



**Comparing second language development in three learning contexts: Study Abroad, Summer Camp and Intensive EFL Classes**

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## **Abstract**

The present study aimed to examine which of the following three learning contexts (Study Abroad, Summer Camp “at home” and Intensive English as a Foreign Language Classes) had the most favorable impact on second language (L2) development. The participants were 109 Catalan-Spanish bilingual learners of English (mean age = 12.91). L2 development was assessed through an elicited imitation task performed at the beginning and at the end of the programs (there were 18 days in between the two testing points in the three contexts). The task consisted of 23 simple English sentences, three of which were used to make the students familiar with the procedure. The sentences ranged between four and eight words in length and were semantically adapted to 10- to 17-year-old learners of English. As there were statistically significant differences between the three groups of participants at the pretest, instead of comparing the three posttests scores we compared the gains each group made. The main finding was that the Summer Camp “at home” context was the context where the participants made the greatest gains. However, these results have to be interpreted carefully as it was in this context where participants obtained the lowest scores at the pretest, which left them more room for improvement.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### *1.1. Literature review*

Learning context has received growing attention during the past few years and has been at the heart of many discussions. As highlighted by Housen, Schoonjans, Janssens, Welcomme, Schoonheere and Pierrard (2011), two main lines of research currently confront one another. On the one hand, supporters of Firth and Wagner (1997) who argue for a “reconceptualization of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research” (p. 285), they claim that “methodologies, theories, and foci within SLA reflect an imbalance between cognitive and mentalistic orientations, and social and contextual orientations to language, the former orientation being unquestionably in the ascendancy” (p. 285). In short, they think that little importance has been granted to social context in second language acquisition and that it probably has more impact than expected. On the other hand, we find supporters of Long (1997), who wrote an article to respond to Firth and Wagner. Long said that “SLA, as the name indicates, is the study of L2 *acquisition*, not (except indirectly) of “the nature of language” in general or “most centrally the language use of second or foreign language speakers”-especially not “most centrally”- interesting though those subjects may be” (p. 318). In other words, Long thinks that social context has nothing to do with second language acquisition and therefore does not need to be taken into account.

The present study, comparing the effect of three learning contexts on L2 development obviously relies on the assumption that learning context is a factor that has an influence on second language acquisition. As Collentine (2009) said, “one of the most important variables that affects the nature and the extent to which learners acquire a second language (L2) is the learning context, that is, whether the learning takes place within the society in which the L2 is productive or where the first language (L1) is productive” (p. 218). The results of the present study will contribute to the current debate about the possible effect of learning context on second language acquisition.

When trying to define learning context, Housen et al. (2011) suggest the following: “Learning context includes the linguistic input and output opportunities available to learners in their socio-physical environment but it is wider than that”

(p. 85). In addition, Freed, So and Lazar (2003) state “For many this term [context of learning] includes the broad, general L2 speech environment that surrounds learners (and thus the L2 exposed to the L2 learner) both in and out of the classroom” (p. 34). Moreover, Housen et al. (2011) maintain that most researchers have been subdividing learning contexts into two macro-contexts: natural(istic) vs. educational contexts. Naturalistic settings usually encourage implicit learning while educational contexts tend to encourage explicit learning. Implicit language acquisition is defined by Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2008) as “acquisition without conscious reflection on linguistic structure” (p. 482) while explicit language acquisition is defined as “conscious reflection on grammatical structure during acquisition” (p. 487). However, according to Ellis (2008) this subdivision is a bit elementary. Ellis (2008) maintains that implicit learning could occur in educational contexts and that explicit learning could occur in natural context. A somewhat more complex subdivision is the one suggested by Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004) who bring out five main settings: exclusively technological academic contexts, uninstructed learning settings for those residing in a native speech community, formal academic (in country or “at home”) language classrooms, IM [intensive domestic immersion] settings that integrate formal classroom (content or language oriented) and out-of-class learning opportunities, and SA [Study Abroad] contexts with potentially unlimited opportunities for use of the target language. This subdivision might be reflecting a bit more accurately and exhaustively the reality of learning contexts.

According to Collentine and Freed (2004), there are “three contexts in which high school or university level students typically find themselves” (p. 155): the formal language classroom (AH, for “at home”), the intensive domestic immersion (IM) context and the study abroad (SA) context. The present study extends the scope by introducing the intensive EFL Classes context instead of the “regular” at home context. As emphasized in Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004), very few studies have focused on the intensive domestic immersion context; therefore, the present study offers valuable data which are supplementing the currently incomplete empirical findings about learning contexts.

It is a common belief that studying abroad rather than receiving formal instruction in at home institution for example is the best way to acquire a second language. The SA setting is supposed to be the ultimate context to attain high levels of proficiency because, as suggested by DeKeyser (2007), it is the context that offers the best input quantitatively and qualitatively and the best interaction. That is the reason why, as highlighted by Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004), most studies on learning context have focused on the SA context rather than on other ones (IM, AH, etc.).

But what do students really learn when they spend a period of time abroad? On the one hand, studies narrow down the benefits of the SA context to the improvement of oral skills. Segalowitz and Freed (2004), using English native speakers studying Spanish for one semester, found that the participants in the SA context, compared to participants in the AH context, made greater gains in terms of temporal and hesitation phenomena and in oral proficiency. Freed, So and Lazar (2003), comparing gains in written and oral fluency in French learners attending a AH and a SA context during one semester found that the learners who went abroad outperformed the learners who did not in both perceived fluency and actual speech features. Juan-Garau and Pérez-Vidal (2007) focused on Catalan/Spanish bilingual learners of English. The same participants were first tested before and after formal instruction in the AH context and then directly after a three-month stay abroad in an English-speaking country and finally 15 months after the stay abroad. The researchers found that “Spanish/Catalan learners’ oral abilities are positively affected by a SA period” (p. 124). However, as suggested by DeKeyser (2007), these gains in oral fluency reported by different researchers are not always so remarkable.

