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Pragmatic development during study abroad: L2 intensifiers in spoken Spanish
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Abstract

The current investigation examined the development of second language (L2) intensifier use in spoken Spanish over a 6-week immersion program in Madrid ($n = 45$). Native Spanish speakers from Madrid ($n = 10$) served as a comparison group to represent the local ambient input or sociopragmatic norm to which L2 learners were exposed. Data were extracted from semi-structured interviews. Results exposed different developmental trends over the program for intensifier frequency, intensifier lexical diversity, and intensifier collocations. While learners already had a strong sense of which intensifiers were most frequent in Spanish and how to use them in appropriate linguistic environments at the beginning of the program, the immersion program had positive impacts on the development of intensifier frequency and intensifier lexical diversity. The findings also highlighted different intensifier frequency developmental trends among learners, which collectively suggested that learners adjusted to the sociopragmatic norm of intensifier use in Madrid over the immersion experience.

Keywords: Intensifier frequency, intensifier collocation, intensifier lexical diversity, second language (L2), L2 pragmatics, Spanish, study abroad, immersion

1. Introduction

Second language (L2) learners must acquire linguistic structures, but they also must develop communicative competence in order to use the language effectively and appropriately (Hymes, 1972). Many linguistic variables pose both structural and pragmatic concerns for learners. Intensifiers, such as *muy* 'very' or *mucho* 'a lot,' are structurally confined to certain syntactic structures and semantic relationships. They are also pragmatic devices used to emphasize a message, express attitudes, as well as reinforce involvement in the conversation (Baños 2013).

Prior research on L2 intensifiers has examined intensifier frequency, collocational knowledge and use involving intensifiers, and preference for different intensifiers (e.g. Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014; Kanwit, Elias, & Clay, 2018; Lorenz, 1998; Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004). Intensifier frequency and collocational examinations have often led to results pointing to an increase in L2 use and knowledge of intensifiers over the developmental trajectory (Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012; Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014), frequently resulting in an overuse of the intensifiers examined compared to native speakers (NS) (Lorenz, 1998; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004). At the same time, there is evidence that more advanced learners gain collocational knowledge involving intensifiers that is similar to that of native speakers of a language (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014) and that in a study abroad setting learners adjust to the intensifier norms of the target language population, at least when selecting between two lexical variants in Spanish for 'very' (Kanwit et al., 2018). While research has begun to address L2 intensification, questions remain about the interactions among different types of linguistic knowledge required in the L2 intensifier developmental process (e.g. syntactic, pragmatic), whether different measures of L2 intensifier use indicate similar developmental trajectories, and what developmental trajectories are expected in certain learning environments.

Considering the impact of the learning environment of study abroad, which has been shown to be conducive to L2 acquisition (e.g. see Freed, 1998; Isabelli-García, Bown, Plews, & Dewey, 2018; Lafford, 1995, 2006; and Pérez-Vidal & Shively, 2019 for reviews) but underexamined with respect to the potential impact on L2 intensifier development (cf. Kanwit et al., 2018), the current investigation sought to examine the developmental trajectory of L2 intensifiers during a short-term immersion program in Madrid among English-speaking L2 learners of Spanish. This investigation offers longitudinal (L2-pre vs. L2-post) and cross-sectional (L2 vs. NS) analyses of intensifier frequency, intensifier lexical diversity, and intensifier collocations used by learners and native speakers of Spanish in spoken, semi-structured, authentic interview data.

2. Intensifiers

Prior research has referred to intensifiers as linguistic forms that serve to heighten or weaken communicated ideas (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1992). Terms including amplifier, emphasizer, and booster have been used to express "degrees of increasing intensification upwards from an assumed norm," and terms like downtoner or hedge have been used for "scaling the sense … downward from an assumed norm, often with a hedging

or softening effect" (Kennedy, 2003: 469). In addition to this wide range in meaning, a variety of linguistic features can serve to intensify, which may be morphological (suffixation, prefixation), lexical (intensified lexemes), syntactic (simple and complex modifiers, repetition, enumeration), semantic (irony, tropes), and phonetic (emphatic pronunciation, elongation of sounds) (Albelda, 2005, 2007). The current research uses the term intensifier to indicate only the heightening end of the spectrum, following Bradac, Mulac, and Thompson (1995) and Martin and White (2005). The current analysis is limited to lexical intensifiers and includes the seven most frequent lexical intensifiers found in the L2 and NS data examined in this investigation: BASTANTE 'a lot/quite', DEMASIADO 'so/too much', MUCHO 'a lot', MUY 'very', SÚPER 'super', TANTO 'so much', TODO 'all.' In addition to being frequent intensifiers in the data, these seven intensifiers are among the most frequent words in Spanish, evidenced in Davies' (2006) frequency dictionary based on a 20 million word Spanish corpus (Table 1). The only item not included in Davies' (2006) list of the 5,000 most frequent words in Spanish is SÚPER.

Table 1. Rank among the most frequent words in Spanish (Davies, 2006)

Item	Rank
BASTANTE	270
DEMASIADO	335
MUCHO	45
MUY	42
SÚPER	
TAN/TANTO	83/79
TODO	22

Individual intensifiers may be used in a variety of grammatical constructions, taking on different grammatical uses. Davies (2006) conflates part of speech categories associated with intensifiers because some part of speech distinctions are the result of "minor syntactic and semantic differences." Considering L2 learners, Davies (2006) discusses words like *menos* 'less/least,' which can be adjectives, adverbs, or pronouns for example, and he claims that "learners can easily apply the one meaning to the three contexts" (2006: 5).

2.1 L2 intensifier use

The examination of intensifier use among L2 speakers has often been included within broader research interests, such as stance, assessment, or evaluation (Biber, 1988; Dings, 2014; Gablasova, Brezina, McEnery, & Boyd, 2015). Fewer studies have focused specifically on intensifiers (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014; Kanwit et al., 2018; Lorenz, 1998; Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004) and, of those, most studies have addressed L2 intensifiers in written language and in L2 English, leaving a relative gap concerning spoken L2s other than English (cf. Kanwit et al., 2018).

Considering corpus and experimental investigations of L2 intensifiers, one main finding is that L2 learners experience development over time. Pérez-Paredes and Díez-

Bedmar (2012) examined intensifier use among Spanish learners of English from the 5th to 10th grade in written essays. They found significant frequency differences between the 7th and 9th and between the 7th and 10th grades, with more advanced students using more intensifiers (i.e. *very*, *too*, *so*, *really*).

Research on intensifier collocations, where collocations are "recurrent combinations of words that co-occur more often than expected by chance" (Smadja, 1993: 143), has confirmed L2 intensifier development over time and demonstrated that more advanced L2 learners have enhanced collocational knowledge involving intensifiers compared to lower-level learners. Using collocation judgement and fill-in-the-blank questionnaires to test intensifier-adjective collocations, Edmonds and Gudmestad (2014) found that undergraduate-level French learners of English who were studying an English degree in France (i.e. first and third year undergraduates; L1 French) had less robust collocational knowledge involving intensifiers compared to graduate-level French learners of English who were studying an English degree in France (i.e. master's level students; L1 French). The judgement task consisted of 13 intensifiers that were each paired with 18 adjectives. Participants identified all adjectives that they thought naturally followed the given intensifier, being those that they deemed "appropriate" (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014: 84). They also identified those that were "most commonly associated with the adverb in question" to identify those judged as "best" collocations (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014: 84). For each intensifier, researchers used frequency and collocational strength measures from the *British National Corpus* (BNC; Davies, 2004) to determine the operationalized definitions of appropriate and best collocations. The current research also depended on frequency and a collocational strength measure for the analysis of collocational knowledge.

In the judgment task implemented by Edmonds and Gudmestad (2014), there were significant differences between the undergraduate level learners and native speakers of English, but no significant differences between the graduate level learners and native speakers. The more advanced, graduate level learners identified best collocations significantly more often than first and third year undergraduate level learners. The undergraduate learners identified a wider range of acceptable intensifier-adjective collocations compared to more advanced learners and native speakers. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that lower-level learners, while identifying a wide range of common intensifier collocations, are less discriminatory and less sensitive to native speaker-like frequency and collocational strength distributions compared to more advanced language learners. These findings on the undergraduate learners may lead them to overuse intensifiers in certain semantic environments. In fact, Edmonds and Gudmestad's (2014) production task, in which participants were asked to fill in the blank with an intensifier, confirmed that at least some L2 learners tended to overuse certain intensifiers compared to native speaking populations.

The trend of overuse of intensifiers was also confirmed in a study of written L2 English (L1s: Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish) versus spoken academic English by native speakers in which learners used intensifiers in double the number of collocations compared to native speakers, finding more specifically an overextension of use in word combinations (Recski, 2004). Recski (2004: 211) claimed that the undergraduate university level L2 writers' wider range of intensifier use with more collocational combinations was "associated with colloquial style and an exaggerated tone that is often

considered to be inappropriate in formal academic contexts." Beyond the context of collocations, Philip (2007) found that L2 English speakers overused *very* and *really*, whereas the native speakers of English in his investigation relied on a wider range of lexical items. L2 overuse of certain intensifiers or within a wider range of collocations can negatively impact communication. It has been identified as inappropriate or unexpected, and researchers have negatively evaluated these overuses as seeming exaggerated, too colloquial, or communicating a sense of overstatement (Lorenz, 1998; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004).

