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# A TRIPLE CASE STUDY OF TWO SAUDI AND ONE ITALIAN LANGUAGE LEARNERS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF TARGET LANGUAGE (TL) SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

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A TRIPLE CASE STUDY OF TWO SAUDI AND ONE ITALIAN  
LANGUAGE LEARNERS' SELF-PERCEPTIONS  
OF TARGET LANGUAGE (TL) SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

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A Thesis

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

Teaching English as a Second Language Emphasis

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By

Jena M. Robinson

Spring 2017

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## Master's Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

This triple case study examined the diverse ways in which two Saudis and one Italian English language learner (ELL) came to speaking proficiency according to his or her own perceptions and observations. The researcher conducted interviews of the two Saudi ELLs face-to-face and the one Italian ELL through Skype by asking 15 open-ended questions related to their English language learning experiences (narrative inquiry) specifically related to speaking proficiency from their beginning learning through the present. This study was not intended as a contrastive analysis.

The researcher was a monolingual English speaker with beginning experience in Korean and Spanish, and was currently working to become proficient in Italian. She has taught English at the elementary level in South Korea for several years and has tutored Italian ELLs of all ages ranging from the elementary age through later adulthood.

The researcher's findings have indicated four categories identified as instrumental in these learners' paths to speaking proficiency. The categories included authentic exposure to English through different mediums, frequent exposure through practice and repetition, interactive practice with peers and others at a higher level of speaking proficiency, and a reason to study English that motivated them and combined their interests whether it was through need, enjoyment or personal achievement.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although some may think of writing as a very individual process, in fact, it takes a community to bring a large writing and research project such as this one to completion. Without my community assisting and encouraging me with this project, this idea and curiosity, which began for me as child, would not be very well satisfied. This curiosity has been satisfied and broadened at the same time.

I would like to thank my interviewees for being open, willing, and perhaps even vulnerable as they have shared their stories. Without the three participants, this project would not have been possible.

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In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Tracey McHenry, one of my professors and my second thesis committee member, for reigniting my curiosity related to the history of the English language and World Englishes, along with the potential areas for researching how ELLs become proficient in speaking English.

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Dr. Justin Young and Dr. Lynn Briggs also have been instrumental in helping me get this project off the ground through providing me with thought-provoking readings and guidance for the beginning stages of this research.

I would also like to thank Dr. Julie Nelson Christoph, my undergraduate English advisor and professor, who recommended me for graduate school and read what I expect was some of my not-so-great composition writing in the earlier years of my higher education.

Thanks are also due to all my international students with their struggles and triumphs, who are proof, at least to me, that being proficient in English is not something I should take for granted. I am thankful to my Korean students who allowed me to take a closer look at the beginning stages of language learning and determine that I did want to pursue a master's degree in TESL. I am thankful for my Italian host mother Elisa Dalla and the rest of the Barilli family for allowing me to have another look into English language learning in different part of the world.

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## **Preface**

### **Literacies and Learning Style Experiences**

I should have paid attention to my audio-visual learning style preference as I went through my undergraduate studies, or perhaps even as early as middle or high school. Knowing and accepting my dominant learning styles might have helped me to gain some confidence in my scholarly abilities earlier on in my life. When I was a young child, my mother, who was a professional violinist, taught me how to play the violin on a tiny instrument with taped lines of red, yellow, blue, and green to show where my fingers went. I was able to hear to something played and, after listening closely, I would imitate it without reading any notes. My mother expressed her astonishment with laughter. While she eventually did teach me how to read musical notes, it must have been a struggle because I loved to play by “ear.”

Before reading words on a page, I learned how to read musical words, and how to connect them to musical representations coming out of my violin. By age five or six, I played Bach’s Concerto for Two Violins, the first movement, with my mother, and later, I could play either version. This stuck in my memory as a monumental time that I later referred to as an adult trying to remember how to play the violin and read music. Unlike the English language skills that I acquired as a young child and appropriated for my own use, music, and the ability to read music, faded around the time I entered high school and has been practically lost to me ever since.

As an adult, I have tried to reclaim my ability to play the violin, though it has eluded me as I further my quest for a career and desire to be a writer and reader of words rather than of music. At several points, I have tried to pull out my childhood (yet

still full sized) violin and practice reading the music, but I have found myself only “reading” the pages that I could attach to the music in my head that I remembered. My superior auditory abilities (compared with my other ones, at least), while they affected my musical abilities greatly, they still affect my learning and reading to this day. I still prefer listening to audiobooks rather than sitting for long stretches with a Kindle or physical book.

For a music learner to have an auditory learning style and play from memory seems almost like cheating. These days I play a melody in my head, then I try to distinguish the notes that seemed to match up with my memory. More times than not, I toss away Suzuki’s Violin School Volume Four or Five and I simply play what I remember in my head. Another auditory habit I have taken up is imitating another violinist after I hear what they play. Imitating, however, does not really take the place of the practice I should have continued from a young age. This behavior makes me think about language learning. It seems crucial to teach and expose a child to a second language if the goal is for them to acquire a second language proficiently early on (Krashen, Long & Scarcella, 1979). Otherwise, some young learners may run the risk of losing or forgetting what they have learned. They may come back to the language, like me as an adult, wondering why they cannot recall or use what they learned so voraciously as a child.

In addition to recognizing the need for repetition and practice, my experiences and struggles as a learner, whether or not they have always been linked directly to languages and/ or language learning, have primed me to seek out ways for both myself and for my students to understand what learning styles, methods and strategies are

most effective. Not everyone thrives in the same way, and it is my goal to help myself and other students not to fear or avoid seeking out or using strategies that suit them best.