On the other hand, some other studies have found other contexts to be more favorable than the SA context or to be equally favorable. For example, Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004) compared learners in three contexts, SA, AH and IM, in terms of fluency and found that IM was the context where the participants made the greatest L2 gains. Collentine (2004), comparing Spanish learners in a AH context and in a SA context (lasting one semester) found that “the AH context facilitated more development on discrete grammatical and lexical features” (p. 227). Días-Campos (2004) compared participants learning Spanish during one semester in an AH context and in a SA context in terms of phonology. He found similar gains or lack of gains for



participants in both contexts. Mora (2006) focused on Spanish/Catalan advanced learners of English. He tested the same participants before and after 100 hours of formal instruction (FI) and later after a three-month stay abroad. He found that the FI had a more favorable impact on the participants' perception of L2 phonemic contrasts than the SA term. Serrano, Llanes and Tragant (2011) compared subjects who went on Erasmus with subjects who attended intensive and semi-intensive courses as regards the development of L2 written and oral production. Both the intensive and the semi-intensive programs offered the same number of hours of instruction; however, the hours were spread over a longer period of time in the semi-intensive program. Comparable results were found for the subjects who participated in the Erasmus and the subjects who attended the intensive course.

Many reasons could explain this lack of advantages for the Study Abroad context. First, as suggested by Lafford and Collentine (2006), there might be "a threshold which learners must reach to benefit fully from the SA context of learning" (Collentine, 2009, p. 221). As a result, learners who have not reached this proficiency threshold do not improve their proficiency level. They are unable to benefit from the advantages offered by the Study Abroad context; for example, they cannot interact with native speakers. DeKeyser (2007) suggests that the students should prepare themselves at home before going abroad to make the most of their experience abroad. Second, as claimed earlier, the Study Abroad context may have a positive impact on some aspects of the language only (e.g. oral fluency as opposed to grammar). Most studies have shown that a stay abroad mainly enables oral fluency to develop. This could be explained by the type of input learners receive during their stay abroad; what they normally do is interacting orally and probably informally with native speakers; therefore, this interaction enables them to improve their oral skills but not so much their grammar, for example. Third, the effect of the SA context on second language acquisition depends on the motivation of the learners and on the way they decide to accomplish their stay abroad. If they do not interact with the native speakers of the country, if they do not attempt to integrate into the society, they will probably not make any progress. An instrument that has been widely used to find out how much contact with the language SA learners have had is the Language Contact Profile created by Segalowitz and Freed (2004). Segalowitz and Freed (2004) define the Language Contact Profile as "a multifaceted questionnaire that examines various aspects of a student's

language history and language use” (p 179). Fourth, Housen et al. (2011) suggest that the diversity of methodological design features that have been used when doing research in SA lead to a non-homogeneous big picture. Differences between the participants, their background, the instruments used, the linguistic structures studied and so on, do not allow for homogeneous results. Fifth, Housen et al. (2011) also suggest that the dichotomous operationalization of the term learning context tends to ignore the multifaceted characteristics of each context and the difference of quality and quantity of input in each context. Sixth, as suggested by Segalowitz and Freed (2004), the native speakers of the community might adjust their level to the one of the learner; this phenomenon is called “foreigner talk”. According to Ferguson (1975), the native speaker would modify and adapt his/her speech to the one of the learner. The native speaker would notably speak more slowly, exaggerate his/her pronunciation, use less complex structures and so on. This foreigner talk does not have a positive effect on the learners who need quality input to improve. Moreover, as DeKeyser (2007) claims, native speakers are often reluctant to give feedback to the learners: on the one hand, when the learners make a lot of mistakes, it is difficult for native speakers to correct all of them; and on the other hand, when learners only make a few mistakes, the message gets across anyway and native speakers do not bother to correct. Without corrective feedback learners keep making the same mistakes and do not improve. Seventh, as stated by Collentine (2009), individual differences as the short-term memory stores or the speed of information access for example might come into the picture and explain why the Study Abroad context does not always seem to have a positive impact on second language acquisition. Eighth, DeKeyser (2007) states that, in the case of English-speaking SA learners, it may be difficult to avoid speaking their L1 in a foreign country, especially if their level of proficiency in the L2 is low. Using the L1 enables the learners to communicate efficiently and effortlessly.

The present study aims to fill some gaps in the existing research on the effect of learning context on L2 development. As suggested by Llanes (2011), the majority of the studies which have focused on SA have been run in the USA and there is a lack of research in Europe. The present study, involving Spanish participants notably going to England, offers valuable data to the current research about SA. Moreover, as suggested by Llanes (2011) too, even though “the most popular SA programme is the short-term one (less than eight weeks)” (p. 20), most studies have been focusing on long-term

programs. As an example, the studies reviewed before generally involved SA lasting for one semester or for three months. Therefore, the present study, which examines three-week programs, is better anchored to reality and once again offers valuable data to the current research about SA. In addition, one of the main contributions of the present study is that it includes the Summer Camp context, which very few studies have examined. Moreover, the present study includes intensive instruction (e.i. Intensive EFL Classes), which is more comparable to the SA or IM setting than regular AH, and again, very little research exists including intensive instruction when analyzing learning context. Finally, the present study includes children and teenagers, who are not typically included in the studies of learning context as suggested by Llanes (2011), according to her, “It is crucial that further research seeks to fill the gap in this area since SA experiences are becoming more and more common among children” (p. 10).