In sum, there is evidence that L2 learners increase the frequency of use of intensifiers and their collocational knowledge involving intensifiers over time (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014; Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012). Compared to native speakers, learners tend to overuse intensifiers – a finding measured by the frequency of use of specific intensifiers and the linguistic contexts in which intensifiers are used (Lorenz, 1998; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004). These investigations identifying L2 intensifier overuse have often examined undergraduate L2 learners, and there is evidence that even more advanced learners may not perform in significantly different ways from native speakers (Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014). The investigations of L2 intensifier frequency and intensifier collocational knowledge align with language acquisition trajectories that show that lexical, semantic, and syntactic acquisition occurs as learners advance from novice to advanced levels (e.g. Gass, Behney, & Plonsky, 2013). At the same time, examinations that point to L2 overuse of certain intensifiers and within a wider range of word combinations do not align with a notion of appropriate pragmatic use which can be defined as the expected norm for a given community or context (Leech, 1983; Kasper & Rose, 2001), as indicated in researcher comments on overuse and overextended uses (Lorenz, 1998; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004). Furthermore, both the findings on increasing intensifier frequency over time and overuse of certain intensifiers compared to native speakers can be explained by Philip's (2007) proposal that intensifier use may have positive linguistic consequences such as aiding learners in their fluency or allowing them to avoid the use of other structures that they find more difficult. These findings and explanations indicate that L2 learners are tasked with a challenge. They must acquire not only lexical knowledge associated with intensifiers but also learn the collocational patterns. This endeavor of learning the collocational patterns may be particularly challenging with intensifiers because while many intensifiers share a common intensification property, they differ in their uses in word combinations.

2.2 Intensifier development during study abroad

Study abroad and language immersion programs can foster L2 acquisition (e.g. see Freed, 1998; Isabelli-García et al., 2018; Lafford, 1995, 2006; and Pérez-Vidal & Shively, 2019 for reviews). Study abroad has been found to positively impact learners' fluency (e.g. Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2009; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), communicative competence (e.g. Lafford, 2004), sociolinguistic competence (e.g. Kanwit, Geeslin, & Fafulas, 2015; Salgado-Robles, 2014), and pragmatic competences (e.g. Alcón-Soler, 2015a; Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Edmonds, 2014; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2014), among other areas of linguistic development. Yet, linguistic development during study abroad is not always uniform for all learners or across all programs (e.g. for reviews see Isabelli-García et al., 2018; Pérez-Vidal & Shively, 2019; Wyner & Cohen, 2015); research comparing study

abroad and at-home environments does not always show greater benefits afforded by study abroad (e.g. for reviews see Collentine, 2004; Lafford, 1995, 2006; Taguchi, 2015; Wyner & Cohen, 2015); and interventions have proven to be useful and sometimes necessary for the development of some linguistic constructions during study abroad (e.g. Alcón-Soler, 2015b).

In the area of pragmatics, many studies have found that study abroad facilitates L2 pragmatic learning (e.g. Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Dings, 2014; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2015; Shively, 2016). Pragmatics researchers are concerned with learners' development of pragmalinguistic resources and sociopragmatic knowledge. Pragmalinguistic resources are the linguistic structures available in a language to communicate a specific function, act, or relational or interpersonal meaning (Leech, 1983; Kasper & Rose, 2001). Sociopragmatics relates to the social contexts in which those resources may be used (Leech, 1983) and is concerned with culturally-specific linguistic uses in specific social contexts (Schneider, 2014). "[S]ociopragmatics is very much about proper social behaviour, making it a far more thorny issue to deal with … – it is one thing to teach people what functions bits of language serve, but it is entirely different to teach people how to behave 'properly'" (Kasper & Rose, 2001: 2). Understanding what is considered proper or appropriate in a given community or context is based on what is expected by local populations. Therefore, pragmatics research related to cross-cultural or L2 interests often relies on examination of the local norms of the target community to gauge understandings of sociopragmatic norms (e.g. Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2015; Shively, 2016).

Relating intensifier use to pragmatics, intensifier use is known to vary depending on the mode of language (Biber, 1988; Swales & Burke, 2003; Xiao & Tao, 2007) and social variables (Lakoff, 1973, 1975; Leaper & Robnett, 2011), indicating that there are specific ways of using intensifiers that are appropriate in different contexts. Further supporting the understanding that intensifier use is a pragmatic issue are the definitions that go beyond the sentence-level meaning (e.g. an intensifying adverb intensifies adjectival meaning). Baños (2013) highlights that intensifiers emphasize a message, express attitudes and emotions, and reinforce involvement in the conversation, and Briz (1996) claims that intensifiers enhance the pertinence of one's contributions. Because of these proposed pragmatic meanings and the appropriateness of certain uses of intensifiers in different contexts, the current investigation is framed as an L2 pragmatics study, and it questions whether L2 learners adapt to the sociopragmatic norms of a study abroad community over a short-term study abroad period. It is important to examine L2 and NS uses not only to understand linguistic development in general but also to understand learners' sociopragmatic development since appropriate uses of language facilitate interaction in local communities and further linguistic development.

Our review of the literature revealed one study that examined L2 intensifiers during study abroad. Kanwit et al. (2018) studied English-speaking learners of Spanish over a 6-week study abroad program and their preference for the Spanish intensifiers *muy* 'very' and *bien* 'really.' The preference and use of these intensifiers varies across and within different Spanish speaking communities. For example, prior research reported that *muy* was used more often than *bien* in the corpus *El Habla Popular de México* (Arjona, 1990) but that *bien* was used more frequently in informal registers and by the lower-middle class in Mexico (Serradilla Castaño, 2006). Comparing Spanish and Argentine preferences, Kanwit, Teran, and Pisabarro Sarrió (2017) found that *muy* was preferred over *bien* in general, and that Argentines had a higher preference for *bien* than Spaniards.

Given that the frequency of intensifier types varies across Spanish speaking communities, Kanwit et al. (2018) examined the preferences for *muy* and *bien* between L2 learners, who participated in study abroad programs, and native Spanish speakers from the study abroad locations (i.e. Mexico and Spain). Comparing the native speaker groups, Spanish native speakers selected *muy* in the preference task significantly more often than Mexican native speakers. Mexican speakers exhibited a greater preference for *bien*, and they also accepted both *muy* and *bien* more often than Spaniards. While both native speaker groups exhibited a low level of preference for *bien*, Mexicans preferred it more than Spaniards. L2 learners of Spanish in Mexico and Spain began their programs with similar preferences with respect to the two intensifiers. By the end of the programs, students in Spain had adopted a stronger preference for *muy*; students in Mexico had adopted a stronger preference for *bien* and also increased flexibility in intensifier preference, indicated by the increased preference for both *muy* and *bien*. Although L2 learners preferred *bien* more than the native speakers in both locations, the results showed that learners' intensifier preferences became more attuned to the local norms during the program abroad, indicating an increase in sociopragmatic knowledge about these two intensifiers.

2.3 The current investigation

Drawing on the previous literature, various aspects of L2 intensifier use have been examined, and there is evidence that L2 learners increase intensifier frequency and collocational knowledge over time (Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012; Edmonds & Gudmestad, 2014), often resulting in an overuse of certain intensifiers and their use within word combinations (Lorenz, 1998; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004). While this work has been important for understanding how intensification may be related to other linguistic systems (e.g. fluency [Philip, 2007]) and instrumental in providing insight into the use of specific intensifiers, it has not accounted for the role of ambient input, such as that experienced during an immersion experience. Seeking to account for the role of input, several studies have suggested that L2 learners during an immersion experience acquire sociopragmatic norms of the target community (Alcón-Soler, 2015a; Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Edmonds, 2014; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2014). Related to intensifiers specifically, Kanwit et al. (2018) found that learners' preference for two intensifiers changed over time to align better with the sociopragmatic norms of different study abroad locations (i.e. Mexico and Spain), but little is still known about how study abroad impacts L2 intensifier development.

The various findings from prior research on L2 intensifiers make divergent but not necessarily opposing predictions about the developmental trajectory of L2 intensifier use. Findings of overuse of intensifiers (Lorenz, 1998; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004) may predict that learners will increase the frequency of intensifiers over their developmental trajectory to the extent that they use intensifiers more than native speaking populations and also overextend the linguistic environments of intensifiers compared to native speakers. Findings of L2 alignment with a local sociopragmatic norm (e.g. Kanwit et al., 2018) imply that the developmental trajectory will depend on a learner's initial intensifier use or knowledge as it compares to the local ambient input, which represents the sociopragmatic norm. Finally, these possible developmental trajectories likely interact with not only the learning context

but also the different sets of intensifier knowledge relevant to L2 learners (e.g. frequency, collocational use, collocational preference, pragmalinguistic resources, sociopragmatics).

