or second stage of the intervention. The experimental group's two in-country scenarios were as follows:

Scenario 1. *Broken laptop* (-Power, -Distance): You borrowed your friend's brand-new laptop so that you can finish a project after class. While attempting to answer your phone, you accidentally drop her laptop and smash part of the screen. What do you say to her? She is about your age.

Scenario 2. *Research project* (+Power, +Distance): You are participating as an intern in a Spanish research project (on the acquisition of Spanish as a second language) during your study abroad program. Last Thursday, the director of the program, Dr. García, asked you to report a key part of the project first thing on Monday morning. Friday, as you were completing your other duties, you forgot the papers in the office when you left for home. The building was inaccessible during the weekend, so you could not use part of Saturday or Sunday to write the report and access the plans and related documents—none of which were online. It is now Monday morning. Dr. García asks you to her office to report on your key part of the project. Explain to her what happened and apologize. Dr. García is about 50 years old and is a distinguished and respected researcher. What do you say?

4.4. Data analysis

The measures in this study were pragmatic appropriateness, apology strategies, and speech rate. Appropriateness was defined as "the knowledge of the conventions of communication in a society, as well as linguistic abilities that enable learners to communicate successfully (Taguchi, 2006, p. 513). The first research question examined the SA students' pragmatic appropriateness ratings before and after SA. In addressing this question, two native Spanish speakers from Spain were recruited specifically to assess the written transcriptions of the SA participants' apologies on the pre- and posttest ODCT. Both raters were female exchange students (ages 21 and 22). Prior to rating, the researcher asked them to complete the ODCT and thus become familiar with the scenarios. Next, the evaluation criteria were described. Raters were told not to give a participant a lower score for grammatical errors, unless those errors inhibited their ability as the hearer to understand the speaker's message, in which case, the raters were instructed to assign the participant a lower score. Sample responses from students who had previously completed the ODCT were provided to the raters and discussed. The researcher and the two raters then scored several practice scenarios together. Ratings and rationale were compared and discussed. Before rating, the transcribed ODCT data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and randomized so that the raters would not know whether

Table 3
Pragmatic appropriateness rating scale.

Rating	Description
5	I would feel very satisfied with the speaker's apology
4	I would feel satisfied with the speaker's apology
3	I would feel somewhat satisfied with the speaker's apology
2	I would feel unsatisfied with the speaker's apology
1	I would feel very unsatisfied with the speaker's apology

responses were from the pre- or posttest, or from the experimental or control group. Employing Shively and Cohen's (2008) five-point rating scale (Table 3), the native speaker raters then assigned pragmatic appropriateness scores to all of the SA students' apologies on the pre- and posttest ODCT (see Appendix C for sample transcripts and ratings).

Both raters submitted their ratings for all of the SA students' pre- and posttest ODCTs. Disagreements between the two raters of more than one point were discussed and adjustments were made. An interrater reliability analysis was then performed on the raters' scores. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were high for the pretest (0.73) and the posttest (0.83). Finally, the average of the scores between the two raters was used for data analysis.

The second research question asked whether the SA participants changed their apology strategies from pre-to posttest. To answer this question, both the researcher and research assistant transcribed the data provided by the SA students and native Spanish speakers. Next, they independently coded the participants' apologies using Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding scheme. The researcher and researcher assistant agreed on the coding for 96% of the data. Results were compared, disagreements were discussed, and the data subsequently recoded.

Finally, in addition to the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis was conducted on three features of Spanish apologies that previous research (e.g., Shively & Cohen, 2008) has identified as difficult for L2 learners to acquire through exposure alone: IFIDs, IFID Intensification, and the agentless construction in the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy. The frequency of the SA participants' production of *lo siento* relative to other IFIDs (e.g., *Perdóname.* 'Forgive me'), *lo siento mucho* compared to other IFID Intensification (e.g., *Lo siento de veras.* 'I'm really sorry'), and the agentless construction (e.g., *Se me olvidó.* 'I forgot') was compared to the native Spanish speakers' employment of the same features.

The third research question examined SA participants' speech rate as an indicator of pragmatic processing ability. Following Li (2014), speech rate was measured by calculating the number of Spanish syllables produced per minute. False starts, repetitions, and repairs were excluded from this count.