### Foreign Language Learning

This same concept of continual practice and application also applied to my Japanese skills (learned at about age eight) or Spanish skills (started around age 14 as a first year in high school). I cannot recall a thing in Japanese besides how to say hello, yet I have journals and evidence of the fact that at one point, I could read (or at least partially read) what my instructor had written or translated on the pages of my books and notebooks. The books with their hiragana symbols remain abandoned and dusty upon the bookshelf to this day.

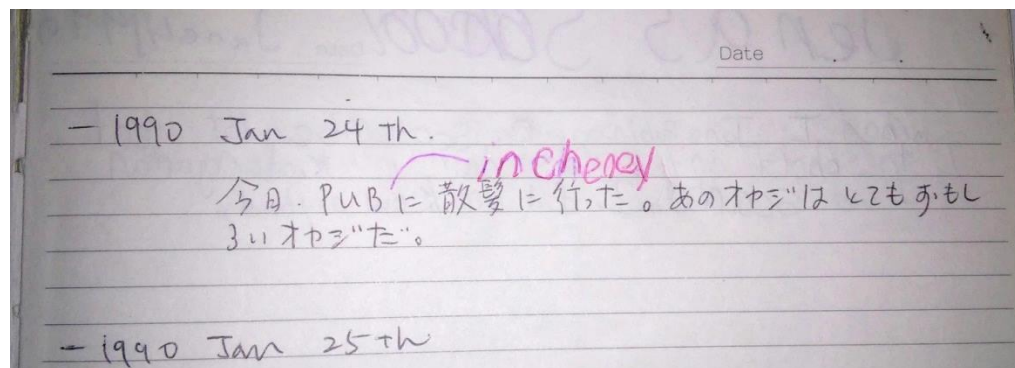


Figure 1 Japanese and English Notes from my Childhood Journal

My history in learning Spanish spans more years than my history with Japanese. Like many other students in Washington State high schools, I began learning a language at age fourteen. Sadly, I gave up that minor as an undergraduate when I found myself struggling in a Spanish literature class that was the equivalent of one of my English literature classes, and I could not keep up. I lament my decision to give it

up, but it was too much for me to take on successfully at the time. Thus, my Spanish skills are incomplete and lacking. While not everyone will have a similar language experience, I still keep it in mind as I teach ELLs in a class of native speakers. I do not want them to feel the despair I did, and I continue encourage them even if they are flailing with their feet over their heads.

In 2009, I had an opportunity to visit Puerto Rico, an island where Spanish is the main language spoken, with a fluent cousin. Ecstatic, I jumped at the opportunity to brush up my Spanish skills in an authentic setting. Instead of trying to use what Spanish I had, incomplete as it was, I retreated into silence, thinking my imperfections would not enable me to communicate clearly. So, instead of wandering around the airport and exploring, I sat and waited for my cousins' flight to arrive for hours, observing, listening, and writing in silence.

Ellis (1994), a renowned scholar in second language acquisition research, referred to the silent period as a stage in second language acquisition. He has stated, "Some L2 learners, especially children, undergo an often lengthy period during which they do not try to speak in the L2. However, they may be learning the L2 through listening to others speak it and may also be engaging in private speech (p. 723). I can relate this directly to my personal language learning. Over the course of a week in Puerto Rico, I acclimated to the Spanish that I rarely heard back in my hometown of Spokane, Washington, and eventually felt comfortable enough to use what I had and listen intently to the conversations playing out around me.

I find the inability to communicate well exceedingly uncomfortable as is evidenced by my initial silence and reluctance to speak Spanish in Puerto Rico. Some

individuals find creative ways around it, but there comes a time when lacking that ability to communicate becomes outright terrifying. In 2012, I packed my bags and took a flight to Incheon International Airport in South Korea. About one month into teaching English in there, I accidentally stabbed my forearm with a kitchen knife. Panicky thoughts immediately flooded my mind, but I gathered my wits about me and called the one Korean I knew who spoke English well enough to help me (incidentally not my co- teacher). I felt helpless as he translated everything for me at the hospital. Even though I began teaching myself Korean through an application and website called “Talk to Me in Korean” months before I came to Korea, I was in no position to have a detailed conversation regarding an emergency. In this situation, I was lucky, but this and worse probably happens to thousands of people living in English speaking countries who lack high levels of skill in the language. I pictured my students dealing with the same issues in the US and I did not want to imagine the potential outcomes. Thus, experiences like these have become my motivation for obtaining a Master’s degree in TESL. I want to help students build a strong foundation in English that will be useful to them throughout their entire lives.

Experiencing life as a “foreigner” and teacher has increased my empathy for people who come to English speaking countries with their own language challenges, both the educated and non-educated individuals. I assume their goals are to find safety and to better their lives for themselves and their families, but the language barrier is a huge hurdle.

I owe my strong interest in TESL, in part, to a Korean friend, Eun Ji. I met her through a mutual friend the summer before I left to teach in Korea while she was taking

a few ESL classes. We had much in common to talk about, and she gave me all kinds of insight on what I might experience there. Throughout my time in Korea, we kept in touch, and she came to me for editing help on her academic papers. Her rapid improvement impressed me. She had taken classes through an International ESL program in addition to some classes at the graduate level. The evidence, in both her writing and in her confidence, convinced me of what ESL teachers had the potential to help with. I knew I would enjoy being immersed in an educational environment with others who were so focused on improving English language learning.

What really cemented my desire to be a part of the MATESL program at Eastern Washington University was when my Eun Ji told me how her professors showed cultural competence towards their international students. I, too, value rapport building as well as the need to recognize cultural sensitivities and I consider them to be a necessary package deal in teaching my students.