Considering the remaining questions about L2 intensifier use, the current study questions whether learners' intensifier use in spoken discourse changes over short-term study abroad to align with the sociopragmatic norms of the local community. The current analysis focuses on intensifier frequency, a collective measure that is understood to communicate a pragmatic meaning of heightened emotion and involvement (Baños, 2013; Briz, 1996) and also investigates qualitative uses of intensifiers (i.e. intensifier lexical diversity, intensifier collocations). By addressing various aspects of intensifier use, this study acknowledges the learning problem that intensifiers present to learners: learners must not only appreciate the shared property of intensification among different intensifiers but also gauge the overall frequency with which they are used in different contexts and specific patterns of use of individual intensifiers and within word combinations. This study compares learners' oral production of intensifiers at the beginning and end of a short-term study abroad program[1]. It also compares learners' intensifier use to that of the local native speaker population to approximate the available ambient input in the study abroad environment to which learners are exposed, representing the sociopragmatic norm.

The research questions collectively focus on the question of change in L2 intensifier use over short-term study abroad:

(1) Overall, does the intensifier frequency produced by L2 learners of Spanish in spoken discourse change over the course of a 6-week language immersion study abroad program?

(2) Is the change in intensifier frequency over the course of a 6-week study abroad program dependent on or influenced by learners' initial intensifier frequency, as evidenced by a whole-group correlation or an analysis of learner subgroups with different initial intensifier frequencies?

(3) Is there evidence of qualitative changes in learners' use of intensifiers over the course of the study abroad program?

With respect to the three research questions, we also consider how the L2 results compare to those of the native speaking population in the study abroad location.

Considering the hypothesis for research question (1), results from prior intensifier literature would predict either an increase in frequency over time or an adaption of intensifier frequency to the local norm. Therefore, it was hypothesized that learners' frequency of use of intensifiers would change over the immersion experience. Given the L2 pragmatics literature indicating that L2 learners adjust to sociopragmatic norms during immersion experiences (Alcón-Soler, 2015a; Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Edmonds, 2014; Kanwit et al., 2015; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2014), the hypothesis related to research question (2) was that the change in intensifier frequency during the 6-week program abroad would be related to learners' initial frequency of use of intensifiers. Specifically, it was hypothesized that learners would experience change over the immersion experience, corresponding to sociopragmatic development (Alcón-Soler, 2015a; Czerwionka & Cuza,

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[1] Studies on short-term study abroad are particularly relevant considering that short-term study abroad is the most frequent type of learning experience abroad, accounting for 63% of study abroad experiences among U.S. students (The Institute of International Education, 2016).

2017; Edmonds, 2014; Kanwit et al., 2015; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2014). Learners who initially used intensifiers with a less frequent rate compared to the ambient input (i.e. sociopragmatic norm) would increase their reliance on intensifiers; those who initially used intensifiers with a more frequent rate compared to the ambient input would decrease their use of intensifiers over the program. For research question (3), it was hypothesized that in addition to shifts in intensifier frequency, qualitative differences in learners' intensifier usage would be identified through the analysis of intensifier lexical diversity and intensifier collocations. Similar to the previous hypotheses, change in learners' intensifier usage was expected over the immersion program. These final analyses contributed to a detailed understanding of how learners use intensifiers in discourse. Collectively, the analyses of intensifier frequency, lexical diversity, and collocations allow for additional understanding of how different sets of intensifier knowledge relate to L2 development. All analyses contribute to the investigation of learners' intensifier use over the short-term program abroad and how those compare with the intensifier use norms of the study abroad community.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants and program

Participants included 45 learners of Spanish (female = 29, male = 16) and 10 native speakers (NS) of Spanish (female = 5, male = 5). All L2 participants were American, native English-speaking undergraduate students who were majors or minors in a Spanish program at a large, Midwestern, public university. They were intermediate learners of Spanish based on institutional definitions of proficiency (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008). Participants had taken an average of 7.32 years of Spanish classes prior to the program ($SD = 2.76$) and were enrolled in fourth year Spanish courses at the time of the study. Learners completed an adapted version of the *Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera* (DELE; Montrul, 2012) to provide a standardized measure of proficiency. This test assessed grammatical and semantic knowledge using multiple-choice questions and a cloze test. It has been used in a variety of investigations to assess learner proficiency (e.g. Montrul, Foote, & Perpiñán, 2008; Slabakova, Kempchinsky, & Rothman, 2012; White, Valenzuela, Kozlowska-MacGregor, & Leung, 2004). Advanced learners score between 40-50, intermediate learners between 30-39, and low learners below 30 (Montrul, 2012)[2]. The L2 learners took the DELE within the first three days of the program abroad. Based on this proficiency test, learners were at the low-intermediate level ($M = 28.28$) and results were quite uniform across learners ($SD = 6.54$).

The Spanish native speakers were university students from Madrid who had just arrived in the United States as part of a study abroad program or had recently completed a study abroad program. This population of native speakers was an ideal comparison group for

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[2] The adapted DELE focused specifically on grammar and semantic knowledge, and thus it does not necessarily align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages levels (Council of Europe, 2001) or the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2012), which assess the learner's ability to accomplish certain communicative tasks.

three reasons. First, they were native speakers of Spanish from the location of the L2 study abroad program. Second, both the native speakers and learners were Spanish-English bilingual populations, which marks a similarity across groups and goes beyond the often-claimed notion of the monolingual native speaker in language acquisition research (e.g. Cook, 2008; Geeslin, 2003; Kanwit & Geeslin, 2018; Ortega, 2010). Third, the native speakers' participation as study abroad students made the interview structure and topics of conversation equally relevant to them and to the L2 learners, which allowed the conversational environment to be controlled across groups.

The immersion program in Madrid was six weeks long. Students took two of the following courses at a local university: third year Spanish language course, fourth year advanced culture course in which they focused on Spanish current events and politics, and fourth year advanced art class that included weekly visits to the Prado museum. All courses were taught in Spanish, and no class included specific lessons on the use of intensifiers. Students spent nearly five hours per day, four days per week at the university. Students lived with host families, ate at least two meals per day with the family, and interacted with them in Spanish. The program also included one to two excursions per week in Madrid or the surrounding areas, where tours and activities were conducted in Spanish. In summary, this immersion program provided ample opportunity for students to use Spanish in a variety of settings.

3.2 Instruments: Interviews and corpus description

The Second Language Study Abroad Spanish Corpus (L2SAS; Czerwionka, 2013–2017) was used to examine L2 intensifier frequency. The corpus included data from semi-structured interviews in Spanish with L2 learners at the beginning and end of a 6-week immersion experience. The data for the current project were limited to learners who studied abroad in Madrid, Spain. Semi-structured interviews include planned questions but allow other topics to emerge as well, resulting in a more natural flow of conversation (Eckert, 2000). The interview questions addressed a range of topics related to the study abroad experience and comparisons between the home and host countries (e.g. university life, family, travel). Interviews began with more general topics and progressed to more specific ones related to the study abroad experience and comparisons between Spain and the students' home country, following interview question-ordering norms (Tagliamonte, 2006). L2 learners participated in the first interview within the first four days of the program and the second within the last three days of the program, for a total of 90 learner interviews and approximately 40 hours of recorded data (approx. 30 minutes × 90 interviews). Interview formats have been used in prior examinations of L2 intensifiers (Sardabi & Afghari, 2015), but most often prior investigations have relied on written data or experimental approaches, making the current data useful for understanding how learners use intensifiers in spontaneous spoken language.

A comparative data set of semi-structured interviews with 10 native Spanish speakers from Madrid, using the same interview structure that was used with L2 learners, was created. Each native speaker was interviewed one time (approx. 30 minutes × 10 interviews = 5 hours). The native speaker group provided a measure of the approximate ambient input for the learners in Madrid and sociopragmatic norms in Madrid.

The word counts used in this investigation excluded interviewee fillers (e.g. *uh, um*), partial words (e.g. *ex- ex- excelente; ex- ex- were excluded*) and extra-linguistic information (e.g. laughter) that were present in the transcriptions, following Bishop (2017) and considering that L2 and native speaker data likely vary in their use of fillers and partial words. Considering these exclusions, Table 2 lists the total interviewee word counts for learners and native speakers.