Statistical analysis of the data was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0). There were no outliers, as determined by boxplot inspections. Because Shapiro-Wilk's tests ($p > .05$) confirmed that the data were normally distributed, parametric tests were used. Regarding the independent samples *t*-tests, there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p > .05$). The statistical tests employed to examine the data were paired-samples *t*-tests and independent samples *t*-tests. All tests were performed using the Holm-Bonferroni method to adjust for inflated alphas. Cohen's *d* effect sizes were also calculated to interpret the data (small: $0.40 \leq d \leq 0.70$; medium: $0.70 \leq d \leq 1.00$; large: $d \geq 1.00$; Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

5. Results

5.1. SA participants' pragmatic appropriateness scores -pretest and posttest

The first research question investigated whether SA students receiving pragmatic instruction became more pragmatically appropriate in their Spanish apologies than those who did not. Table 4 provides the means and standard deviations of the SA participants' pre- and posttest pragmatic appropriateness scores. Posttest mean scores were higher than pretest mean scores on each of the five scenarios and for the five combined scenarios.[2]

To address this first research question, paired samples *t*-tests were conducted on the five ODCT scenarios combined (total). The experimental group's increase in appropriateness scores from pre- ($M = 11.00$, $SD = 1.48$) to posttest ($M = 18.39$, $SD = 1.76$) was statistically significant: $t(8) = 9.255$, $p = .000$, $d = 3.09$. The control group improved their scores from pre ($M = 11.83$, $SD = 1.64$) to posttest ($M = 13.78$, $SD = 1.89$), a statistically significant increase: $t(8) = 3.540$, $p = .008$, $d = 1.18$.

An independent samples *t*-test was then performed to determine whether there were significant differences in the pragmatic appropriateness scores between the experimental and control groups. No differences were found between the experimental group ($M = 11.00$, $SD = 1.48$) and the control group ($M = 11.83$, $SD = 1.64$) on the pretest. This result suggests that the SA participants began the program at statistically similar levels of pragmatic ability. At the time of the posttests, however, the experimental group's pragmatic appropriateness scores ($M = 18.39$, $SD = 1.76$) were significantly higher than the control group's scores ($M = 13.78$, $SD = 1.89$): $t(16) = 5.352$, $p = .000$, $d = 2.52$.

Table 4
Means and standard deviations for ODCT.

Scenario	Experimental Group ($n = 9$)				Control Group ($n = 9$)			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
SA excursion	2.22	.44	3.67	.50	2.44	.46	2.67	.50
Friend's book	2.17	.50	3.67	.25	2.33	.71	2.83	.43
Spilled wine	2.28	.26	3.83	.83	2.44	.68	2.78	.94
Meeting friend	2.06	.73	3.56	.81	2.50	.56	2.67	.56
Babysitting spill	2.28	.83	3.67	.25	2.11	.55	2.83	.43
Total	11.00	1.48	18.39	1.76	11.83	1.64	13.78	1.89

Note. Maximum score for each scenario = 5 points. Maximum total score = 25 points (5 scenarios x 5 points each).

5.2. SA participants' apology strategies -pretest and posttest

The second research question asked whether SA students receiving pre-departure and in-country pragmatic instruction produced more native-like apology strategies than those SA students who did not receive the instruction. Table 5 provides the means and standard deviations for the six strategies employed by the SA participants and native Spanish speakers on the five scenarios combined. Strategies were also calculated for each individual scenario (Appendix D).

The experimental and control group's pretest and posttest means were compared to determine if there were changes in the SA students' production of apologies. Results of the paired samples *t*-tests performed on the experimental group's pre-to posttest mean scores revealed significant differences in four of the six strategies: Acknowledgement of Responsibility (t [8] = -6.487, p = .000, d = 2.163); Promise of Non-Recurrence (t [8] = −4.914, p = .001, d = 1.64); Offer of Repair (t [8] = −4.000, p = .004, d = 1.33); and Intensification (t [8] = −3.213, p = .012, d = 1.071). As seen in Table 5, each change in the experimental group's strategy use represented a shift toward the native speaker norm. The group's posttest mean scores for Explanation were also higher than pretest mean scores. The difference was not significant, however. Further, the group decreased their use of Expression of Apology from an average of 3.44 on the pretest to 2.78 on the posttest. This made the experimental group similar to the native Spanish speakers with regard to IFID production as well. In contrast, the control group's only significant change from pretest to posttest was in their use of the Offer of Repair strategy (t [8] = −5.657, p = .000, d = 1.885). The control group's other strategies showed little development from pre-to posttest.

Next, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups' use of strategies on the pre- and posttests. No significant differences were found at the time of the pretest. This again suggests that the two groups were comparable prior to the study. On the posttests, there were statistically significant differences in the use of three strategies. The experimental group's posttest mean scores for Acknowledgement of Responsibility (t [16] = 3.962, p = .001, d = 1.866), Explanation (t [16] = 2.910, p = .010, d = 1.371), and Promise of Non-Recurrence (t [16] = 4.707, p = .000. d = 2.217) were higher than the control group's scores for the same strategies. These findings suggest that SA combined with pragmatic instruction contributed to target-like changes in the experimental group's apology strategy use. As Table 5 illustrates, over time the experimental group's strategies became similar to those of the native speakers. Contrastively, the control group's apology strategies remained unchanged and non-target-like over the same period of time.

To gain additional insights into the SA participants' production of apologies over time, a qualitative analysis was conducted on three salient features: *lo siento* versus other IFID production, *lo siento mucho* versus other IFID Intensification, and the agentless construction in the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy. A visual representation of the participants' mean scores for other IFIDs, other IFID Intensification, and agentless construction use appears in Figs. 3–5.