From a young age, I found myself drawn toward experiencing and understanding other cultures, which is why I chose my undergraduate degree in English to have an emphasis on writing, rhetoric and culture. Since living in Korea, I have had the opportunity to meet individuals from all over, including countries including Italy, Greece, Chile, South Africa, and of course, Korea. Falling into discussion with these learners about their struggles and successes in mastering English, as well as earning my certificate in TESOL, has increased my curiosity about second language acquisition research and my desire to further my English education and expertise.

Not all ELLs plan to or do live in an English speaking country. Many see English as a *Lingua Franca*, a language used to bridge understanding between speakers

who do not understand each other's native languages. This occurs quite frequently in Europe. In addition to completing my Korean teaching contract in early 2015, I spent the subsequent three months in Europe tutoring an Italian family. Through this experience, I gained another opportunity to understand why and how ELLs learn English in an EFL context. My host mother was hoping to improve her English speaking in order to be able to teach a science class in English at her school. She also wanted to expose her children to more than what they learned in their classroom from their public education. Other ELLs I found myself teaching were trying to improve for traveling, for school (engineering), and for self-improvement. Most of the parents of the children I taught were already fluent in English. Several used English in their work places, others kept up the practice because they enjoyed it. Upon leaving Italy, I had more of an understanding of how English within one particular Italian public school system was taught, and what I might need to focus on as a language teacher in the future to address some of the challenges I encountered in teaching the Italian language learners.

Coming at a teaching career in reverse (experience first, education second) has been enlightening. I have been able to approach my graduate learning with somewhat of an awareness of what worked, as well as an awareness of my perceived personal strengths and weaknesses as an educator, and now have a well-rounded set of knowledge and skills for tackling the challenges I faced previously. For example, I particularly wanted to focus on methods and strategies for speaking proficiencies as that was a weak area I discovered in my previous experience. In addition, two plus years of teaching has also highlighted policy, country, and cultural challenges that I



may have to face again and again in my teaching career. Combining my knowledge and skills with these challenges will give me a better opportunity to transcend them.

Life since had taken me in several directions, culminating in me tying in many different kinds of teaching, learning, and writing as I complete a master's degree in teaching English as a second language, and learn and strive to become proficient in Italian( with Spanish on pause for now). I am like a chameleon. I am a person with a hybrid (or multi) sense of self as Soliday (1994) puts it. I have been shaped not by one particular experience, and not one directly related to how to read and write, but by many experiences and exposures to culture, language, learning, and literacy. Literacy (of all types) has brought me much in life. Ultimately, cultural literacy, and literacy in reading, writing, and speaking, have led me and allowed me to pursue my dreams while helping others achieve theirs both inside and outside of the United States.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

My first experience with teaching was in the form of a trainer in a corporate company. While there, I asked myself, “How will the information I impart to my fellow workers be done in such a way that they can learn it, remember it, and apply it so that we can grow the sales in our department? When mini lesson sessions proved to be effective, I kept this in mind when I decided to teach at an elementary school in South Korea. In my TESL certificate program, I added to my teaching philosophy the concept of teaching to include different learning styles such as tactile/kinesthetic, auditory, and visual, hoping to catch the interests of young minds to assist with motivation.

While in South Korea, I noticed that Confucius ideals of community and sameness, while very beneficial in many ways, might also be getting in the way of teachers assisting students who did not fit in a single learning mode. It was then that I wanted to do further research on teaching methods and student learning styles. In teaching English composition in the university, after I completed some research on ways to increase the academic writing skills of ELLs, I further added self-awareness and ideas for increasing it to my goal list in order for students to “own” their learning. By identifying their strengths and weaknesses, students could focus more on getting out of the class what they needed in order to boost those weaknesses rather than succumb to them.

With my university students, I believe that they all have the ability to learn, yet they may not all be able to grasp the main concepts of what I am teaching them in the same way. My proposed solutions come in the form of my teaching styles. I often have my students take a few learning style assessments to gauge what their dominant ways of learning may be or to confirm what they might already know. Being more self-aware through strategy intervention, as many researchers have explored, often leads to stronger writing (Astorga, 2007 & De Silva, 2015) and speaking as well (Purpura, 2014). I encouraged my students to understand what their learning styles often require for them to be successful. This way they may use the knowledge to their advantage in all of their classes, not just my class or in English class. I tend to teach in a mixed way that aims to capture different learning styles, even in a composition classroom, in order to help motivate the students to grasp the main point of the lesson.

Scholars such as hooks (1994) and Anzaldúa (1987) have broadened my perspective even further regarding learning styles and strategies to understand that the ways we all come at learning could be influenced by class differences, personality differences, language and cultural differences, and learning style differences. Cain's (2012) research on the different learning styles of introverts, and Tieger and Barron-Tieger's book on Myer Briggs personality types, *Do What You Are*, have influenced me to the point that I now expect some of my students to learn in a different way than perhaps the way I learn, or even the way I teach. My job, as I see it, is to merge my strengths as a teacher (namely organization and powers of observation, and empathy) with diverse ways of presenting material in order to balance how I teach with how students learn so that I may excel at helping my students learn and apply what they need to in their language learning.

My educational philosophy is based on the belief that there is no single way to teach something or to learn something, especially English. I believe that students learn best when given information in a variety of ways through listening, watching, participating, thinking, and most of all, using the information in practical ways to master it. In the future, I hope to increase awareness of different learning styles so my students can avoid my previous struggles by knowing and catering to their dominant learning styles as they work towards proficiency in English as a second or foreign language.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

As a young child, my first exposure to a language (other than English) was from a Japanese student studying abroad at Eastern Washington University. My parents had been students there, and my mom had been connected with a student through friends at church. My kind teacher/babysitter, Yoshi, took me to explore university places (such as the pool) and taught me a bit of Japanese during our outings. He also brought me children's books in Japanese and he translated the Dr. Seuss books I was most interested in at the time. As a seven or eight-year-old, I was quite interested in what he was saying in Japanese because I could not understand it! My curiosity in languages continued through high school( where I learned Spanish), but my internal motivation had not been strong enough to pursue second language learning on my own without formal education or an external motivating push. As an adult, relating to both my interests and career path, I work to understand how students are progressing toward second language acquisition.