Table 2. Interviewee word count for L2-pre, L2-post, and NS groups

Group	Interviewee word count		
	Total	Mean	*SD*
L2-pre (*n* = 45)	57,536	1,278.58	571.14
L2-post (*n* = 45)	69,891	1,553.13	675.13
NS (*n* = 10)	11,754	1,175.40	693.41

3.3 Analyses

3.3.1 Intensifier identification and relative frequency

AntConc (Anthony, 2014) was used for the corpus analyses. Frequency word lists by group were examined to identify the most frequent lexical intensifiers. The seven most common lexical intensifiers used by the L2-pre, L2-post, and NS groups were: BASTANTE 'a lot/quite', DEMASIADO 'so/too much', MUCHO 'a lot', MUY 'very', SÚPER 'super', TANTO 'so much', TODO 'all'. These seven were included in the analyses because they coincided with the most frequent intensifier items in all groups and each appeared at least two times per group. All tokens of these seven intensifiers, including all inflections, were identified in the data. Following the approach to collapse part of speech categories used by Davies (2006), the current investigation did not distinguish between the different grammatical uses of the intensifiers under examination. Independent of whether intensifiers were used as adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, or determiners, they were included in the analysis. Examples (1-7) show L2 uses of intensifiers from the data.

(1) *Bastante* (L2-pre, Sienna)
    En mi universidad tengo un grupo que es <u>bastante</u> bastante diversa
    'At my university I have a group that is <u>quite</u> quite diverse'

(2) *Demasiada* (L2-post, Angela)
    No sé. Yo traigo <u>demasiada</u> ropa [laughter]
    'I don't know. I bring too many clothes [laughter]'

(3) *Muchas* (L2-post, Elly)
    pero sí, <u>muchas</u> veces ella tenía que decirme
    'but yes, <u>many</u> times she had to tell me'

(4) *Muy* (L2-post, Matt)

y ella es <u>muy</u> simpática, <u>muy</u> cómica, <u>muy</u> extrovertida
'and she is <u>very</u> nice, <u>very</u> funny, and <u>very</u> extroverted'

(5) *Súper* (L2-pre, Nancy)
   Fue <u>súper</u> bien porque no hay un centro commercial
   'It went <u>super</u> well because there isn't a mall'

(6) *Tanto* (L2-post, Eric)
   A mí no me gusta mucho cuando hay <u>tanto</u> cosas turísticas
   'I don't like it when there are <u>so many</u> touristic things'

(7) *Toda* (L2-pre, Ben)
   Pero aquí <u>toda</u> la familia comer en la mesa
   'But here <u>all</u> of the family eats at the table'

A manual analysis of all intensifier tokens was conducted to identify those to be excluded from the quantitative analyses. Following Tagliamonte (2006), the immediate repetition of an intensifier (e.g. *muy, muy* 'very, very') was excluded. Intensifiers within two formulaic phrases were also excluded. The first was *mucho* 'much' when used in *mucho gusto*, literally translated to 'much pleasure' and functionally as 'nice to meet you.' It was excluded because the intensifier is a required part of the chunk and does not serve to intensify. The second was *todo* 'all' used in *todo eso* 'all that.' It was excluded because this phrase was used as a hedge to make the meaning more fuzzy or vague, not to intensify. Intensifier tokens that appeared under negation were excluded as well since they served to mitigate (e.g. *no hay mucha gente* 'there are not a lot of people;' referring to a small number of people, not an intensified quantity). Speech production errors containing intensifiers were also excluded; these were identified when participants produced an intensifier that was not connected to the surrounding content syntactically or considering the discourse meaning.

A total of 4,808 L2 and 306 NS intensifier tokens were included in the analyses. The L2-pre data included 2,154 intensifiers ($M = 47.87$, $SD = 24.04$); the L2-post data included 2,654 intensifiers ($M = 58.98$, $SD = 24.66$). Relative intensifier frequency (intensifier token count / total interviewee words × 10,000) was calculated for each participant and data collection time to account for the fact that not all interviews contained the same number of words. To facilitate the interpretation, the initial relative intensifier frequency (intensifier token count / total interviewee words) was multiplied by 10,000.

3.3.2 Statistical and collocational analyses
All statistical analyses were conducted in *R* statistical software (R Core Team, 2018). In response to research question 1 about the change in overall intensifier frequency over study abroad and considering the comparison between learners and native speakers, statistical analyses were conducted using a linear mixed model analysis with the *LME4* package (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2016), and *p* values were generated using the *lmerTest* package (Kuznetsova, Brockhoff, & Christensen, 2014). The significance criterion was set at $p < .05$. In response to research question 2 about the relationship between the degree of change in intensifier frequency and the learners' initial frequency (L2-pre), a correlation between L2

change and L2-pre frequency was conducted. A follow-up analysis compared intensifier frequency change across three subgroups of learners with different initial intensifier frequencies, using a second mixed effects model and subsequent planned posthoc analysis (TukeyHSD).

Finally, in response to research question 3 about qualitative uses of intensifiers by L2 learners, two analyses were conducted. The first was a two-way ANOVA that examined learners' intensifier lexical diversity over the program and among the three subgroups of learners, where intensifier lexical diversity is a measure of how many different intensifier types of the seven analyzed were used by each participant. While a quantitative analysis, the results of this test provided additional qualitative understanding of the developmental trends of learners and their uses of intensifiers. The second analysis that responded to research question 3 was an analysis of intensifier collocations used by learners and native speakers. Whereas L2 research often examines collocations via a frequency analysis (i.e. how often the word combination appears together) or using a specific collocational measure of the strength of the relationship between the words, the current collocation analysis reported frequency and collocational strength while also considering the syntactic relationships to identify intensifiers. Using *Antconc* (Anthony, 2014), the collocation window was set to examine co-occurrences with one word to the left and then one word to the right (e.g. *mucha gente* 'a lot of people,' *me gusta mucho* 'I like it a lot'). All collocation data were ranked by frequency and the MI-score. The MI-score is a statistical measure of collocational strength that serves well to compare collocational information across different sized corpora (i.e. NS vs. L2) (Hunston, 2002; Gablasova, Brezina, & McEnery, 2017). This measure, different from a strict frequency measure, considers frequency, exclusivity, and dispersion of the collocation in the corpus (see Gablasova et al., 2017 for details). An MI-score of three is a suggested threshold to identify collocations (Hunston, 2002), and various investigations have found that NS MI-scores are higher than L2 MI-scores, marking a difference between NS and L2 data (see Gablasova et al., 2017 for discussion). The top ten collocations with a frequency of at least two and an MI-score of at least three, and that represented the grammatical functions of intensifiers, were presented as part of the analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Intensifier frequency across L2-pre, L2-post, and NS groups

The initial model included Intensifier Frequency as the dependent variable and Group (L2-pre, L2-post, NS) as a fixed effect. Accounting for the group structure (i.e. two measures for the L2 group and one for the NS group), two a priori orthogonal contrasts were defined: Contrast 1 examined the effect of language background (L2 vs. NS); Contrast 2 examined the effect of time on L2 speakers (L2-pre vs. L2-post). Participant was included as a random effect with random intercept.[3] This was the maximal random effect structure that permitted

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[3] Model comparison showed that the inclusion of participant as a random effect (log likelihood = -606.68) significantly improved the model fit relative to a simplified model without the random effect (log likelihood = -613.71, $\chi^2(1) = 14.06$. $p < .001$).

model convergence (see Barr, Levy, Scheepers, & Tily, 2013). Model fit was assessed using conditional (R^2 = .074) and marginal R^2 (R^2 = .540). Examination of a Q-Q plot of the residuals confirmed that the residuals were normally distributed.

Results of the model (Table 3) indicated that there was a significant difference in the relative intensifier frequency between the L2 learners and native speakers (Contrast 1). Specifically, L2 learners (M = 391.95, SD = 131.29) used intensifiers with a significantly greater frequency than native speakers (M = 272.33, SD = 88.91). Considering the effect of time on intensifier frequency, there was no significant difference between L2 learners at L2-pre and L2-post (Contrast 2). Figure 1 shows the distribution of the observed data, specifically comparing the L2 group at L2-pre and L2-post to the native speaker group (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics). The initial statistical results do not indicate change in learners' frequency of use of intensifiers over the program. However, the results do demonstrate a general overuse of intensifiers compared to native speakers.