At the time of the pretest, both groups of SA participants were largely dependent on the single chunk *lo siento,* as seen in Table 6.

The experimental group had a mean score of 3.22 tokens before SA. The control group used an average of 3.44 tokens. On the posttests, the experimental group decreased their dependence on this single chunk while concurrently increasing their production of other IFIDs such as *perdón/perdóneme* (Forgive me) and *discúlpame* (I'm sorry), among others. In contrast, the control group continued to overuse *lo siento* while underusing other IFIDs.

Striking patterns of differential developed emerged upon examining the SA participants' *lo siento mucho* production relative to other IFID Intensification (e.g., *Lo siento muchísimo.* I'm so very sorry'). The experimental group increased their use of other forms of IFID Intensification from 0.11 to 1.89. No changes were observed in the control group. Findings suggest that the combined effects of SA and pragmatic instruction contributed to the greater distribution of other IFIDs and other IFID Intensification by the experimental group.

The agentless construction in the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy was the third feature considered in the qualitative analysis. The experimental group's increased use of this construction from a mean score of 0.33 (pretest) to 2.00 (posttest) was suggestive of movement toward the native speaker norm. The control group increased their score only slightly from 0.22 to 0.44. Results demonstrate the that focused pragmatic instruction before and during SA had a positive impact on

Table 5
Means and standard deviations of strategies used by SA students and native Spanish speakers.

	Experimental Group (n = 9)				Control Group(n = 9)				Spanish Native Speakers (n = 9)	
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD
Expression of apology	3.44	1.23	2.67	1.12	3.89	1.76	3.33	1.80	1.67	1.86
Acknowledgement of responsibility	2.44	1.33	4.89	0.33	2.22	1.20	2.67	1.41	4.83	0.41
Explanation	1.56	1.23	2.44	0.73	1.33	1.00	1.33	1.00	2.33	1.03
Offer of repair	1.67	1.22	3.78	0.44	1.89	1.05	3.00	0.71	4.00	0.63
Promise of non-recurrence	0.11	0.33	1.56	0.73	0.44	0.73	0.33	0.71	1.00	0.00
Intensification	1.89	2.20	3.78	1.20	1.89	1.83	2.44	2.13	4.33	1.21

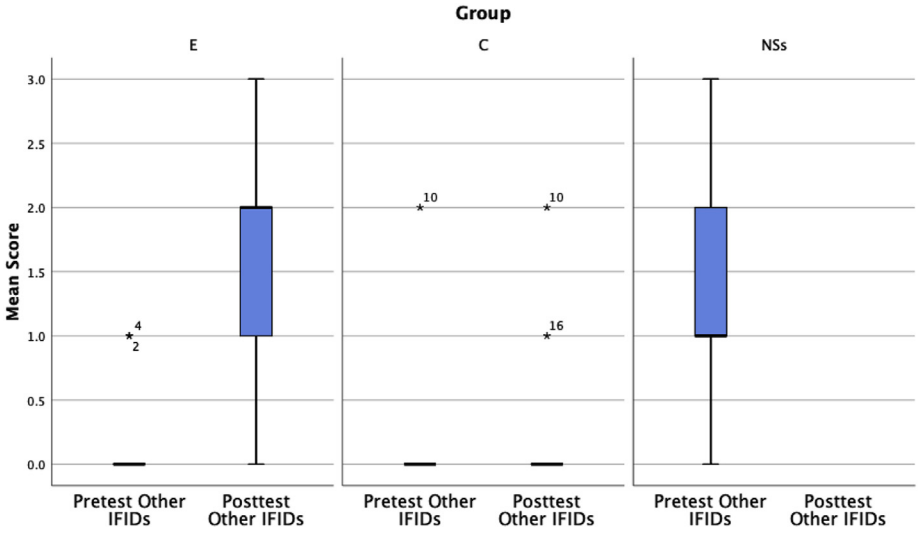

Fig. 3. Other IFIDs production by SA participants and native Spanish speakers
Note: E = experimental group; C = control group; NSs = native Spanish speakers. The SA participants and the native speakers frequently employed more than one IFID expression in their responses to a specific scenario. Different expressions were counted. Repetitive usages were not. The native Spanish speakers took the pretest only.