### ***1.2. Research question***

Considering the gaps pointed out in the literature review as far as research in learning contexts is concerned, the aim of the present study is to answer the following research question:

*Which of the following three learning contexts (Study Abroad, Summer Camp “at home” or Intensive English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classes) has the most favorable impact on second language (L2) development?*

## **2. METHOD**

### ***2.1. Participants***

The data used in the present study come from a project funded by the Spanish Science Ministry about intensive learning contexts (within and outside the school system) carried out at the University of Barcelona. The participants were 109 Catalan-Spanish bilingual learners of English who participated in a three- to four-week program in three contexts: Study Abroad, Summer Camp and Intensive EFL Classes. The Study Abroad context (n = 17) included 12 girls and 5 boys, the Intensive

EFL Classes context (n = 48) included 13 girls and 33 boys (this information was missing for 2 of the participants) and the Summer Camp context (n = 44) included 24 girls and 20 boys. The minimum age of the entire group was 10 years old and the maximum 17 years old, the mean was 12.91 years old. The minimum age for the Study Abroad Context was 12, the maximum age was 17 and the mean was 15.18 years old. The minimum age for the Intensive EFL Classes context was 10, the maximum age was 17 and the mean was 13.53 years old (this mean does not include 12 of the participants for whom this information was missing). Finally the minimum age for the Summer Camp context was 10, the maximum age was 15 and the mean was 11.52 years old (see Table 1 for details).

	(n)	Mean age	Min age	Max age	Sex	
					Male	Female
<b>Study Abroad</b>	17	15.18	12	17	5	12
<b>Summer Camp</b>	44	11.52	10	15	20	24
<b>Intensive EFL Classes</b>	48	13.53	10	17	33	13

*Table 1: Information about the participants*

## **2.2. Learning contexts**

The stay abroad took place in Reading (United-Kingdom) and lasted for three weeks. The participants attended three hours of classes per day and participated in afternoon activities two hours per day. Five of the participants stayed in a residence hall, six of the participants stayed in host families and six participants did a combination of these last two. The participants had access to input from native speakers; however, they were free to interact with their partners from their home country, or with international students from other countries.

The Intensive EFL Classes took place in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain) and lasted for four weeks. The participants attended four and a half hours of classes per day. According to their responses to a questionnaire, they used the L2 an average of two

hours per day, which was probably the time they used for homework. The students attended two different classes according to their age and level. There were two “junior” classes (students were 10-13 years old) and two “senior” classes (students were 14-17 years old). The teachers were all native speakers of English.

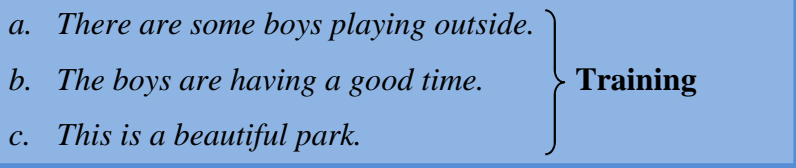
The Summer Camp took place in Cerdanya (Catalonia, Spain) and lasted for nineteen days. The participants attended three hours of classes per day and participated in afternoon activities two hours per day. The group leaders were native speakers of Spanish; however, they followed the “English only” rule throughout the whole duration of the camp. The goal of the Summer Camp was to expose the kids to English as much as possible. The schedule was divided between classes and activities (academic activities, leisure activities, sports activities and mountain activities).