### **The Problem**

As an English teacher who has been fortunate to teach English in several countries, including the United States, I have noticed from observing students, and interacting with ELLs and speakers, and even through reflecting on my own second and third language learning, that not everyone who studies, or who even tries with diligence, becomes proficient in English (or another L2), especially in speaking. If the TESOL field had a definite answer to this question, there would be no point in researching further; however, since this is not the case, I plan to add a small explore

through a multiple case study how several English Language Learners( ELLs) perceived how they came to be proficient in English.

Oral proficiency generally involves variables such as accuracy, complexity and fluency. ELL case study research has indicated that the actual path of a learner to oral proficiency may be quite diverse, even while using repetition of one form or another (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). With regard to fluency, according to Kormos and Dénes (2004), fluency studies are rather rare, possibly due to the time consuming analysis. However, their particular study focused on finding out if native speakers' perceptions of fluency differed from non- native speakers' perceptions of fluency. According to their results, oral fluency was demonstrated best by a rapid, smooth and accurate performance. In other words, oral fluency requires demonstration of both accurate and efficient abilities in order for language to be processed. They further determined that fluency in English was perceived the same way (with rapid, smooth and accurate performance) regardless of if a non-native or a native English speaker conducted the oral fluency evaluation. They both perceived fluency in the same way, showing an element of agreement important to both types of English language users.

While some researchers may share commonalities regarding how learners can reach fluency, Larsen-Freeman (2006) has suggested that there is not one specific way to proficiency, and in fact, there are many unique, complex and dynamic paths to speaking proficiency, depending on the individual. Because so many researchers debate and discuss which ways might bring second language learners toward oral proficiency, there is a need to also understand what learners' ( in this case adult ELLs in particular)

perceptions are of how they reached oral proficiency and if it is comparable to that of what researchers have determined.

If it is plausible that there is no single best way to become orally proficient in English, then narrative inquiry is quite relevant to assist in determining just how many and what other ways may be helpful to reach oral proficiency. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) explain the necessity of narrative inquiry.

Deliberately storying and restorying one's life (or, as we shall see, a group or cultural story) is, therefore, a fundamental method of personal (and social) growth: it is a fundamental quality of education. So called 'narrative research' can only build on this process of growth. Narrative method, in its simplest terms, is the description and restorying of the narrative structure of varieties of educational experience. (p. 2)

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1989), narrative inquiry is less about applying scholarly techniques and more about “‘entering into’ a phenomena and partaking of them” (p. 3). This suggests narrative inquiry requires getting involved in the educational experience of another to understand it. People often do what they do based on their experiences, thus narrative inquiry helps answer the why’s and how’s (p. 5).

This study focuses on narrative inquiry, which Clandinin and Connelly (1989) have explained is a complex process because researchers become a part of the process as data is collected through a collaborative setting( in this case, through interviews) which involves sharing stories( p. 11). Narrative inquiry, in this case study, will enable the participants to tell stories on how they came to be orally proficient in English.

### **Researcher’s Assumptions**

1. I assumed that the participants were more internally motivated than externally motivated in their language learning. In other words, they have motivated themselves to become proficient in English rather than have many outside forces encourage them to be proficient. Perhaps it is a mix, but I assumed they have internal motivation as all the participants learned English as a Foreign Language, which can be challenging just by definition because it is “foreign.” I will define internal motivation in a similar way as Ellis (1994) explained it. Ellis (1994) defined *intrinsic motivation* as being derived “from the personal interests and inner needs of the learner” (p. 36). In a similar yet in a different way, I will define internal motivation as motivation to learn English for the personal interest in learning it rather than because another person, idea or force caused them to learn it.
2. I assumed that the participants had to put in extra effort above and beyond what any classes in the equivalent of middle or high school would teach in order to become orally proficient. This might have included English schools within their own country, studying abroad, having English tutors, having parents who advocated for and used English as a Foreign Language, or other motivating factors.
3. The exigence to learn English and to have a high oral proficiency may have started from a need to use English to avoid being a language interloper, so to speak, in some kind of social activity requiring English. Perhaps external motivation could have stemmed from a job or from parents, too.

4. I assumed the language learners began learning English at a young age, perhaps in elementary school.
5. I assumed that the language learners continued to use their English frequently in the present for work or social situations.
6. I assumed that the language learners did employ specific strategies that helped them become proficient, but I was unsure about what they were or how they helped.

### **Research Questions**

What do adults ELLs perceive oral proficiency to be?

How do adult ELLs perceive the way they became orally proficient?

What are the different strategies adult ELLS have used to reach oral proficiency?

### **Purpose of this Present Study**

This thesis builds on the work of Ray (2011), who studied multilingual writers' metacognitive thinking and reflection. Instead of focusing on writing; however, I chose to focus my research on multilingual learners' and their reflections on how they became proficient in speaking English. This research interest was due to my previous experience as well as my continued path in teaching speaking abroad.

### **Overview of Thesis**

This thesis is divided into four additional chapters. Chapter 2 is a Review of Literature focusing on the following areas and research contribution to understanding how learners may reach speaking proficiency: 4/3/2 Techniques, Formulaic Chunking, Multimedia & Communicative Learning Techniques, Strategy Use, Vocabulary Training, Assessing and Analyzing Oral Proficiency to Understand Development,



Study Abroad Contexts, and Audio-Visual and Authentic Exposure. Chapter 3 is the Research Methodology. Chapter 4 is data collection, analysis, findings, discussion, limitations, implications for teachers, and suggestions for future research. Chapter 5 is the conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

Chapter 2 is a review of literature on understanding oral proficiency and strategies, methods, and paths to reach oral proficiency.