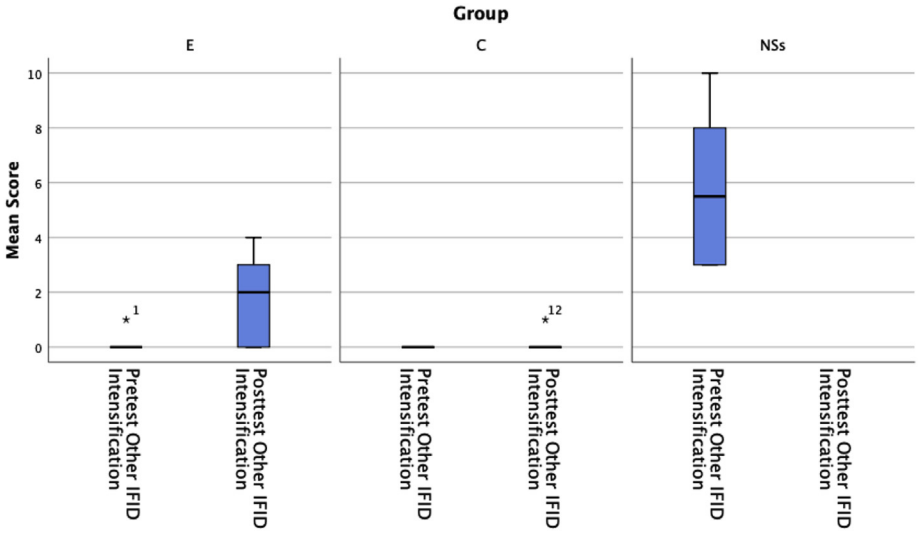

Fig. 4. Other IFID Intensification use by SA Participants and native Spanish speakers
Note: E = experimental group; C = control group; NSs = native Spanish speakers. The SA participants and the native speakers frequently employed more than one IFID Intensification expression in their responses to a specific scenario. Different expressions were counted. Repetitive usages were not. The native Spanish speakers took the pretest only.

the experimental group's production of the agentless construction—an important linguistic strategy employed by Spanish speakers to mitigate apologies.

5.3. SA participants' speech rate -pretest and posttest

The third research question investigated whether there were differences in speech rate between the SA students who received the intervention and those who did not. For a visual representation of the participants' speech rate mean scores, see Fig. 6.

Table 7 provides the descriptive statistics for the speech rate measure.

Paired samples *t*-tests were used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between each group's pre- and posttest scores. The experimental group improved their speech rate from pre- ($M = 128.06$, $SD = 33.00$) to

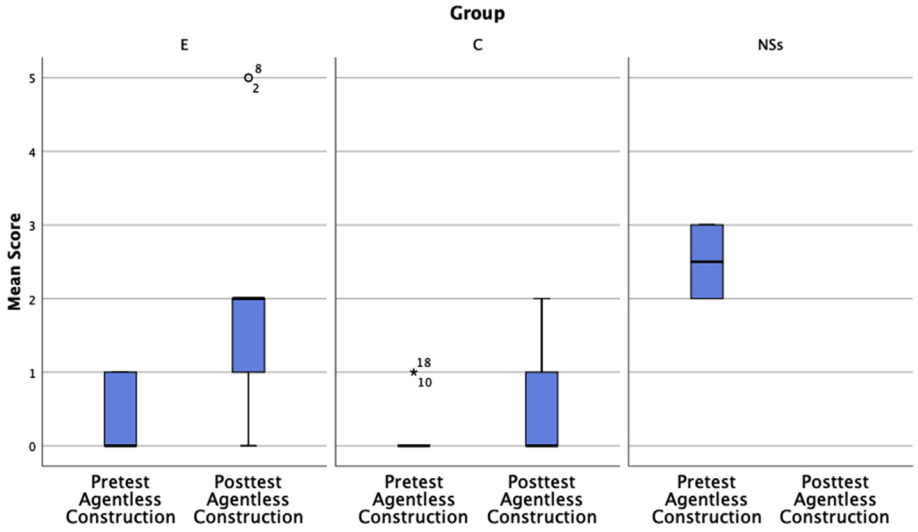

Fig. 5. Agentless construction use by SA participants and native Spanish speakers
Note: E = experimental group; C = control group; NSs = native Spanish speakers. The native speakers took the pretest only.

Table 6
Descriptive statistics for *lo siento*, Other IFIDs, *lo siento mucho*, Other IFID Intensification, and agentless construction by SA participants and Native Spanish speakers.

Group	Pretest				Posttest			
	M (*SD*)	95% CI	Mdn	IQR	*M* (*SD*)	95% CI	Mdn	IQR
				Lo siento				
E	3.22 (1.09)	2.38, 4.06	3.00	1.50	1.67 (1.32)	2.38, 4.06	3.00	1.50
C	3.44 (1.24)	2.49, 4.39	4.00	1.50	2.89 (2.03)	2.49, 4.39	4.00	1.50
NSs	.33 (.82)	-.52, 1.19	.00	.50				
				Other IFIDs				
E	.22 (.44)	-.12, .56	.00	.50	1.67 (1.00)	.90, 2.44	2.00	1.50
C	.22 (.67)	-.29, .73	.00	.00	.33 (.71)	-.21, .88	00	.50
NSs	1.33 (1.03)	.25, 2.42	1.00	1.50				
				Lo siento mucho				
E	1.78 (2.11)	.16, 3.40	1.00	4.00	2.00 (2.12)	.37, 3.63	1.00	4.50
C	1.89 (1.83)	.48, 3.30	3.00	3.50	2.33 (2.0)	.80, 3.87	4.00	4.00
NSs	1.17 (1.17)	-.06, 2.39	1.00	2.25				
				Other IFID Intensification				
E	.11 (.33)	-.15, .37	.00	.00	1.89 (1.69)	.59, 3.19	2.00	3.50
C	0 (.00)	.00, .00	.00	.00	.11 (.33)	-.15, .37	.00	.00
NSs	5.83 (2.79)	2.91, 8.76	5.50	5.50				
				Agentless Construction				
E	.33 (.50)	-.05, .72	.00	1.00	2.00 (1.87)	.56, 3.44	2.00	3.00
C	.22 (.44)	-.12, .56	.00	.50	.44 (.73)	-.11, 1.00	.00	1.00
NSs	2.50 (.55)	1.93, 3.07	2.50	1.00				