### ***2.3. Instrument***

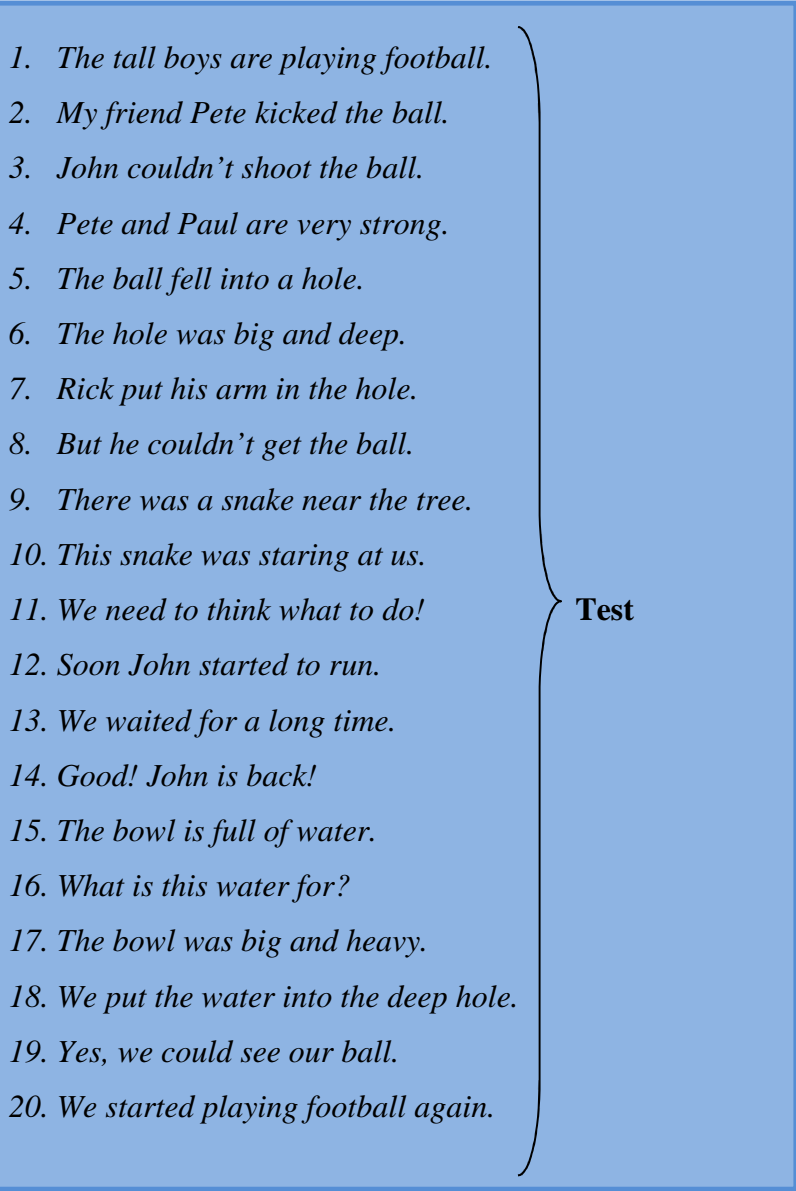
#### **Materials**

The main instrument consisted of an elicited imitation (EI) task. The materials included 23 simple English sentences, three of which were used as a training to make the students familiar with the procedure (see Figure 1) and 20 of which were the actual test (see Figure 2). The sentences ranged between four and eight words in length and were semantically adapted to 10- to 17-year-old learners of English. In total, the 20 sentences included 119 words. By drawing up the Lexical Frequency Profile of the sentences used for the elicited imitation task, we found that the majority of the vocabulary belonged to the first 1000 most frequent words and that a small proportion of the words belonged to the second 1000 most frequent words. These results are coherently linked to the age and the level of the participants. This means that the participants were probably familiar with most of the vocabulary used in the task. Moreover, the sentences were related to a short cartoon informally entitled “The ball story” (see Appendix A) that the participants looked at before the beginning of the EI task. The cartoon comprised six images. The story can be summarized as follows: four boys are playing football in a park, suddenly, their ball falls in a big hole and the boys cannot reach it anymore. They try to find a way to get it back. Finally, one of the boys fills the hole up with water and the boys can get the ball back. This cartoon “set the

scene” for the participants and gave them some clues about the sentences they were about to hear.

- 
- a. *There are some boys playing outside.*
  - b. *The boys are having a good time.*
  - c. *This is a beautiful park.*
- Training**

**Figure 1: Training sentences**

- 
1. *The tall boys are playing football.*
  2. *My friend Pete kicked the ball.*
  3. *John couldn't shoot the ball.*
  4. *Pete and Paul are very strong.*
  5. *The ball fell into a hole.*
  6. *The hole was big and deep.*
  7. *Rick put his arm in the hole.*
  8. *But he couldn't get the ball.*
  9. *There was a snake near the tree.*
  10. *This snake was staring at us.*
  11. *We need to think what to do!*
  12. *Soon John started to run.*
  13. *We waited for a long time.*
  14. *Good! John is back!*
  15. *The bowl is full of water.*
  16. *What is this water for?*
  17. *The bowl was big and heavy.*
  18. *We put the water into the deep hole.*
  19. *Yes, we could see our ball.*
  20. *We started playing football again.*
- Test**

**Figure 2: Elicited imitation task**

The second instrument consisted of three different questionnaires, one for each context, about the participants' linguistic background and about their opinion on the programs they attended. This instrument provides valuable data because as Freed, Segalowitz and

Dewey (2004) suggested, “[...] it is not the context per se that promotes various types of learning but rather, [...], the nature of interactions, the quality of the experiences, and the efforts made to use the L2 that render one context superior to another with respect to language gain” (p. 298).

### **Content validity**

According to Vinther (2002) elicited imitation tests have mainly been used in the fields of first language acquisition, neuropsychological research and second language acquisition. Regarding second language acquisition, the debate about elicited imitation tests has been whether learners understand the sentences they are imitating or whether they simply imitate “a chain of sounds without knowing their meaning” (Vinther, 2002, p. 55). Erlam (2006) claims that “Elicited imitation tests provide accurate representations of a learner’s interlanguage system” (p. 467), suggesting that if a learner wants to imitate a target language structure accurately, this target language structure “[...] must be part of [his / her] interlanguage system” (Erlam, 2006, p. 467). Mackey and Gass (2005) share the same view; they claim that “[...] if a given sentence is part of one’s grammar, it will be relatively easy to repeat” (p. 55). These assertions imply, as many researchers have claimed, that “elicited imitation is reconstructive in nature, requiring the learner to process the stimulus” (Erlam, 2006, p. 467). Bley-Vroman and Chaudron (1994) support the *reconstruction* process proposed by Lust, Chien and Flynn (1987). Bley-Vroman and Chaudron interpret this reconstruction process as follows: “In reconstruction, the subject hears the sentence and, to the extent that the sentence is comprehended, reconstructs the meaning using his or her own grammar” (p. 246). However they claim more research needs to be done to confirm this theory.

In order to prove that elicited imitation tests are reconstructive in nature, Munnich, Flynn and Martohardjono (1994), as many other researchers, have used both grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in an elicited imitation task to check if test takers would correct the ungrammatical sentences. They have observed that the participants indeed corrected the ungrammatical sentences when repeating them. Munnich et al. (1994) came to the conclusion that EI tests were not involving simple “parroting” as the participants were correcting the mistakes in the original sentence. However, this view is not shared by all researchers; some of them as McDade et al.

(1982), showed that learners were able to correctly repeat sentences they did not understand if there was not any delay between the stimulus and the repetition. This phenomenon has been called rote imitation (McDade et al., 1982), rote repetition (Vinther, 2002), parroting (Lee 1970; Lust et al. 1987; Munnich, Flynn & Martohardjono 1994) or echoic memory (Mackey and Gass, 2005). Vinther (2002) defines parroting as follows, “senseless repetition of the acoustic image of a sentence which is so short that its sounds can be phonologically processed in working memory without their meaning being decoded” (p. 58). Some researchers as Berry (1976) give a different definition of the word, they talk about parroting when the last word(s) only is / are repeated. We will stick to Vinther’s definition of the word parroting in the present study. However, many researchers have shown that including a delay between the stimulus and the repetition is sufficient to avoid this phenomenon. McDade et al. (1982) for example found that “Delaying imitation 3 seconds adversely affected imitation of noncomprehended sentences while having no significant effect on comprehended sentences” (p. 19).