Oral proficiency in English as a second or foreign language has been studied for quite a while with regard to how to promote it within learners. Most researchers studying oral proficiency agree on how repetition of one form or another can assist in the building and perhaps even testing of oral proficiency (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2010; Bahrani & Tam, 2012; Boers, 2014; Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; Bruen, 2001; Bylund and Athanasopoulos, 2015; Chiu, 2012; de Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Lynch & Maclean 2000; Nakatani, 2006; Nation, 1989; Razagifard, 2013; and Wood, 2001).

### Proficiency and Competence

In discussing oral proficiency, it is important to have some overarching definitions. Ellis (1994) defines *proficiency* as follows: “L2 proficiency refers to a learner’s skill in using the L2. It can be contrasted with the term ‘competence’. Whereas, competence refers to the knowledge of the L2 a learner has internalized, proficiency refers to the learner’s ability to use this knowledge in different tasks” (p. 720).

In their foundational work *The Tapestry of Language*, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) discussed required competencies and used the metaphor of weaving to express how language learning occurs to create a tapestry. It came about after Oxford had lamented that effective ESL techniques that combined communicated, thematic and

task based learning together with a focus on diverging individual student learning styles were lacking (p. v). With regards to speaking proficiency, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) define four important areas of competence for language learners. These areas include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence strategic competence, and discourse competence (p. 154-155). *Grammatical competence* contributes to a speaker's fluency by enabling them to understand grammatical constructions in accurate ways without hesitation. *Sociolinguistic competence* enables proficient speakers to employ routine phrases to utter speech acts such as compliments and apologies (p. 154). *Strategic competence* and mastery of it is indicated through turn-taking and conversation management techniques, which may also include what Scarcella and Oxford (2012) have referred to as "compensatory strategies." These could take form through gesturing, selecting topics, and utilizing circumlocution to assist when words escape them (p. 154). Circumlocution refers to talking around a word because the learner cannot remember or does not know what it is in the L2. An example might be "the second month of the year" for the word February. Finally, *discourse competence* is a fourth competency required for speaking proficiency. What this means is that speakers show their competency by holding a conversation through taking turns, turning the conversation, opening and closing a conversation, repairing areas of a conversation when confusion arises, and keeping a conversation in flow (p. 155). These particular competencies are important aspects of speaking proficiency that go beyond accuracy, fluency, and complexity.

*Oral proficiency*, according to Escobedo, Balazs, and Sanford (2015), means "the all- encompassing ability to communicate verbally" (p. 16). It is comprised of,

“expressive language skills, social pragmatics, articulation precision, and phonological usage in fluent speech” (p. 16).

Speaking, many language learners, language teachers and researchers would argue, is an incredibly complex process. Lazaraton (2014) explained that the act of speaking includes clustering, which uses groups of thoughts rather than single words; hesitation markers such as “uh” “um,” and pausing; colloquial language, including slang and idioms; and suprasegmental features as well. These suprasegmental elements have to do with stress, rhythm, and intonation (p. 106). Because speech most often occurs with another person through interaction, Lazaraton (2014) has reminded teachers that speaking is quite demanding as it also requires monitoring the speech of others and of self, thinking about and producing speech for that contribution or interaction, and also monitoring the effect of what goes into that speech (p. 106). In this sense, Lazaraton (2014) has considered fluency, accuracy, appropriacy, and authenticity foundational for “competent L2 speaking” (p. 106).

While many researchers share commonalities regarding how learners can reach oral proficiency, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) along with Larsen-Freeman (2006), have pointed out the amount of diversity of student learning styles and abilities as they move along in their development of proficiency. This suggests that an abundance of studies and research may be required to tackle the depth and breadth of this diversity.

The following sections include different methods, strategies and paths researchers have discovered that may bring learners to oral proficiency.

#### **4/3/2 & Similar Techniques for Fluency**

Although Larsen-Freeman (2006) insisted that there is no one path to oral proficiency, several researchers have pointed out how using one strategy, the 4/3/2 technique, can aid in increasing fluency and perhaps even accuracy and complexity of language (Boers, 2014; de Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Wood, 2001). In an earlier study, Nation (1989) researched how repetition could help increase fluency (also changing audiences and reducing time) while he explored Maurice's 4/3/2 technique from 1983, taking into account fluency, accuracy and control of content. The 4/3/2 technique works like this: First, a learner takes a few minutes to prepare a topic without taking notes. Then, students pair up with another student and they speak for four minutes on their topic. The listener only listens. Then, they switch. Next, the students change partners and repeat the same information, but the time is reduced to three minutes. Finally, the students change partners again and repeat the task for two minutes each (p. 378). This technique was found to improve (though not dramatically) accuracy, fluency and control of language, and even allowed students to perform at a higher level than previously (p. 383). According to Nation, it is especially useful because the learners encounter different audiences and have a chance to repeat the same speech, and must deal with time reduction or pressure (p. 378-9).