Note: *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; Mdn = median; IQR = interquartile range.

posttest ($M = 170.61$, $SD = 23.68$), a statistically significant mean increase of 42.56 syllables: $t(8) = 6.397$, $p = .000$, $d = 2.13$. The control group improved their speech rate from pretest ($M = 107.44$, $SD = 16.87$) to posttest ($M = 121.78$, $SD = 21.82$), a significant increase of 14.34 syllables: $t(8) = 4.259$, $p = .003$, $d = 1.42$.

Independent samples *t*-tests were subsequently performed to determine if there were significant differences between the experimental and control groups' speech rate scores. None were found at the time of the pretest ($p = .115$), suggesting that the two groups had similar speech rates scores before SA. On the posttests, however, the experimental group's speech rate mean scores ($M = 170.61$, $SD = 23.68$) were higher than the control group's mean scores ($M = 121.78$, $SD = 21.82$), a statistically significant difference of 48.83 syllables: $t(16) = 4.550$, $p = .000$, $d = 2.15$.

In summary, regarding the first research question, the experimental group outperformed the control group in the pragmatic appropriateness measure. As for the second research question, the quantitative and qualitative analyses of apology strategy use revealed clearly divergent paths of pragmatic development for the two SA groups. Before SA, both the experimental and control groups were similar in performance. By the end of the program, however, the experimental group began to approximate native norms, whereas the control group did not. Results from the third research question mirrored the first

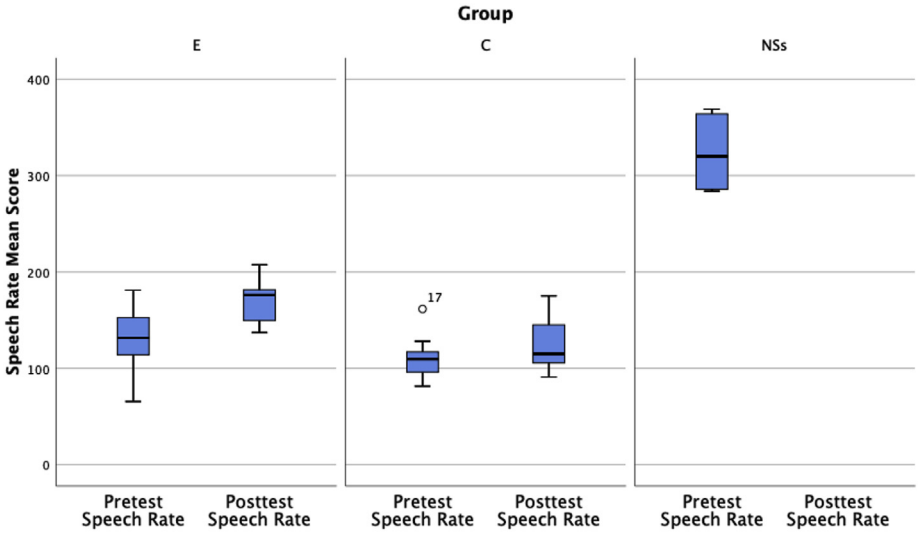

Fig. 6. Speech rate by SA participants and native Spanish speakers
Note: E = experimental group; C = control group; NSs = native Spanish speakers. The native speakers took the pretest only.

two. Although both groups improved their speech rate, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the posttests by an average of 48.83 syllables. Together, these findings suggest that pre-departure and in-country pedagogical intervention had a positive impact on the experimental group's L2 pragmatic knowledge as well as speech rate.