Table 3. Linear mixed-effects model results

	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Left CI	Right CI	p
Intercept	352.08	16.30	21.61	319.49	384.67	< .001
Contrast 1: L2 vs. NS	-39.87	14.29	-2.79	-68.45	-11.29	.006
Contrast 2: pre vs. post	-2.21	13.56	-0.16	-29.33	24.91	.870
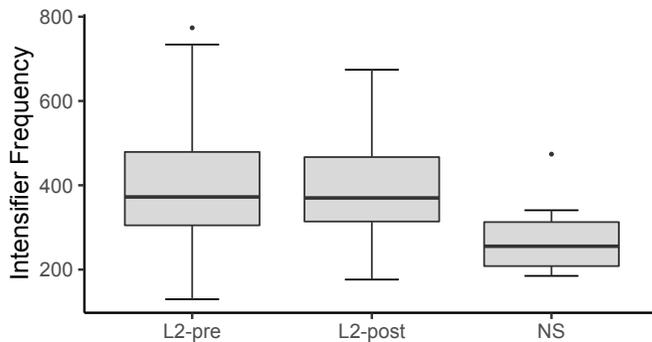
Figure 1. Intensifier frequencies for L2-pre, L2-post and NS groups

Table 4. Intensifier token counts by group

Group	Intensifier count			Intensifier relative frequency	
	Total	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
L2-pre (n = 45)	2,154	47.87	24.04	389.74	145.99
L2-post (n = 45)	2,654	58.98	24.66	394.15	116.36
NS (n = 10)	306	30.60	16.46	272.33	88.91

4.2 Relationship between L2 change in intensifier frequency and initial use

To explore and demonstrate the potential relationship between the change in learners' intensifier frequency, defined as L2-post frequency minus L2-pre frequency (L2 change), and their initial intensifier frequency (L2-pre), a correlation between L2 change and L2-pre intensifier frequency was conducted (Figure 2). Learners who began the program using relatively few intensifiers compared to other learners experienced positive shifts over the program; learners who began the program using many intensifiers compared to other learners experienced negative shifts in intensifier frequency over the program. This finding indicates the existence of different trends in intensifier frequency change over short-term study abroad among learners. The different trends experienced by learners over the program were masked in the prior analysis of group differences in Section 4.1. The strong correlation points to convergence towards some mid-level intensifier frequency.
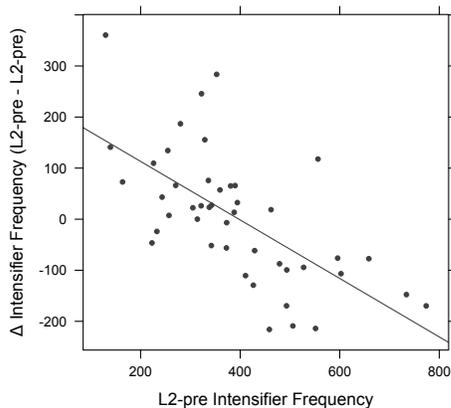

Figure 2. Relationship between L2 intensifier change (L2-post – L2-pre) and L2-pre intensifier frequency

To explore the divergent developmental trends identified with the correlation, learners were separated into three subgroups of equal numbers ($n = 15$) depending on their L2-pre intensifier frequency (L2 Low, L2 Mid, L2 High), a measure that highly correlated with intensifier change. To verify that learner subgroups were different in their L2-pre intensifier frequencies (dependent variable), a one-way ANOVA with the independent variable of Subgroup (L2 Low, L2 Mid, L2 High) was conducted. A significant difference among groups was found, confirming distinct intensifier frequencies at the beginning of the program, $F(2, 42) = 72.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.77$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons (TukeyHSD) indicated that all groups were different ($p < .001$), (L2 Low $M = 245.51$, $SD = 62.32$; L2 Mid $M = 369.02$, $SD = 29.36$; L2 High $M = 554.69$, $SD = 101.69$). To preliminarily examine whether the differences in initial intensifier frequency were the result of subgroup differences in either participant proficiency or vocabulary breadth, analyses of both measures were conducted using one-way ANOVAs. With DELE Proficiency Score as the dependent variable, the one-way ANOVA confirmed that there were no significant differences among the three subgroups

at L2-pre[4], $F(2, 33) = .924$, $p = .401$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$, (L2 Low $M = 389.20$, $SD = 142.32$; L2 Mid $M = 364.07$, $SD = 96.09$; L2 High $M = 340.53$, $SD = 89.94$). To assess vocabulary breadth, lexical diversity was calculated for each participant at L2-pre. Lexical diversity can be measured in a variety of ways, considering or not considering text length (Johansson, 2008). For the current purposes of understanding vocabulary breadth of the L2 learners, the count of unique words (types) was used. The results of the one-way ANOVA with lexical diversity at L2-pre as the dependent variable indicated no significant differences among the three subgroups, $F(2, 42) = 0.709$, $p = .498$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$ (L2 Low $M = 30.20$, $SD = 8.89$; L2 Mid $M = 26.57$, $SD = 5.18$; L2 High $M = 28.67$, $SD = 5.71$). As such, the initial differences in relative intensifier frequency among the three subgroups were not the result of either differences in proficiency or lexical diversity.

Returning to the examination of the role of immersion on L2 intensifier frequency, a second mixed effects model was conducted with Intensifier Frequency as the dependent variable and Subgroup (L2 Low, L2 Mid, L2 High) and Time (L2-pre, L2-post) as fixed effects. Model comparison showed that inclusion of participant as a random effect (log likelihood = -503.56) significantly improved model fit relative to a simplified model without the random effect (log likelihood = -507.10; $\chi^2(1) = 7.093$. $p = .008$). Model fit was assessed with marginal ($R^2 = .522$) and conditional R^2 ($R^2 = .711$).

Results of the model (Table 5) confirmed that there were significant differences between the intercept (L2 Low, L2-pre) and each of the other two subgroups at L2-pre. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the intercept (L2 Low, L2-pre) and the L2 Low subgroup at L2-post, suggesting that the L2 Low subgroup increased in their relative intensifier frequency throughout the immersion experience. There was also a significant interaction between Subgroup and Time at the posttest for the L2 High group, suggesting that the impact of time was different for the L2 Low and L2 High subgroups.

Table 5. Linear mixed-effects model results for comparison of L2-pre, L2-post, and NS intensifier frequency for the L2 Low, L2 Mid, and L2 High subgroups

	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Left CI	Right CI	p
Intercept	245.51	23.74	10.34	198.03	292.99	< .001
L2 Mid	123.50	33.58	3.68	56.34	190.66	< .001
L2 High	309.18	33.58	9.21	242.02	376.34	< .001
L2-post	89.71	26.13	3.43	37.45	141.97	.001
L2 Mid: L2-post	-60.01	36.96	-1.62	-133.93	13.91	.112
L2 High: L2-post	-195.88	36.96	-5.30	-269.8	-121.96	< .001

Subsequent planned posthoc analysis, TukeyHSD, allowed for the comparison of the impact of time on each individual subgroup. Results of the posthoc analysis indicated that the L2 Low group produced a significantly greater intensifier frequency at L2-post relative to L2-pre ($b = -89.7$, $SE = 26.1$, $t = -3.43$, CI[-141.9, -37.5], $p = .016$). Trending in the opposite direction, the L2 High group produced significantly lower intensifier frequency at L2-post

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[4] Nine DELE data points were missing: two from the L2 Low, three from the L2 Mid, and four from the L2 High group.

relative to L2-pre (b = 106.2, SE = 26.1, t = 4.063, CI[54.0, 158.4], p = .003). In contrast, there was no significant impact of time on the L2 Mid group (b = -29.7, SE = 26.1, t = -1.136, CI[-81.9, 22.5], p = .863). Figure 3 illustrates the intensifier frequency at L2-pre and L2-post for each participant in each of the subgroups. The solid lines represent the predicted values from the model and the dashed lines the actual learner values. Broadly, it can be seen that the L2 Low group produced a greater intensifier frequency following immersion while the L2 High group produced a lower Intensifier Frequency following immersion.
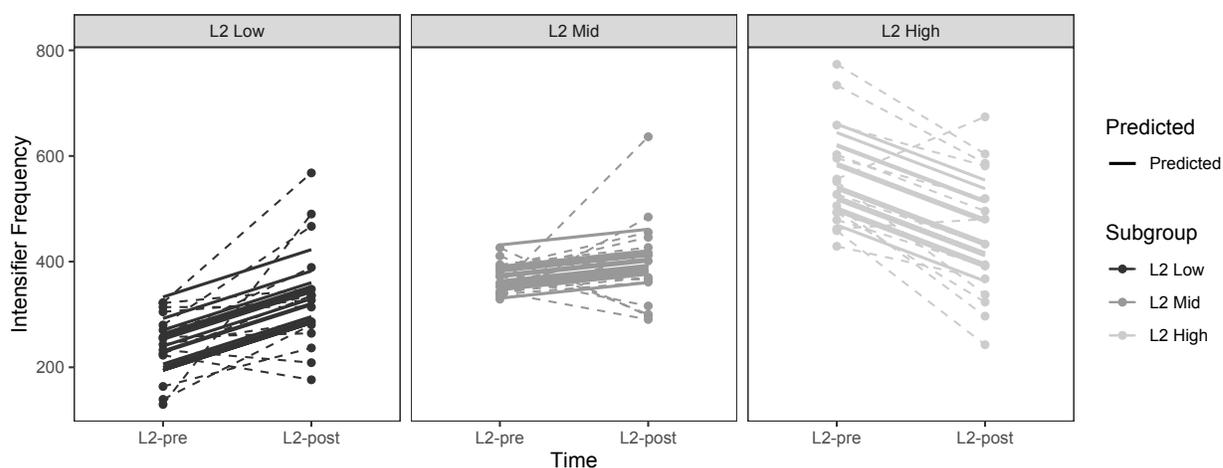

Figure 3. Intensifier frequency by participant at the L2-pre and L2-post for each subgroup (solid lines represent the predicted values, dashed lines represent the actual values)

While statistical measures to compare L2 subgroups to the native speaker group were not possible because of limited data in L2 subgroups, descriptive statistics provided a possible explanation for the distinct developmental trends in intensifier frequency over short-term study abroad (Table 6). With the native speakers' relative intensifier frequency being an average of 272.34, the L2 Low group began the program producing fewer intensifiers than native speakers on average; the L2 High group began the program producing many more intensifiers than the native speaker normal range. Both of these learner groups modified their intensifier frequency over the program, moving towards the native speaker norm and perhaps indicating sociopragmatic accommodation to the local intensifier frequency norm in the ambient input in Madrid. The L2 Mid group did not experience a significant change over time, despite also showing a more frequent use of intensifiers compared to native speakers.