According to Bley-Vroman and Chaudron (1994), sentence length has a great influence on the participants’ ability to imitate the stimulus because memory limitations are playing a role. The idea is that the shorter the sentence the more accurate the repetition. This has been confirmed in the present study, sentence fourteen (*Good! John is back!*), the shortest sentence, including four words only, was the sentence the most accurately repeated by the participants. Bley-Vroman and Chaudron (1994), relying on Miller’s famous paper “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information” published in 1956, argue that short-term memory can only retain seven (plus or minus two) *chunks*. Our sentences’ length ranged between four and eight words in length, the length’s average being 5.96 words. Therefore, one cannot hold the sentences’ length responsible for the potential failure of the participants: if the participants failed to repeat sentences accurately it was not because of memory limitations but because of a low proficiency level.

Bley-Vroman and Chaudron (1994) reviewed the literature about the relationship between EI ability and global language proficiency and they discovered that many studies (Call, 1985; Carrown, 1974; Clay, 1971; Connell & Myles-Zitzer, 1982; Dailey & Boxx, 1979; Gallimore & Tharp, 1981; Henning, 1983; Hood & Lightbown, 1978;



Lee, 1974; Naiman, 1974; Newcomer & Hammill, 1977; Perkins, Brutton, & Angelis, 1986) have found correlations between the results of an elicited imitation task and the results of *other measures of production in learners*. In conclusion, even if further empirical findings need to be gathered, the elicited imitation instrument seems to be a good measure of L2 development.

### **Reliability of the instrument**

The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed through Cronbach's alpha. The results for the instrument of the present study were .919 for the pretest and .915 for the posttest which indicated very high reliability. Therefore, we can conclude that the different items which made up the elicited imitation task used in the present study measured the same underlying construct and that the instrument was reliable.

## **2.4. Procedure**

### **Recording**

The participants were tested individually by trained researcher assistants. All the participants followed the same detailed recorded instructions in Catalan (See Appendix B). The tests took place in situ towards the beginning and the end of the three- to four-week program in the three different contexts. In order to ensure the same amount of exposure for all the participants despite different programs' lengths, 18 days separated the pretest and the posttest in the three contexts. The same elicited imitation task was administered for the pretest and for the posttest. The participants were asked to wear headphones and listened to the following instructions in Catalan:

*“You are now going to listen to a couple of sentences in English. Please repeat these sentences and imitate the original pronunciation. You will listen to the sentences **once only**. After each sentence you will hear a “beep” and then you will have to start repeating. You will have 6 seconds to repeat each sentence. These sentences are related to a story that we are going to show you now. Have a look at the cartoon to familiarize yourself with the story.”*

The participants then had 20 seconds to have a look at the cartoon. Afterwards, they listened to further instructions in Catalan:

*“Listen to the sentences and repeat them after the beep. The first sentences are for practice only. Are you ready? Let’s start!”*

After each sentence, a one second break followed by a “beep” was included to avoid parroting. The recording ensured a comparable administration of the test for each participant and the exact same time repartition for each participant. The whole task was recorded to enable further analyses.

### **Transcription**

The idea when transcribing was to be as accurate and as faithful as possible. The present researcher did all the transcriptions following some simple transcription conventions. For example repetitions were marked by the following signs: < >, unidentifiable materials were represented by the following symbol: xxx and errors or incomplete words were marked with the following symbol: @e. An exhaustive use of transcription conventions was useless as it was decided to count the number of words correctly repeated in order to assess the participants. This will be discussed in further details in the scoring section.

### **Scoring**

As in Trofimovich et al. (2009), a “sentence-based measurement” was used to analyze the data. Repetition accuracy was calculated by counting the number of words from the original stimulus that were correctly repeated. The number of words correctly repeated for each sentence was then divided by the total number of words in the original sentence prompt. For example for the sentence *Pete and Paul are very strong* (6 words), if a participant said *Pete and Paul are very blond* (5 words correctly repeated), his/her final score for this sentence was  $5/6 = .84$ . Afterwards, the total number of words correctly repeated (out of 119) was calculated and the total ratio was computed. This final ratio was the one used for the analyses. Following Trofimovich et al. (2009)

guidelines, a word repetition was counted as correct only if all its morphemes were correctly repeated (e.g. *kick* instead of *kicked* was not counted as correct). There was no penalization for added words (e.g. *we waited for a **very** long time* instead of *we waited for a long time*); the extra words were just ignored. Word order was ignored (e.g. *the bowl was heavy and big* instead of *the bowl was big and heavy*), as long as the words were correctly repeated, the order did not matter. Moreover we decided not to put an emphasis on pronunciation as this was not the focus of this study; therefore, if the pronunciation of a word was not 100 % perfect but that the word could be understood and could not be confused with another word, it was counted as correct. For example if the word “playing” was pronounced /'plɑ:ɪŋ/ instead of /'pleɪŋ/ it was counted as correct. The decision to calculate the repetition accuracy by counting the number of words from *each original sentence prompt* that were correctly repeated was made because it was thought to be the most objective way of assessing the data. As stated in Vinther (2002), “Most scoring procedures, though endeavoring to reach a maximum of objectivity, include an element of arbitrariness” (p 68). Vinther explains that the different concepts used by the researchers (e.g. inaccurate, acceptable, etc.) are highly subjective. One researcher might consider a sentence acceptable (e.g. because even though the form is not the same, the meaning is kept) while another might not. Therefore, our method seems highly precise and unequivocal as it does not involve the subjectivity of the researcher, at least as far as the scoring part is concerned, because as regards the transcription there is some subjectivity involved.