Later studies confirmed the outcomes of Nation's use of the 4/3/2 technique (Boers, 2014; de Jong & Perfetti, 2011). De Jong and Perfetti (2011) concluded that this technique seemed to increase long-term oral fluency through proceduralization, but of what specifically was not determined. Lynch and Maclean (2000) also mentioned the usefulness of time pressure to mimic the stress of communication to which Nation (1989), de Jong and Perfetti (2011) and Boers (2014) referred. Also

similar to Nation (1989) and Boers (2014), Lynch and Maclean's (2000) preliminary study focused on repetition, speed, and audience (changing). In contrast, their study explored learner perceptions and gains in fluency from both a lower and a higher-level student. In addition, the retrieval Lynch and Maclean (2000) used was very similar to Nation's (1989) test and the 4/3/2 technique, with a difference of adding an interactive unit instead of simply duplicating the task (p. 242). They discovered that by recycling the communicative content as participants completed their tasks, the participants were able to improve their proficiency (even at two different starting levels). This suggested this particular methodology could be used in the classroom with learners at differing levels. However, because this study only had two participants, Lynch and Maclean (2000) cautioned against using the information in a general way (p. 244-245).

De Jong and Perfetti (2011) sought to determine how the 4/3/2 technique affected the mechanisms of long-term proficiency, transfer, and proceduralization rather than in the short term as Nation (1989) focused on. They discovered that fluency was indeed increased long term, but only by the participants who repeated their speeches, and it only transferred after repetition. In addition, the fluency was most likely due to proceduralization.

Boers (2014), expanding on Nation's (1989) and de Jong and Perfetti's (2011) studies and wanting to determine the effectiveness of the 4/3/2 technique, confirmed Nation's findings in a study which compared the 4/3/2 technique to a 3/3/3 technique. Though Boers (2014) found the time shrink (from four minutes to three minutes to two minutes) was effective for stimulating faster speech than normal, the 3/3/3 technique made greater speech gains (p. 230). Boers (2014) went beyond Nation's (1989) study to

collect participant feedback and discovered some students found the 3/3/3 part “boring” as it was repetition with no increased stakes compared with the 4/3/2 technique.

However, some students found it helpful to have the same amount of time for each speech with the 3/3/3 technique (p. 230-231). In addition, Boers (2014) found that there was no compelling evidence for other aspects of oral proficiency from these techniques such as lexical sophistication or syntactic complexity (p. 231).

### **Formulaic Chunking, Multimedia, & Communicative Language Technique**

Several researchers have focused on the idea that formulaic chunks can be useful when building L2 oral fluency (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Oe & Alam, 2013; Wood, 2001). Boers and Lindstromberg (2012) identified trends in the research that focused on the usefulness of formulaic sequences (strings of words). The trends were as follows: The uptake of a formula generally required multiple encounters with the same string of words. Student awareness of formulaic sequences did not necessarily increase the use of them. Additionally, though being more aware of formulaic sequencing might have increased learning rates, there were many variables to consider when doing the research. Student autonomy with information produced mixed results and effectiveness appeared to be dependent on tool quality and learner willingness, yet it did not guarantee long-term memory of it. Lastly, idioms connected to images had been found to be better for learning in that they could be more easily remembered. These trends seem to point to more challenges in using formulaic sequencing than to their usefulness. More research with regarding the use and acquisition of formulaic sequencing would be beneficial, especially with regard to differing variables (p.99).

While phrasal verbs are not huge chunks of language, they must often be seen as a small chunk of language. Oe and Alam (2013) also found that images connected not to idioms, but to phrasal verbs, seemed to be more effective than using glosses in the L1 for Japanese students learning English. Those who participated in the study using pictures also finished their tasks faster than those using glosses (p. 230). During the post-test, the researchers also found that the participants who practiced using pictures were able to use the phrasal verbs in their L1 with their own words as opposed to those who used the glosses. Oe and Alam (2013) suggested that this might be good reasoning for avoiding glosses and using multimedia as replacements in language learning (p. 231). While more research would be required to be able to generalize, and the study did not focus specifically on use of phrasal verbs in oral language, the use of multimedia aspect for language learning is promising and learning phrasal verbs is often a challenge for second language learners. In addition, written to oral language methods can be useful (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2010; Razagifard, 2013; Satar & Özdener, 2008). Also, there can be interference from first languages and sometimes learners avoid phrasal verbs altogether (Oe & Alam, p.222).

Phrasal verbs are difficult, as Oe and Alam (2013) pointed out, yet they are a crucial part to showing mastery of English, according to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). Phrasal verbs need to be considered as entirely new verbs instead of taking each piece of the verb phrase separately using separate definitions for each part (p. 427). The problem with this is that phrasal verbs seem to be nearly impossible to learn without guidance or at least understanding of their existence, as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) have pointed out:



...[W]e are once again dealing in this chapter with a structure that is very difficult of ESL/EFL students. For one thing, the meaning of phrasal verbs is often noncompositional; that is someone can know the meaning of the verb and the apparent meaning of the particle, but when they are put together, a unique meaning is derived... Yet they are ubiquitous in English; no one can speak or understand English, at least the informal register, without a knowledge of phrasal verbs. (p.425)

Being able to understand and use phrasal verbs correctly, though challenging, especially for language learners who do not have them in their L1, seems to be a necessary part of communicating in English at a proficient level. Wyss (2003), who taught English in Italy for eleven years, took a Communicative Learning Technique (CLT) approach in his lesson plan on phrasal verbs shared in TESOL Journal as he encouraged teachers to use authentic texts for intermediate learners and beyond, to show that phrasal verbs exist in real world contexts. While he did not provide empirical research, his encouragement of authentic text with pictures was in alignment with Oe and Alam's (2013) conclusions for using pictures, and their recommendation for using comics and manga, in addition to monitoring the learner processes carefully (p. 232). One key component to Wyss (2003) making his lesson a CLT activity was the end discussion when the teacher would ask the students a question about the text with an actual phrasal verb in it, thus getting the students to use the phrasal verb in answering the question. This helped him to monitor and assess students informally (p. 37).