Table 6. Intensifier frequency descriptive statistics for L2-pre, L2-post, and NS groups considering the L2 Low, L2 Mid, and L2 High subgroups

Subgroup	Time	Mean	*SD*
NS (n = 10)		272.34	88.91
L2 Low (n = 15)	L2-pre	245.51	62.32
	L2-post	335.22	107.04

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L2 Mid (*n* = 15)	L2-pre	369.02	29.36
	L2-post	398.71	89.62
L2 High (*n* = 15)	L2-pre	554.69	101.69
	L2-post	448.52	127.11

4.3 Qualitative changes in learners' intensifier use over short-term study abroad

Further exploring the learners' developmental trends over the program going beyond intensifier frequency, the qualitative characteristics of learners' intensifier use over the program were evaluated considering intensifier lexical diversity and intensifier collocations.

Intensifier lexical diversity represents the unique intensifier words (types) used by learners at L2-pre and L2-post, considering the seven possible intensifiers analyzed: BASTANTE 'a lot/quite', DEMASIADO 'so/too much', MUCHO 'a lot', MUY 'very', SÚPER 'super', TANTO 'so much', TODO 'all.' Given the prior findings of different intensifier frequency trends among learner subgroups, the learner subgroups were again examined considering intensifier lexical diversity. A two-way ANOVA with the independent variables of Subgroup (L2 Low, L2 Mid, L2 High) and Time (L2-pre, L2-post) with the dependent variable of Intensifier Lexical Diversity was conducted. Results indicated a significant effect of Time, $F(1, 84) = 3.82$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$, and no significant difference among Subgroups, $F(2, 84) = 1.63$, $p = .20$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$. Further illustrating that the effect of time was similar for all subgroups, there was no significant interaction between Time and Subgroup, $F(2, 84) = 0.55$, $p = .58$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$. Descriptive statistics in Table 7 indicate that the three learner subgroups increased their intensifier lexical diversity over the program, meaning that they used a wider range of intensifier types at the end of the program compared to the beginning. All subgroups shifted in the direction of the native speakers' intensifier lexical diversity. Descriptive statistics for each of the seven intensifiers for the L2-pre, L2-post, and NS groups are provided in Appendix A.

Table 7. Intensifier lexical diversity descriptive statistics for L2-pre, L2-post, and NS groups considering the L2 Low, L2 Mid, and L2 High subgroups

Subgroup	Time	Mean	*SD*
NS (*n* = 10)		5.10	1.10
L2 Low (*n* = 15)	L2-pre	3.67	0.72
	L2-post	4.27	1.03
L2 Mid (*n* = 15)	L2-pre	3.40	0.51
	L2-post	3.73	1.03

L2 High (*n* = 15)	L2-pre	3.67	0.72
	L2-post	3.80	1.01

Given the prior findings regarding the increase in intensifier lexical diversity over the program for all three learner subgroups, the intensifier collocation analysis examined learners collectively at L2-pre and L2-post and also examined intensifier collocations used by native speakers. Table 8 includes the ten most frequent collocations with at least two uses and an MI-score of at least three for MUY and MUCHO, the two most frequently used intensifier types by learners and native speakers, and Appendix B includes the same frequency lists for the remaining intensifiers examined in order of overall frequency of use by learners and native speakers (i.e. TODO, TAN, BASTANTE, SÚPER, DEMASIADO).

Overall, the collocation analysis demonstrated many similarities between the native speakers and learners, and also for learners at the beginning and end of the program. Considering MUY collocations, *muy bien* 'very well,' *muy diferente* 'very different,' *muy muy* 'very, very,' *muy divertido* 'very fun,' and *muy interesante* 'very interesting' appear as strong collocations for native speakers and learners at the beginning and end of the program. Furthermore, *muy* is paired with adjectives of size (i.e. *grande* 'big,' *pequeño* 'small') and various positive adjectives (i.e. *cariñoso* 'caring,' *amable* 'nice,' and *simpático* 'nice') for all groups. One difference in the data is that native speakers use collocates that are characteristic of Spanish in Spain, including *chulo* 'cool' and *majo* 'nice,' exhibiting great collocational strength (MI-scores = 6.97); the learners do not use these. Yet overall, the findings indicate that native speakers and learners share similar uses of MUY. Furthermore, there are similarities in how the NS and L2 learners reflect on their study abroad experiences as evidenced via intensifier collocations – positive and emotive experiences. In terms of learner development, the MUY collocations indicate similar usage at the beginning and end of the program.

Considering collocations involving MUCHO, learner and native speaker data indicated high collocational strength with the verb *gustar* 'to be pleased' or 'to like' and words such as *gente* 'people,' *personas* 'people,' and *más* 'more' (Table 8), again showing similarities between native speakers and learners and also little change in the characteristic uses of intensifiers for learners over the program abroad. The strong collocations with MUCHO showed the use of the intensifier in a range of grammatical positions, confirming that learners can apply an intensifier's meaning in a range of grammatical contexts (Davies, 2006: 5).

Table 8. MUY, MUCHO, [L1, R1], Frequency, MI-score, and Collocation by Group and Time

RANK	NS (n = 10) Freq.	MI-score	Collocation	L2-pre (n = 45) Freq.	MI-score	Collocation	L2-post (n = 45) Freq.	MI-score	Collocation
1	15	4.47	*muy* bien	100	4.76	*muy* bien	86	4.68	*muy* bien
2	4	4.97	*muy* diferente	55	4.28	*muy* diferente	67	2.44	*muy* muy
3	4	2.30	*muy* muy	49	2.15	*muy* muy	52	4.38	*muy* diferente
4	3	6.97	*muy* chulo	38	4.89	*muy* grande	51	5.65	*muy* divertido
5	3	5.56	*muy* interesante	29	5.35	*muy* divertido	32	4.84	*muy* interesante
6	3	4.39	*muy* divertido	24	5.96	*muy* rápido	29	4.93	*muy* cerca
7	2	6.97	*muy* majos	22	4.99	*muy* interesante	26	4.64	*muy* grande
8	2	6.97	*muy* cariñosa	20	5.74	*muy* amables	21	5.40	*muy* simpáticos
9	2	6.39	*muy* pequeño	19	5.16	*muy* simpáticos	21	5.40	*muy* rápido
10	2	5.65	*muy* mal	18	5.64	*muy* bonita	18	3.35	*muy* difícil
10	2	5.65	*muy* bonito						
1	10	5.13	gusta *mucho*	93	6.65	gusta *mucho*	143	6.05	gusta *mucho*
2	10	5.05	*mucha* gente	69	6.70	*muchas* personas	81	6.43	*muchas* cosas
3	8	7.27	*muchas* gracias	49	7.09	*muchas* cosas	81	4.89	*much** más
4	8	3.64	*mucho* más	41	5.09	*much** más	52	5.45	*muchas* personas
5	5	4.80	*muchas* cosas	37	7.02	*mucho* tiempo	34	6.03	*muchas* gente
6	3	5.65	*mucho* tiempo	29	7.35	*muchas* veces	32	6.19	*muchas* veces
7	2	7.97	*muchos* tipos	17	6.17	*mucha* gente	30	3.80	*mucho* mucho
8	2	7.97	*muchas* ganas	12	3.69	sé *mucho*	20	7.08	aprendido *mucho*
9	2	7.97	*mucho* frío	10	7.99	*muchas* diferencias	15	4.81	*mucho* tiempo
10				10	6.20	hablan *mucho*	13	7.07	aprendí *mucho*

The collocational data in Appendix B highlighted similarities and a few differences between the NS and L2 corpora. In terms of differences, TODO in a position that precedes copular verbs like *estar* 'to be' and *ser* 'to be' was commonly used by learners, but not native speakers. This finding may indicate a tendency for these learners to rely more on generalizations about things or people than the native speakers (e.g. *Todos son amables.* 'All are nice.'). A difference that was found with respect to various intensifiers was that there were more collocations identified for learners compared to native speakers, which either may indicate an overuse of these intensifiers or reflect the different NS and L2 corpora sizes. Overall though, the data in Appendix B highlight similarities among the collocations themselves across native speaker and learner groups, while also indicating similar differences in overall frequency by intensifier type for native speakers and learners (see also Appendix A).