To assess the reliability of the transcriptions and of the analysis, another rater was asked to perform the same work for 15 % of the data. The instructions given to the second rater were to transcribe the audio files as accurately as possible and to take into account the main scoring guidelines described previously (e.g., a word repetition is counted as correct only if all its morphemes are correctly repeated) and then to calculate how many words were correctly repeated per sentence and in total. Afterwards a Spearman’s Rank Order Correlation was performed with rater 1 and rater 2’s scores to check if there was a correlation between both raters’ scores. A correlation coefficient of .899 was found which means a large positive correlation between the two raters’ variables. This result shows a strong inter-rater reliability.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS

Due to a non-normal distribution of the data, non-parametric tests were used to make statistical analyses. First, a between-group analysis through Kruskal-Wallis Test was performed with the pretest scores to confirm that the three groups were comparable. Afterwards, Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used when within-groups analyses were performed in order to compare the scores of the subjects at the pretest and at the posttest. Finally, Kruskal-Wallis Test was used when between-group analyses were performed in order to compare the gains experienced in each context. If a statistically significant difference was found, Mann-Whitney was subsequently used to see where the difference lied.

### 4. RESULTS

For the preliminary analyses, descriptive statistics were obtained (see Table 2) and normality was assessed through Kolmogorov-Smirnov<sup>a</sup> and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The data were not normally distributed, the Sig. value for both the total score of the pretest and the posttest was .000. Most participants had scores in the pretest that were quite high (see means in Table 2) and even higher in the posttest (see means in Table 3). The results tended to be too good for all the participants which means the task was too easy for them. That might be the reason why the data were not normally distributed.

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Intensive EFL Classes</b>	48	.57	.97	.85	.10200
<b>Summer Camp</b>	44	.32	.97	.76	.14768
<b>Study Abroad</b>	17	.62	.97	.87	.10025

*Table 2: Descriptive Statistics pretest (ratios)*

We first performed a between-group analysis through Kruskal-Wallis Test to confirm that the three groups were comparable. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $\chi^2=16.473$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ ) indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the three groups. The mean scores of the pretest (see means Table 2) informed us that the participants from the Study Abroad Context were the ones with the highest

scores while the participants from the Summer Camp Context were the ones with the lowest scores.

As we could not compare the posttest results of the three groups because the groups were different in the pretest (see Table 3 for descriptive statistics of the posttest results), we found alternative analyses for our data. First, we decided analyze differences from pretest to posttest through Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests for each program independently. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and the posttest for the Intensive EFL Classes context ( $Z=-4.273$ ,  $p<.001$ ), for the Summer Camp context ( $Z=-5.620$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and for the Study Abroad context ( $Z=-2.966$ ,  $p=.003$ ).

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<b>Intensive EFL Classes</b>	48	.46	.98	.88	.09957
<b>Summer Camp</b>	44	.50	.97	.83	.11428
<b>Study Abroad</b>	17	.68	.99	.90	.08763

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics (posttest)**

Then, we decided to perform a Kruskal-Wallis Test to check whether there was a statistically significant difference between the three groups in terms of gains. To calculate the gains each group had experienced, we subtracted the total pretest results from the total posttest results. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $\chi^2=11.790$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.003$ ) indicated that there was indeed a statistically significant difference between the three groups as far as gains were concerned. Therefore, we decided to perform a Mann-Whitney Test to know where the difference lied. We found that there was a statistically significant difference between the Intensive EFL Classes context and the Summer Camp context ( $Z=-3.232$ ,  $p=.001$ ); a statistically significant difference between the Summer Camp context and the Study Abroad context ( $Z=-2.282$ ,  $p=.022$ ); and no statistically significant difference between the Intensive EFL Classes context and the SA context ( $Z=-.247$ ,  $p=.805$ ). Therefore, we concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the Summer Camp context and the two other contexts. By looking at the ranks, we discovered that the Summer Camp context was the one with the highest gains, followed by the SA context and finally the Intensive EFL Classes

context. However, as it will be discussed in the following section, these results have to be interpreted carefully as the Summer Camp context was the context with the lowest scores at the pretest (see Table 2); therefore, this group had more room for improvement.

In order to avoid the potentially confounding factor of initial pretest scores, we decided to select the largest possible range of comparable participants on the basis of the pretest. This was achieved by erasing the “outliers” (i.e., the participants whose scores were really high or really low in comparison with the mean score) till we got an Asymp. Sig. value higher than .05 at the Kruskal-Wallis Test when comparing the three groups at the pretest. We ended up with a group of 74 participants (32 participants from the Intensive EFL Classes context, 32 participants from the Summer Camp context and 10 participants from the Study Abroad context) whose scores at the pretest ranged between 79 and 111 out of 119. Then, we performed a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for each context to see if there was a statistically significant difference between scores at pretest and posttest. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between scores at pretest and posttest for the Intensive EFL Classes context ( $Z=-6.734$ ,  $p<.001$ ), for the Summer Camp context ( $Z=-4.747$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and for the Study Abroad context ( $Z=-2.106$ ,  $p=.035$ ). Finally, we performed a Kruskal-Wallis test to see whether there was a statistically significant difference between the three contexts in terms of gains. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $\chi^2=1.211$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.546$ ) indicated that there was not any statistically significant difference between the three contexts once the participants were comparable.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of L2 learning context (Study Abroad, Summer Camp and Intensive EFL Classes) for L2 development. First, the statistical analyses revealed a statistically significant difference between the three groups before they attended the three different programs. The participants from the Study Abroad context were the ones with the highest scores while the participants from the Summer Camp context were the ones with the lowest scores. This is probably

related to the differences in age of the participants as the participants with the highest scores are the oldest ones and the ones with the lowest scores are the youngest ones. It can reasonably be reckoned that the amount of exposure to English prior to the attendance to the different programs had been higher for the older participants than for the younger participants. Moreover, as suggested by Cummins (1980), older learners have a greater cognitive maturity which helps them acquiring L2 syntax, morphology, vocabulary and reading comprehension, etc. In addition, the difference in age is quite large, as the mean age for the Study Abroad context is 15.18 while it is 11.52 for the Summer Camp (and 13.53 for the Intensive EFL Classes). The reason why the participants are distributed the way they are is that it is very hard to find teenagers interested in attending summer camps or families that are willing to send young children abroad. The non-homogeneity of the sample in the present study is therefore not surprising.