6. Discussion

6.1. Pragmatic appropriateness ratings

The first research question investigated the SA students' pragmatic appropriateness ratings before and after the program. The SA participants' mean scores on all five scenarios were higher on the posttest than the pretest. Paired samples *t*-tests revealed that after SA, both groups made statistically significant gains on the entire pragmatic appropriateness measure. The groups' ratings were statistically similar at the time of the pretest, as determined by an independent samples *t*-test. Post-SA, the experimental group had significantly higher appropriateness scores than the control group. The combined effects of SA and pragmatic instruction assisted the experimental group to become more pragmatically appropriate than the control group. Further, this finding differs from Cohen and Shively's (2007) results. In their examination assessing pedagogical intervention on SA students' apologies, although both their control group and experimental group improved pragmatic appropriateness, there were no significant differences between the two. It may be that the contrasting findings are attributable to the fact that Cohen and Shively's (2007) intervention did not include practice tasks performed during SA, whereas this investigation did. The pre-departure instruction and subsequent tasks performed abroad by the SA students may have provided the learners not just the practice opportunities that enhanced their procedural pragmatic knowledge, but it also made them conscious of how to manipulate language register and speech norms according to the task at hand. In their study on pre-departure pedagogical intervention, Halenko and Jones (2017) alluded to a similar phenomenon. The authors argue that their students would have benefitted from regular repeated instruction, with practice distributed over time, rather than the pre-departure practice only. This view of practice as a "consistent, repetitive activation of form-function-context mappings" is also shared by skill acquisition theory (Taguchi & Roever, 2017, p. 45).

6.2. Apology strategies

The second research question asked whether differences existed in the strategies employed by SA participants who received pedagogical intervention and those who did not. ODCT data indicated that over time, the experimental group's apologies shifted in the direction of the native speaker norm. The control group did not. Four major findings were of consequence. First, the experimental group increased their use of four strategies: Acknowledgement of Responsibility, Promise of Non-Recurrence, Offer of Repair, and IFID Intensification. This finding is consistent with previous research on the beneficial effects of pragmatic instruction on SA participants' L2 pragmatic competence (e.g., Hernández & Boero, 2018a; Shively, 2011). Whereas those studies examined SA students' request development, the present study focused on L2 Spanish apologies.

Table 7
Means and standard deviations for speech rate.

		Speech Rate	
		Pretest	Posttest
Experimental Group ($n = 9$)	Mean	128.06	170.61
	SD	33.00	23.68
Control Group ($n = 9$)	Mean	110.72	124.33
	SD	23.71	26.62
Native Spanish Speakers ($n = 6$)	Mean	323.83	
	SD	36.74	

A second important finding was that the experimental group reduced their dependence on the single chunk *lo siento* as they simultaneously increased their production of other IFIDs. *Lo siento* is one of several routine expressions that is well-documented in interlanguage pragmatics research for its overuse (Barron, 2019; Sabaté i Dalmau & Currell i Gotor, 2007; Shively & Cohen, 2008). Researchers attribute this overreliance to factors such as L2 transfer, ease of coding, the one-to-one principle, and classroom instruction (Barron, 2019; Trosborg, 2003). As a result, students who spend academic time abroad continue to depend on the single, routine expression *lo siento* when producing apologies in Spanish (DiBartolomeo et al., 2019; Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008). At the time of the pretest for this study, both the experimental and control groups' preferred IFID was indeed *lo siento.* By the end of the program, the experimental group had begun to incorporate other expressions, such as *perdóneme/perdóname* (Forgive me), *discúlpeme/discúlpame* (Excuse me), and *perdón* (Sorry) into their apologies. These findings suggest that the pragmatic instruction given to the experimental group both before and during SA helped them to notice and subsequently employ a greater variety of IFIDs in the posttests. In contrast, the control group did not expand their IFID repertoire. The results confirm previous research indicating that without intervention, SA students may fail to develop pragmatic competence (Bataller, 2010; DiBartolomeo et al., 2019; Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008). In Hernández (2018), for example, *lo siento* was the predominate IFID on both pre- and posttests after a four-week program in Spain. These findings support the positive effects of classroom-based explicit pragmatic instruction aimed to promote students' pragmatic competence in the short-term SA context (Hernández & Boero, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Morris, 2017).

The third finding to emerge from this study involved the development of learners' IFID Intensification. Previous studies on L2 apologies have demonstrated that intensification is challenging for language learners (Hernández, 2018; Mir, 1992; Sabaté i Dalmau & Curell i Gotor, 2007; Shively & Cohen, 2008; Trosborg, 1995). Shively and Cohen (2008), for example, found that after a semester abroad, their SA students increased IFID Intensification so much that it exceeded native speaker norms. In addition, L2 learners' dependence on the adverb *mucho* (a lot) as a modifier of the routine expression *lo siento,* despite native Spanish speakers' utilization of other forms of IFID Intensification, has also been documented (e.g., Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008).

In the present study, when the experimental and control groups employed IFID Intensification on the pretests, both indeed showed a strong preference for the expression *lo siento mucho*. The experimental group recorded an average of 1.78 tokens compared to the control group's 1.89. Other forms of IFID Intensification were absent before the program. At the time of the posttests, the experimental group had increased their use of other IFID Intensification from 0.11 to 1.89. Lexical items employed on the posttests included among others, *lo siento muchísimo* (I'm so very sorry), *le pido mil disculpas* (I'm really very sorry), and *lo siento de verdad* (I'm truly very sorry), three expressions that were targeted during the pragmatic intervention. The control group, for their part, continued to depend on the routine expression *lo siento mucho* as their only intensification strategy. These results suggest that pragmatic instruction helped the experimental group develop the ability to produce IFID Intensification.