5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to examine L2 intensifiers in spoken, spontaneous, semi-structured interview data over a 6-week study abroad program to understand whether learners developed sociopragmatic norms of the local community. L2 results were compared with those of native speakers from the study abroad location who participated in the same interview format. The native speaker data represented the ambient input to which the learners were exposed and, thus, provided a baseline for the sociopragmatic norms of Madrid.

The first set of results in response to research question (1) indicated a significant difference between learners and native speakers' intensifier frequency with learners using more intensifiers overall than native speakers. There was no difference over time for learners when data were taken as a whole. Thus, the results did not align with the hypothesis that learners would experience change over the immersion program. The results did align with prior research highlighting a trend of L2 overuse of intensifiers compared to native speaking populations (Lorenz, 1998; Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004), with this research offering overall intensifier frequency as a measure of overuse. Yet, follow-up analyses provided a more nuanced understanding of this overall trend of overuse by L2 learners.

The analyses in response to research question (2) shed additional light on the question of sociopragmatic development with respect to L2 learners' intensifier frequency. The correlational data demonstrated a strong negative relationship ($r = -.62$), indicating that L2 learners who initially used intensifiers less frequently compared to other learners increased their frequency of use over the program and those who initially used intensifiers more frequently than other learners decreased their frequency of use over the program. The correlational analysis exposed new information about L2 learners' intensifier frequency trends over the program and contributed the understanding that the L2 data as a whole may converge towards some centralized level of intensifier frequency. The overall intensifier frequency analysis in response to research question (1) effectively masked the divergent trends among the learners. Further exploring the divergent L2 trends, a secondary analysis of three learner subgroups based on their initial intensifier frequency (L2 Low, L2 Mid, L2 High) was conducted, which showed that the L2 Low group experienced a significant change

in intensifier frequency over time, increasing over time. The L2 High group also showed a significant change over the program, decreasing over time. The L2 Mid group did not exhibit any significant difference between the beginning and end of the program. Evaluating the general trends of the two learner subgroups with significant change over the immersion program and the native speakers' intensifier frequency, it was noted that the L2 Low group began with intensifier frequency values lower than the native speakers and the L2 High group with values higher than the native speakers. Thus, it is possible that learners during short-term study abroad are sensitive to the overall intensifier frequency norms in the ambient input and accommodate to those sociopragmatic norms. The L2 Mid group also had values that were higher than native speakers; it would be expected that this group would also use fewer intensifiers over time to align better with the ambient input, but no significant difference over time was identified. A possible explanation for this is that the difference in intensifier frequency between the L2 Mid group and the ambient input was not as salient as the differences in intensifier frequency between the other learner subgroups and the ambient input. These results, which will be further discussed in Section 5.1, aligned with the hypothesis that immersion experiences facilitate adjustment to the sociopragmatic norm or, in other words, sociopragmatic accommodation (Alcón-Soler, 2015a; Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Edmonds, 2014; Kanwit et al., 2015; Li, 2014; Schauer, 2009; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2014).

Research question (3) examined learners' use of intensifiers through analyses of intensifier lexical diversity and intensifier collocations. It was hypothesized that the data would exhibit change over the program for learners. The hypothesis was confirmed by the analysis of intensifier lexical diversity, with all learner subgroups experiencing a significant increase over the program, meaning that learners used additional intensifier types at the end of the program compared to the beginning. The learners' increase in intensifier types shifted towards the native speaker intensifier lexical diversity measure, indicating that learners became more similar to the native speakers in their use of intensifiers. Although, at the end of the program, the learners still used fewer intensifier types compared to native speakers. The collocational analysis did not highlight any change in learner usage over the immersion program, nor did it highlight major differences between learners and native speakers. Specific differences noted between learners and native speakers were the absence of collocates that are particular to Peninsular Spanish like *chulo* 'cool' and *majo* 'nice' in the learner data, a tendency for learners to use TODO with copular verbs perhaps expressing more generalizations than native speakers, and the finding of more collocations by intensifier in learner data compared to native speaker data. In response to the hypothesis for research question (3), the intensifier lexical diversity analysis aligned with the hypothesis in that change over the program was identified. This was not the case for the collocation analysis from which similarities between the NS and L2 corpora and between the L2-pre and L2-post data were most apparent.

5.1 The impact of immersion on L2 intensifier use

Collectively, the analyses of intensifier frequency, intensifier lexical diversity, and intensifier collocations allow for additional understanding of how different sets of intensifier knowledge relate to L2 development over an immersion program abroad. The data point to L2

development in intensifier use over short-term study abroad, particularly in terms of intensifier frequency and intensifier lexical diversity. Both analyses demonstrated that learners' change over the program was in the direction of native speaker norms, with different learner trends being exposed with respect to intensifier frequency and one general trend of increase in intensifier lexical diversity for the learner group as a whole. For intensifier frequency, given that no explanation of proficiency or vocabulary breath differences were found to explain the different learner subgroup frequencies, it seems clear that accommodation towards the sociopragmatic native speaker norm is a likely explanation since learners who used the fewest intensifiers and the most intensifiers at the beginning of the program experienced change in intensifier frequency over the program in the direction of the native speaker norm; the change for both the L2 Low and L2 High groups represented significant differences over the six week program. The L2 Mid group did not exhibit a significant change over the program, and while using more intensifiers than native speakers on average, this group's intensifier frequency may not have been different enough from the ambient norm at the beginning of the program to prompt further adjustment in the direction of the native speaker norm. For intensifier lexical diversity, this same explanation of sociopragmatic development could be provided but the results also align with explanations of lexical acquisition. The analysis of collocations did not show any impact of the immersion experience on learners' collocational knowledge, but learners' collocations were quite similar to those used by native speakers.

Considering the proposal that the different intensifier frequency trends over short-term study abroad indicate sociopragmatic accommodation, the findings align with prior L2 pragmatics research that has shown that study abroad is an environment in which learners can experience sociopragmatic development (see Pérez-Vidal & Shively, 2019 for a review). The prior literature has most often found sociopragmatic development during study abroad with certain types of pragmatic variables such as speech acts (e.g. Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2015; Shively, 2016) and structures that allow for enhanced interactions such as assessments, collaborative contributions, and collaborative completions (Dings, 2014) and conversational phenomenon like the use of incomplete sentences to co-construct discourse (Taguchi, 2014). The current investigation suggests that L2 learners may also experience sociopragmatic development in intensifier frequency over short-term study abroad. Also related to intensifiers, Kanwit et al. (2018) demonstrated that learners adjusted to local sociopragmatic norms of intensifier preference over a six-week immersion program when judging the use of *muy* 'very' and *bien* 'very', a finding which also relies on learners' ability to gauge local intensifier frequency.

The suggestion that intensifier frequency undergoes sociopragmatic accommodation for these learners of Spanish during short-term study abroad requires some reflection about why intensifier frequency may be a pragmatic resource that is important to use in sociopragmatically appropriate ways and what allows these learners to accommodate the local intensifier frequency norm during the immersion program. Regarding the importance of intensifier frequency, it should be noted that the pragmatic meaning of intensifiers is to communicate heightened emotion and involvement (Baños, 2013; Briz, 1996), a characteristic that may allow for enhanced interactions. Other pragmatic resources that enhance interactions have also been found to be developed during study abroad (Dings, 2014; Taguchi, 2014).

In terms of what allows for the learners to adjust to the sociopragmatic norms of intensifier frequency, as evidenced in the current data, the learners already had a strong sense of which intensifiers are most frequent in Spanish and how to use them in appropriate linguistic environments at the beginning of the program. Thus, they had already developed certain types of intensifier knowledge, which may have facilitated their ability to modify their intensifier frequency over the period abroad.

More generally, whether or not sociopragmatic development is likely to occur for learners considering a specific pragmatic variable may depend on many factors. Intensifier use in English and Spanish have many characteristics in common, which may partially explain why L2 learners may be able to develop sociopragmatically appropriate uses of intensifier frequency over short-term study abroad. The syntactic patterns involving intensifiers are similar in the learners' L1 and L2; the pragmatic meaning of the intensifiers under examination, contributing heightened emotion and involvement, is equally transparent in Spanish and English; the use of intensifiers in both languages communicates emotion, subjectivity, and involvement; the relationship between intensifiers and both emotion and interaction may naturally encourage a relationship-building activity like accommodation to another's sociopragmatic norm of intensifier frequency. Furthermore, considering that the use of intensifiers is often based on subjective choices and that their use varies depending on the mode of language and many social and contextual variables (Biber, 1988; Lakoff, 1973; 1975; Leaper & Robnett, 2011; Swales & Burke, 2003; Xiao & Tao, 2007), learners may already be experienced with the often-present optionality and variability of intensifiers, which may encourage the process of adaptation to new sociopragmatic norms related to intensifier frequency. Finally, the high frequency of intensifiers in Spanish (Davies, 2006) may also encourage L2 accommodation to the sociopragmatic norm during even short-term periods in Spanish-speaking communities. We may expect further accommodation over longer periods of immersion.