Second, a comparison between the different contexts in terms of gains showed that the Summer Camp context was the context where the participants experienced the most gains. These results are in line with Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004) who found an advantage for the IM context over the SA and AH contexts. However, the reason why the Summer Camp context was found to be the most favorable one in the present study could be that, because the participants of this context were the ones who had the lowest scores at the pretest, they had more room for improvement. This is why it was decided to perform further statistical analyses including participants whose performance was comparable in the pretest across contexts.

Third, once the largest range of comparable participants were selected on the basis of the pretest, a statistically significant difference was found between the pretest and the posttest in each context, which means that the learners made significant gains in all three contexts, but no statistically significant difference was found between the three contexts in terms of gains, none of the context distinguished itself from the others. These results are in line with Serrano, Llanes and Tragant (2011) who did not find any difference between participants' written and oral performance after a stay abroad and after Intensive EFL Classes. The reason why the three contexts ended up having comparable positive effects might be attributed to the fact that they all included good aspects which balanced their weaknesses. Tragant, E., & Marsol, A. (2011) suggested a

couple of ideas. For example, the Intensive EFL Classes context and the Study Abroad context involved teachers who were native speakers of English while the Summer Camp context did not. However, it emerges from the analysis of the questionnaires that the participants of the Summer Camp context were highly motivated and had lots of opportunities to use the L2. As an example, these participants were the ones who declared liking the most learning English. Moreover, it was for these participants that learning English seemed the easiest (according to their answers to the questionnaires). As regards the Intensive EFL Classes, its strength, a high number of hours taught per week in comparison with the other contexts is counterbalanced by the fact that once the students had left the class, they were not in touch with English anymore. This was confirmed by the questionnaire: most participants' answer to the question "*How much English have you done at home / during your free time (homework or activities you decided to do for yourself)*" tended to be closer to "not a lot" rather than "a lot". Finally, the participants of the Study Abroad context had plenty of opportunities to be in contact with the L2; with their teachers (native speakers of English), with the families hosting some of them, by looking at the television or by listening to the radio, and so on, but not all of them made the most of these opportunities probably because, as suggested by Lafford & Collentine (2006), they had not attained the threshold necessary to make the most of their experience abroad. This was confirmed by the answers given to the question "*Which language(s) have you used the most during your stay abroad?*", most of the participants answered they used some more Catalan or Spanish than English or that they used as much Catalan or Spanish as English. In more details, they declared using Catalan or Spanish with their friends and English with their teachers. Moreover, outside the classroom (during their free time, at the residence or at home, in the dining room, etc.), the participants tended to use more Catalan or Spanish than English. Another reason why no statistically significant differences between the three contexts appeared might be the fact that there were few comparable participants ( $n = 74$ ), especially in the Study Abroad context ( $n = 10$ ).

It is important to note that, regardless of the context and despite the disparities between the participants' pretests results, the vast majority of the participants scored better at the posttest than at the pretest, which means that most of them made progress. In other words, the three contexts had a beneficial effect on participants' L2 development. In addition, participants made progress despite the short duration of the



program and the short amount of time between the two testing points (18 days). Therefore, it is already a good result to find a statistically significant difference between the pretest and the posttest. These results are in line with Llanes, A. & Muñoz, C. (2009) whose research aimed at discovering if short stays abroad of three to four weeks made a difference. The researchers examined the learners' oral fluency and accuracy as well as a listening comprehension task. They found that short stays abroad indeed enable learners to make significant gains. The progress made by the participants in the present study might have been due to a task effect. However, the results show that learners in one context (Summer Camp) made more gains than learners in the other two contexts. If the gains were due to a task effect exclusively, these results would not have been obtained, as participants in all three context should have experienced a similar task effect, and therefore, similar gains.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study was to compare three different learning contexts (Study Abroad, Summer Camp and Intensive EFL Classes) in order to find out which one had the most favorable effect on the L2 development of Catalan-Spanish bilingual learners of English. The first findings were that the Summer Camp context was the context where the participants made the greatest gains. The Summer Camp seems to be beneficial to young learners, on the one hand because it is an attractive and motivating context to young learners, probably because it is more dynamic and interactive than regular classrooms and on the other hand because it offers lots of opportunities for practice. Therefore, we might think that the Intensive EFL context, for example, might be more successful among young learners if it used a different approach, more similar to the one used in the Summer Camp context. In addition, the SA context may not have been so favorable in the present study because the learners might have lacked the proficiency level that was needed for them to make the most of the experience abroad (Lafford & Collentine, 2006).

However, once the group of participants analyzed was reduced to comparable participants only, none of the contexts distinguished itself anymore suggesting that the three contexts were equally advantageous. As highlighted in the discussion section, each

context has good aspects and the fact that one has what another one might lack explains why they ended up having comparable positive effects

The present study has some limitations. First, the participants were not comparable in terms of age and amount of exposure to English prior to the attendance to the program. Second, one task only was used to assess L2 development which is a multifaceted notion; ideally, the elicited imitation task should be combined with other tasks in order to have more data to analyze L2 development. Moreover, different tasks should be used for the pretest and the posttest to reduce the possibility of a task effect. Third, even if the questionnaires were useful tools, interviews would have enabled the researcher to explore to a greater extent the participants' use of English in and out of the different programs. All these aspects should be taken into account for further research.

As a conclusion, the present study, involving young European participants in short-term intensive domestic immersion, Intensive EFL Classes and SA programs has made its contribution to the research focusing on learning contexts. Despite its limitations, the results obtained in this study shed some light on the effects of learning contexts on second language acquisition.