The fourth major finding involved the SA participant's use of the agentless construction in the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy. A key feature for apologies mitigation by Spanish speakers is their utilization of either the agentless construction (*se*) or the employment of the third-person verbal statement using an undefined referent preterit plural. An example of the former is: *se me rompió el vaso* (The glass broke). Illustrating the latter is: *me robaron la mochila* (They stole my backpack). These forms permit speakers to distance themselves from being perceived as responsible for committing an act to positioning themselves as the victims of an unexplained or unplanned occurrence perpetrated by an anonymous party (Wagner & Roebuck, 2010). In the case of the agentless construction, the pedagogical intervention focused on this strategy both during pre-departure and once again during the SA period. It was the researcher's expectation, therefore, that the experimental group would begin to use the structure in the two tasks given to them while abroad, and also on the posttests. At the time of the pretest, the SA students' use of the agentless construction was infrequent. The experimental group's mean scores were 0.33. For the control group, it was 0.22. By the end of the SA program, the experimental group had measurably increased their production to an average of 2.00. The control group produced a much lower average of 0.44 tokens.

The increase is especially noteworthy from the perspective of L2 pragmatics research on the acquisition of this structure by students in SA contexts (Hernández, 2018; Shively & Cohen, 2008). To this point, Shively and Cohen (2008) determined through students' written DCTs that even after a semester abroad, the posttest usage was sporadic. After a short-term SA program in Spain, Hernández (2018) found that his students did not use agentless construction on either pre- or posttests. As a consequence of the experimental group's significant increase in their use of expressions such as *se me cayó el vaso* (I dropped

the glass) on an ODCT posttest administered after a 4-week SA program, the researcher argues that appropriate pragmatic instruction before and during SA prepares students to notice and then produce the agentless construction—a linguistic form that previous researchers suggest is challenging for SA learners—but can be acquired through intervention.

6.3. Speech rate

The change in speech rate measure was the focus of the third and final research question. Once again, both the experimental and control groups made significant gains from pre-to posttest. Although the two groups were similar in their performance before the program, an independent samples *t*-test revealed that after SA the experimental group had a significantly higher speech rate ($M = 170.61$, $SD = 23.68$) than the control group ($M = 121.78$, $SD = 21.82$). A plausible explanation for the experimental group's superior performance on the speech rate measure is found in reflecting on skill acquisition theory. Acquisition is viewed as a gradual process full of false starts, repetitions, and errors. It moves from slow and error-prone declarative knowledge to faster and more error-free procedural knowledge. In terms of L2 pragmatic development, initial declarative knowledge involves the knowledge of pragmalinguistic forms and their functional meanings (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). Gradually, form-function mappings are strengthened through meaningful practice. In the current study, the pre-departure pragmatic instruction sought to develop the SA participants' declarative knowledge by providing explicit information about forms, functions, and contexts (i.e., sociopragmatic rules and pragmalinguistic forms). During their time abroad, the students received two practice scenarios. Each required them to use declarative pragmatic knowledge productively—thus contributing to developing their procedural knowledge (DeKeyser, 2007b; Segalowitz, 2010). In addition, SA participants received explicit feedback upon submission of their responses, which DeKeyser (2007b) believes leads to further proceduralization and, when combined with extensive practice, to eventual automaticity.

6.4. Pedagogical implications

The findings of the present study show that a pedagogical intervention consisting of pre-departure and in-country pragmatic instruction had a positive impact on the experimental group's production of L2 Spanish apologies. The agentless construction in the Acknowledgement of Responsibility strategy and IFID Intensification, two problematic structures for L2 Spanish learners, were among the features that the experimental group employed more frequently on the posttests. An additional finding was the experimental group's reduction in the use of the single chunk *lo siento* and parallel expansion of their IFID repertoire. In contrast, the control group did not improve their apologies during the SA period—often overusing routine expressions (e.g., *lo siento*) perhaps because they did not have explicit declarative knowledge about other IFIDs nor opportunities to practice using these forms. Similarly, ease of use and frequency in classroom instruction are potential explanations that have been put forth by other researchers (e.g., Barron, 2019). When taken together, these results demonstrate the need to incorporate explicit teaching of pragmatics into SA programs. In order to facilitate acquisition, such interventions should expose SA students to pragmatic features during pre-departure orientation and then provide learners with opportunities to notice, practice, reflect, and receive feedback about speech patterns during the SA program.