While trends of sociopragmatic accommodation were identified with the results of the present study, there was also a general tendency for learners to overuse intensifiers, also aligning with prior research (Lorenz, 1998; Pérez-Paredes & Díez-Bedmar, 2012; Philip, 2007; Recski, 2004). The overall intensifier frequency results (Section 4.1) along with the reduced variety of intensifier tokens for learners compared to native speakers found in the intensifier lexical diversity analysis (Section 4.3) demonstrated intensifier overuse overall and also overuse of the individual intensifier types compared to native speakers. Explaining the tendency for learners to overuse intensifiers, in addition to the explanation that intensifiers enhance learners' fluency and allow them to avoid other more difficult structures (Philip, 2007), the overuse of intensifiers may also result from the desire to communicate emotion and involvement with others, key pragmatic meanings associated with intensifiers that positively impact interactions (Baños, 2013; Briz, 1996).

5.2 Remaining questions about intensifier frequency

There are still remaining questions about the results of the current investigation and the study of L2 intensifiers in general. Regarding the diverse trends of the three subgroups of learners, the current data indicated that different learners began the program using different frequencies of intensifiers (L2-pre). The data also showed that those learner groups

experienced different developmental trends over the immersion program. While this investigation ruled out the impact of proficiency and vocabulary breadth, future research should consider other variables to explain the different L2-pre intensifier frequencies among learners. Individual characteristics such as personality, gender, L1 speaking style, or level of interactional competence could potentially explain why different learners began the program using different intensifier frequencies. While these variables may seem potentially explanatory for the L2-pre intensifier frequency, they would not seem to explain the different developmental trends associated with the different L2-pre frequencies. For example, if a learner who is more extroverted uses many intensifiers and a more introverted learner uses fewer intensifiers at the beginning of the program, it is unclear why the extroverted learner would use fewer intensifiers over the program and the introverted learner use more over the program. With this, individual characteristics like those proposed may explain the L2-pre intensifier frequency but not the developmental trends identified.

Another option for future exploration is the potential impact of the effect of the study abroad program on individual learners to explain the diverse trends of intensifier frequency. Some learners may feel more emotions at the beginning of the program, while others may feel more emotions at the end; the emotional state may be reflected in the tendency to use intensifiers. Similarly, since intensifiers communicate involvement, learners' intensifier frequency may be explained by learners' interest in showing involvement during the interview, which may vary over time. These variables could be examined in future studies through psychological measures, or they could also be examined through an analysis of the co-occurrence of intensifiers with other linguistic variables that communicate emotion or interactional competence. Finally, while the current data pointed to a significant increase in L2 intensifier lexical diversity over the study abroad program, future work is needed to explore which intensifiers tended to be used at the beginning and end of the program to further highlight developmental trends.

These and other remaining questions call attention to certain limitations of the current study. A main limitation was the limited data in the three learner subgroups. This prevented additional comparison with native speaker groups, which could have provided stronger evidence of sociopragmatic accommodation. Furthermore, additional collection of data related to learners' individual characteristics and their emotional states at the beginning and end of the study abroad program may have provided useful data to explain intensifier use.

6. Conclusion

This study examined intensifiers used by L2 speakers of Spanish in spoken language over a short-term language immersion program abroad and compared learners at the beginning and end of the program to native Spanish speakers, representing the ambient input and sociopragmatic norm in the study abroad location. Through examination of intensifier frequency, intensifier lexical diversity, and intensifier collocations, results indicated different developmental trajectories over the program. No change over time was found with respect to learners' use of collocations, but the immersion program was shown to have positive effects on both intensifier lexical diversity and intensifier frequency. Although the developmental trajectories over the immersion program for intensifier lexical diversity and intensifier

frequency were not the same, both were proposed to represent sociopragmatic development. The intensifier frequency results were particularly interesting in that they showed that learners who began the program using relatively few intensifiers experienced significant change, increasing the use of intensifiers over time. Those who began the program using relatively high numbers of intensifiers also experienced significant change over the program, reducing their use of intensifiers over the program. Both of these subgroups of learners shifted towards the native speaker intensifier frequency norm, indicating sociopragmatic accommodation over the short-term program. Various studies have found that L2 learners of a language can align with the sociopragmatic norms of a new community over time, including during short periods abroad (Czerwionka & Cuza, 2017; Dings, 2014; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2015; Shively, 2016; Kanwit et al., 2018). The current results expand on this understanding to apply to the sociopragmatic use of intensifier frequency, where intensifiers communicate heightened emotion and involvement (Baños, 2013; Briz, 1996).

The results of this study of L2 intensifier use may guide future research. The current results indicated that group measures, even for quite uniform L2 groups like the one under investigation, do not always expose all paths of linguistic development undergone by different learner subgroups or individual learners. Therefore, future studies should continue to consider group analyses along with other approaches to identify L2 developmental patterns. This investigation also highlighted distinct developmental trends related to different intensifier knowledge sets (i.e. frequency, lexical diversity, collocations), calling attention to the fact that acquisition and use of linguistic variables must be examined from a range of linguistic perspectives and approaches to analysis.

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Appendix A

Intensifier token counts and relative frequencies by type and by group

Group	Intensifier count			Intensifier relative frequency	
	Total	Median	*IQR*	Median	*IQR*
L2-pre (*n* = 45)					
BASTANTE	8	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
DEMASIADO	2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
MUCHO	809	15.00	10.00	134.13	101.88
MUY	903	19.00	11.00	154.08	102.94
SÚPER	5	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TAN	31	0.00	1.00	0.00	8.25
TODO	396	7.00	6.00	56.18	49.47
L2-post (*n* = 45)					
BASTANTE	27	0.00	1.00	0.00	3.55
DEMASIADO	14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
MUCHO	1,098	23.00	17.00	158.14	85.67
MUY	997	22.00	13.00	146.73	88.09
SÚPER	24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
TAN	35	0.00	1.00	0.00	8.76
TODO	459	9.00	10.00	65.45	42.67
NS (*n* = 10)					
BASTANTE	47	3.50	3.75	35.48	36.87
DEMASIADO	2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
MUCHO	86	7.50	8.00	58.09	87.10
MUY	88	6.50	3.75	65.04	63.69
SÚPER	14	1.00	2.00	11.81	16.91
TAN	13	0.00	1.75	0.00	11.59

TODO   56   4.50   4.50   46.11   24.81 !

Appendix B

Todo, tan, bastante, súper, demasiado, [L1, R1], Frequency, MI-score, and Collocation by Group and Time

	NS (n = 10)				L2-pre (n = 45)				L2-post (n = 14)			
RANK	Freq.	MI-score	Collocation		Freq.	MI-score	Collocation		Freq.	MI-score	Collocation	
1	10	4.11	*todo*	el	63	4.66	*todos*	los	84	4.57	*todos*	los
2	6	4.58	*todas*	las	52	4.89	*todo*	el	54	4.59	*todo*	el
3	4	7.95	*todas*	partes	41	5.16	*todas*	las	46	4.92	*todas*	las
4	4	3.72	*todos*	los	33	3.28	*toda*	la	16	3.97	*todos*	son !
5					20	4.18	*todos*	son	9	4.09	*todo*	lo !
6					12	5.58	*todos*	están	6	7.27	*todas*	partes !
7					8	4.03	*todo*	todo	6	3.63	*tod**	mis
8					8	4.42	*todo*	lo	6	3.67	*todo*	fue
9					3	3.23	*todo*	está	6	4.48	*tod**	están
10					2	4.85	*tod**	viven	6	3.81	*todo*	está
1	4	4.87	*tanta*	gente	6	6.46	*tan*	grande	4	5.94	*tan*	grande
2	3	8.12	*tanto*	movimiento	5	4.37	*tantas*	personas	4	5.52	*tan*	bueno
3	2	7.32	*tan*	grande	3	8.28	*tan*	lejos	4	5.18	*tan*	difícil
4	2	6.66	*tan*	fácil	2	6.14	*tan*	pequeño	3	10.05	*tan*	horrible
5	2	5.60	*tanto*	inglés	2	7.79	*tan*	largo	3	6.59	*tan*	rápido
6	2	3.71	*tan*	bien	2	7.00	*tan*	importante	3	5.96	*tan*	tan
7					2	3.73	*tan*	diferente	3	4.26	*tan*	diferente
8									3	3.69	*tantas*	cosas
9									2	6.88	*tan*	amables
10									2	3.95	*tanta*	gente
1	3	5.18	*bastante*	bastante	3	7.71	*bastante*	grande	3	6.48	*bastante*	grande
2	2	5.22	gustaría	*bastante*	2	6.17	*bastantes*	cosas	2	4.88	*bastante*	tiempo !
3									2	4.21	*bastante*	bien !
1	2	7.74	*súper*	interesante	3	6.83	*súper*	bien	3	9.36	*súper*	bonita
2	2	6.57	*súper*	divertido					3	5.47	*súper*	bien
3									2	11.51	*súper*	bonitas
4									2	7.63	*súper*	simpáticos
1									2	9.94	*demasiada*	ropa