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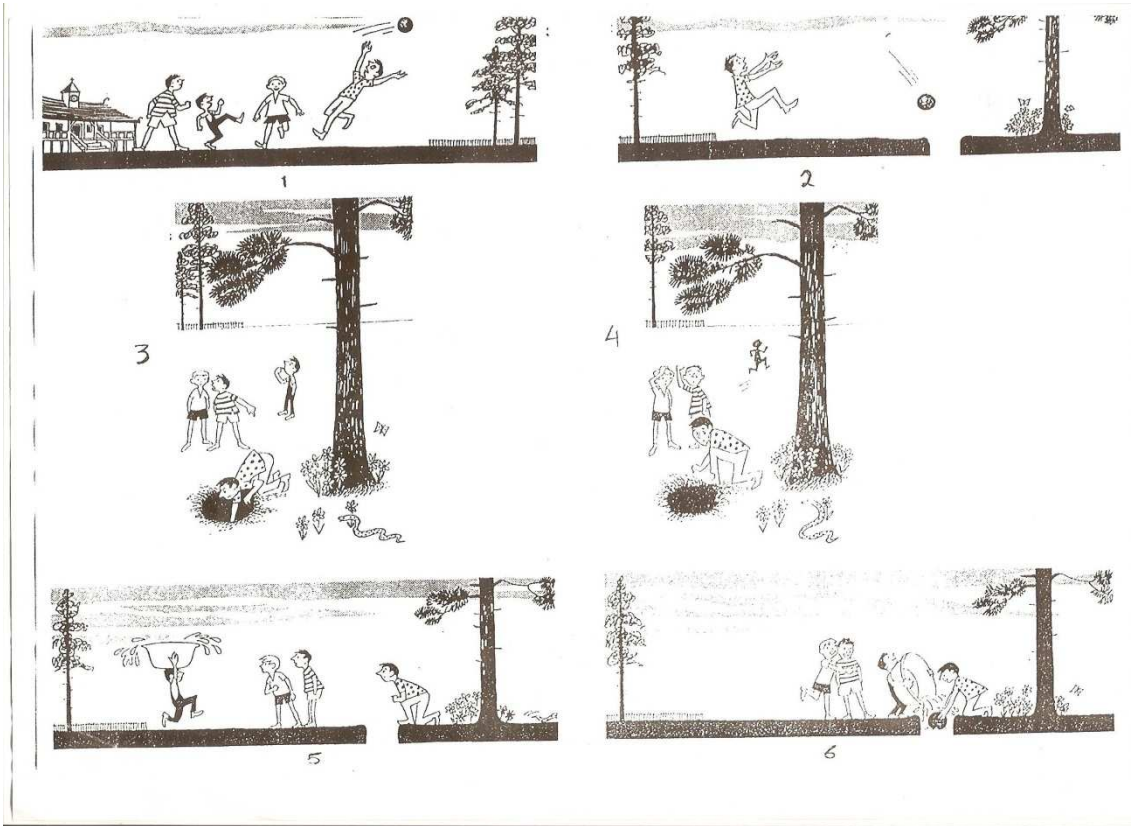
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APPENDIX A: The ball story



## APPENDIX B: Instructions for the recording

### RECORDING:

- *Instruccions “TÈCNIQUES” per l’enregistrament de les instruccions i de les frases del nadiu. Després de cada frase esperar 1 segon, incloure un “beep” (sobre duració del beep, com a molt 1 segon, no?) i esperar 6 segons a que els participants repeteixin la frase, després frase següent, etc.*
- *Instructions for participants in Catalan (To be recorded on the same day as native speaker).*

Ara escoltaras unes frases en anglès. Sisplau repeteix les frases i imita la pronunciació original. Només podras escoltar las frases UNA VEGADA. Després de cada frase sentiras un “beep” i llavors podras començar a repetir. Tindras 6 segons i després vindrà la frase següent. Aquestes frases estan relacionades amb la historieta que et mostrem ara. Mira un moment els dibuixos per familiaritzar-te amb el que passa [*esperar uns 20 segons*].

Ara escolta les frases i repeteix després del beep. Les primeres frases son de prova. Estas preparat? Comencem. [*2 segons*]

1. There are some boys playing outside. [*1 segon després que acabi el speaker i beep + 6 segons*]
2. The boys are having a good time. [*1 segon després que acabi el speaker i beep + 6 segons*]
3. This is a beautiful park. [*1 segon després que acabi el speaker i beep + 10 segons*]

ARA comença el test. Escolta i imita les frases següents: [*2 segons*]

- *Instructions native speakers:*
  - *Please read these sentences ONCE as clearly as possible. Please read slowly but “naturally”, considering the sentences are going to be imitated by 11-18 year-old Catalan students. Intonation: typical of a narrative.*
  - *Do NOT read the numbers next to the sentences.*

[*Després de cada frase esperar 1 segon, incloure un “beep” i esperar 6 segons a que els participants repeteixin la frase, després frase següent, etc.*]

### *Enregistrar frases de prova:*

There are some boys playing outside.  
The boys are having a good time.  
This is a beautiful park.

1. The tall boys are playing football.
2. My friend Pete kicked the ball.
3. John couldn't shoot the ball.



4. Pete and Paul are very strong.
5. The ball fell into a hole.
6. The hole was big and deep.
7. Rick put his arm in the hole.
8. but he couldn't get the ball.
9. There was a snake near the tree.
10. This snake was staring at us.
11. We need to think what to do!
12. Soon John started to run.
13. We waited for a long time.
14. Good! John is back!
15. The bowl is full of water.
16. What is this water for?
17. The bowl was big and heavy.
18. We put the water into the deep hole.
19. Yes, we could see our ball.
20. We started playing football again. [*10 segons enlloc de 6*]

Molt bé. Ja has acabat aquesta prova. Moltes gràcies.