SA participants will thus benefit from a planned two-stage intervention that consists of extensive pre-departure and in-country activities aimed at increasing pragmatic competence. L2 learners who receive pre-departure explicit information about relevant pragmatic features of the host culture, combined with awareness-raising activities and practice, may be able to develop appropriate declarative knowledge that they can then draw on over the course of their SA experience. Having established a solid foundation of declarative pragmatic knowledge during pre-departure will assist students to become confident during interactions with native speakers. While abroad, reception- and production-oriented practice requiring conscious use and manipulation of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge gained in pre-departure has the potential to help SA participants develop and fine-tune procedural knowledge. Such practice should include explicit feedback, which assists learners in reflecting on language use (e.g., forms, register, appropriateness). Post-SA, students would further benefit from communicative practice that sustains and further develops their interactional skills in the language, thus moving them closer to automatic processing (DeKeyser, 2007c; Segalowitz, 2003, 2010). As this study demonstrates, pedagogical interventions grounded in skill acquisition theory may promote SA participants' pragmatic knowledge and speech rate.

7. Limitations and future research

Although the present study found that pedagogical intervention has the potential to promote students' L2 pragmatic development as measured by appropriateness ratings, apology strategies, and speech rate, more research is needed to measure the impact of explicit pragmatic instruction in short-term and academic semester-long SA contexts. Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the study's findings.

The first limitation involved the ODCT. The same scenarios were used on the pre- and posttest, thus raising the possibility that familiarity with the scenarios may have helped the SA participants on the posttests. The study's lack of a delayed posttest to measure whether the SA learners' maintained their pragmatic gains over time was also a limitation. Another limitation was that the data analysis of the ODCT did not specifically examine the impact of the two variables (P, D) on the SA participant's pragmatic development. A closer analysis of these variables might yield additional information about the effectiveness of the intervention and is an appropriate topic for future examination. The fourth limitation was that the ODCT data were not

supplemented with other data collection measures. Employing naturally occurring data, for example, would increase the validity and generalizability of the results, and therefore merits further investigation. An additional limitation was that the native Spanish speakers' apologies on the ODCT were not evaluated for pragmatic appropriateness. These appropriateness ratings might have provided additional comparison points between the SA students and L1 Spanish speakers.

An additional limitation was that it was not possible to determine which specific features of the intervention (e.g., explicit information, practice, or feedback) influenced the changes observed in the experimental group. Therefore, researchers may want to measure the individual contributions of these components on the measures in this study. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to examine whether manipulating the amount or distribution of practice (e.g., increasing task repetition) would have a significant effect on the outcomes. A further limitation involved the self-access materials provided to the experimental group during pre-departure. Although the practice given to the students during SA required the learners to discuss their speech act production in terms that were introduced in the pre-departure materials, the researcher could not control how much time and thought the experimental group invested in reflecting on this information.

The small sample size was also a significant limitation. Increasing the number of participants would strengthen the ability to draw more generalizable conclusions. Finally, it was not practical to measure students' language proficiency in the current study. It should also be noted that the difficulties of measuring L2 pragmatic competence are compounded by the fact that some L2 learners may consciously use a non-target-like feature because they know it is correct even though it is not pragmatically appropriate, a strategy Barron (2003) termed "playing it safe." Because other factors during SA (e.g., motivation, target language input, access to social networks, learner agency, language proficiency) may have influenced the participants' development of apologies, research that measures how pragmatic instruction and these individual differences jointly influence the path of L2 pragmatic development represent yet another important line of future investigation.

8. Conclusion

Employing an ODCT, the present study examined the impact of pedagogical intervention on SA participants' pragmatic knowledge as measured by appropriateness ratings and strategy use, on the one hand, and speech rate on the other. By considering multiple measures of pragmatic performance, this investigation provided a more detailed account of the effects of pragmatic instruction on L2 pragmatic development in the SA context. Data indicated that the students who received explicit pragmatic instruction outperformed those students who did not on all three measures of pragmatic development. Despite the small sample size, the current study's findings confirm that SA directors and instructors interested in helping their students develop pragmatic competence should consider integrating explicit classroom-based pragmatic instruction into the at-home and SA curriculum.

Declaration of competing interest

No conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102395.

Endnotes

1. Students participating in summer SA programs (Córdoba, Madrid, and Valladolid) in Spain were recruited from different U.S. universities. The experimental group consisted of three students from Córdoba and six from Valladolid; the control group had three participants each in the Córdoba, Madrid, and Valladolid programs. Both the experimental and control groups were told that they were participating in a research study on the impact of SA on language development. Furthermore, both groups were asked not to discuss or share any information pertaining to the research with other students.

2. One of the anonymous reviewers suggested that although the experimental group made significant gains from pre-to posttest, the mean scores remained relatively low. Shively and Cohen (2008) reported similar results with SA participants who spent a semester abroad. When taken together, these findings suggest that current foreign language programs may not be sufficiently preparing students to develop their pragmatic ability. Because most foreign language programs fail to teach pragmatics as a core feature of instruction, classroom and SA learners have few opportunities to develop their pragmatic knowledge, a finding that has been asserted by other scholars as well (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler Barker, 2015).

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