Though Wood (2001) did not focus on phrasal verbs in formula learning as Oe and Alam (2013) did, he did insist that formula learning, while challenging as is

teaching phrasal verbs, is a large part of oral proficiency. Differing from Boers and Lindstromberg (2012), Wood (2001) used the 4/3/2 technique that Nation (1989) used and created his own course to bring about fluency which he explained should be used as a model for a starting point to produce empirical evidence for increasing fluency. He confirmed that automatization of formulaic language units is an important building block to fluency.

Agreeing with the importance of automaticity of formulaic language, Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) went beyond Wood (2001) and integrated genuine communication to the mix to create automaticity and in a way that could be measured. Similar to Wood (2001), they employed stages with automatization, language consolidation and free communication. Moving beyond Wood's (2001) starting point, Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) focused the study on using a Communicative Learning Technique (CLT), similar to how Wyss (2003) might construct a lesson, explained how to break down teacher resistance to using it while addressing how to promote mastery through a more repetitive, yet a genuinely communicative process. With ACCESS, their proposed methodology, which stands for Automatization in Communicative Contexts of Essential Speech Segments, there are three phases. This is similar to Wu, Chen Hsieh & Chang's (2017) "Flipped" classroom in a way, though without the technological aspect. Using the ACCESS way, speech segments were introduced, elicited and practiced. Then they were used in interactive activities. Next, the speech segments were strengthened through fluency, accuracy and grammatical discovery tasks. Finally, students engaged in free communication with topics related to the speech segments learned. According to the researchers, CLT can be used to

facilitate fluency in a genuine manner that can be taught by teachers rather than avoided through ACCESS (p. 5).

Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) also echo the thought that particular language features can bring heightened awareness through use of communicative techniques and practice that makes the learning meaningful. Mochizuki and Ortega (2008), in an effort to balance grammar and communication, also have advocated for task-based language teaching options in foreign language classrooms in Japan, as they researched, or in other FL classrooms around the world. They found that guided planning was most effective and productive rather than unguided or no planning when it came to preparing for an oral task where a particular target form was required. The students who received guided planning exhibited higher quality language use, higher use in general, and more accurate use than non-planning or un-guided planning groups (p.26). They did not, however, focus on long- term interlanguage development (p. 31).

### **Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), Technology Use, and Online Planning for Oral Proficiency**

While some researchers have focused on a communicative approach to oral proficiency through a specific CLT methodology, others have combined the use of technology and communicative practices or careful online planning (COLP) to enhance oral proficiency with improving oral fluency (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2010; Blake 2009; Razagifard, 2013; and Satar & Özdener, 2008).

Satar and Özdener (2008) discovered that transfer from text to oral skills was possible using synchronous CMC through voice chat and text messaging chat. They

found that both their experimental groups increased their speaking proficiency during the chat sessions, but anxiety decreased only for the text chat group.

Blake (2009) also presented promising research in regards to planning through text-based internet chats with synchronous internet chatting, face-to-face communicating, and a control group of intermediate learners at the same level. He concluded that the internet chat group made the highest gains in oral proficiency (p. 234). This might have been due to more exposure, practice, and repetition. It might also have been due to low affective filters from free typing (p. 237). The preparation a text-based communication allows could have also influenced the results (p. 238).

Additionally, Blake (2009) conducted exit interviews, which provided some unique insight. In this case, learner perception versus reality did not seem to match. Seventy percent of the subjects who participated in text-based communication thought it was useful, whereas 100% of the face-to-face group thought their communication practice was useful. One hundred percent of the traditional or control group believed that the face-to-face communication practice would be useful, and 40% of the text-based group thought the face-to-face group would have been useful. This suggested there might be a bias toward face-to-face practicing, which Blake (2009) suggested teachers might help their students overcome (p. 238). While there were many limitations, including the need for students to be monitored and forced to speak up in chats, the research was beneficial for shedding light on different techniques for increasing oral proficiency.

Razagifard (2013) further studied how using synchronous Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) texting use could indirectly build oral fluency, though how

exactly oral fluency came about was not explored. Razagifard (2013) used similar techniques as Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005) used in their CLT focused methodology through the use of problem solving, opinion exchange and decision-making, which may have had something to do with the results of the interaction building oral fluency development. Perhaps this was the case because Razagifard's (2013) study was synchronous (occurring in real time) interaction with other students over a computer. Additional research, in this respect to CMC, on how learners may reach oral proficiency using text CMC, would be useful.

Wu, Chen Hsieh and Chang (2017) used technology and CLT in order to bring about effective oral proficiency learning. They discovered that a "Flipped" learning classroom style, which used mobile technology( including texting and audio file sending options), and combined authentic use, inside and outside classroom activities, peer and instructor interaction, and a formal educational experience, contributed to significant gains in the English oral proficiency of 50 university students in Taiwan. Unlike Blake's (2009) study, the students did not use CMC, but they did use technology in a similar way to facilitate fluent use and frequent communicative practice while lowering affective filters.

In a "Flipped" learning classroom, in contrast to a conventional lecture- based one, students are introduced to new material prior to coming to class (p. 142). The students were introduced to new material via a mobile technology application called Line, then they participated in classroom activities and discussion or clarification of introduced material. This "Flipped" classroom style allowed for more interactive and engaged learning, which enhanced learning outcomes (oral proficiency in this case).

Another benefit of the “Flipped” classroom this study uncovered was that students were able to take what they learned in class and make it useful outside the classroom in non-formal and non-educational environments( p. 149). According to the researchers, this is one of the major reasons for increasing speaking proficiency; it should be useful for life outside class.

Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2010), while they did not use CMC either, investigated simultaneous careful online planning (COLP), task repetition and time pressure, discovered that learners who are given the chance to engage in online planning at the same time as they repeat tasks increase their accuracy, complexity and fluency significantly. Careful online planning is a process that speakers go through as they prepare their speech. They monitor their speech both before and after production. By itself, careful online planning has been seen to take away from fluency as learners focus more on accuracy, but the element of repetition seemed to be a variable that increased fluency as well (p. 36-37). Thus, the careful planning gives learners ample time to pay attention to their performance and increase elements of their proficiency through repetition, whereas Pressured Online Planning (POLP), perhaps similar to the circumstances in the 4/3/2 technique, forces learners to produce speech under time pressure.

### **Strategy Use and Oral Proficiency**

Defining learning strategies, like proficiency and competence, is also a tricky matter since there are many definitions. Brown (2000) has defined strategies as “battle plans” (p. 113). Strategies, according to him, are ways or methods to approach a task or challenge to achieve a particular result. These are often plans that may vary from one

moment to the next. Strategies from learner to learner also tend to vary. There are many ways to approach a particular problem. Learners might choose one strategy or several to accomplish a task (p.113). These strategies could include many ways learners attack problems as researchers have previously explored.

While Oxford(1990) has agreed that older definitions of learner strategies can include ways to approach a challenge or a way to reach success, she further clarified that a learning strategy is “specific action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations”(p.8).

While researchers have mostly focused on certain strategies useful for increasing oral fluency, Nakatani (2006), placing his research in narrowing a gap for studies addressing interaction in communicative tasks, examined behaviors and/or strategies that learners use which influence oral fluency in a more positive way. Nakatani (2006) sought to discover if Japanese EFL learners could recognize their own oral communication strategies, and the implications of it. He found that there was a difference in use of those oral communication strategies between higher and lower proficiency learners, and those who used eight specific speaking and seven listening factors, were better able to communicate, or at least cope with issues during interactional tasks. The speaking factors were as follows: social affective( related to learners soothing their own anxiety related to social communication), fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy oriented, message reduction and alteration, non- verbal strategies while speaking, message abandonment, and attempt to think in English( p. 155). The listening factors included negotiation for meaning,

fluency maintaining, scanning( focusing on a particular points of speech such as subject, verb, and interrogatives), getting the gist, non-verbal strategies while listening, less active listener( less successful learners), and word-oriented( vocabulary-focused)( p. 156-157).

Nakatani also mentioned Oxford's (1990) Strategies Inventory for Language Learning, which classified strategies into several groups, though he did not use her particular strategy inventory, choosing to develop his own Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI). Oxford's (1990) strategies included affective, social, metacognitive, memory-related, general cognitive, and compensatory strategies. Bruen (2001), on the other hand, did use Oxford's (1990) SILL strategy in her own study.

Bruen (2001) conducted a similar study to Nakatani's related to strategy use, though with English-speaking students with German as a L2. The students in Bruen's (2001) study were a small (18) group of Irish students of German. The students were assessed at two and four years over a four-year period using Oxford's (1990) S.I.L.L strategy questionnaire, which is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (p. 158). Used widely and considered one of the most comprehensive strategy questionnaires available, S.I.L.L. classifies language-learning strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, memory-related, and compensatory strategies (p. 158). What Bruen (2001) discovered was that the students in the higher proficiency categories tended to use more strategies than did the improvers in the lower proficiency category. The same group also had the greatest increase of use of those strategies over the four- year period in getting their degree. Bruen (2001) has cautioned that abandoning training in other strategy types besides cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies is not



recommended even though the results of her study suggest using those three helped students improve their language learning (p.165). In fact, the weaker students may need a flexible approach to learning and using strategies that they can handle at whatever level they find themselves. In addition, other variables need to be considered such as gender, motivation, personality types, interests and even how studying abroad with exposure to L2 might make a difference in the results of a study such as this one (p. 165).

It would be beneficial for English as L2 researchers and teachers if these studies were to be replicated using L2 English, though some of the results could possibly apply to oral proficiency and second language acquisition in general.

### **Vocabulary Training and Oral Proficiency**

AlShaiji (2015), Hellman & Burns (2008), Snellings, van Gelderen, and de Glopper (2002) and Saz, Lin, & Eskenazi (2015) have focused their research on how vocabulary training can increase oral proficiency in students. Snellings et al. (2002) touched on an area that might be a possible first step to oral proficiency and fluency especially with regard to computerized vocabulary training. They found that vocabulary training increased accuracy and reaction times. While it featured written lexical retrieval, further inquiry would be helpful for speaking and with a study done on L2 English.

AlShaiji (2015), from his personal observation, noticed that children, especially in Saudi Arabia spend many hours playing video games that are mostly in English (p. 126). With this study, he sought to investigate if video games actually could promote Saudi children's vocabulary retention since technology has become part of their daily

lives already. The study reported the results of 60 female participants with no prior knowledge of English. While the players did show more gains in vocabulary than the control group who were traditionally learning English vocabulary, those watching the games actually recalled a larger amount of the vocabulary than those playing the game (p. 127). While some parents and teachers may oppose video games in the classroom, AlShaiji has concluded that video games may be a successful new resource to support language learning in the kindergarten classroom, especially since it provides an opportunity for students to have more exposure to native English speakers (p. 130).

Saz et al. (2015) inquired about the effects of translation on the acquisition of new vocabulary through lexical retrieval. They determined that translation increased accuracy in the short-term, but negatively influenced accuracy and possibly fluency in the long-term. They determined that the amount of translation (or control of it by teachers) is important and that scaffolding is better for learning vocabulary long-term for second language acquisition than constant translation.

Also focusing on vocabulary training as a topic of interest, Helman and Burns (2008) conducted a study that aimed to understand the relationship between oral proficiency and sight word vocabulary acquisition. In the end, they could not determine if language proficiency supported a higher acquisition rate or if a higher acquisition rate supported language development (p. 16). Because of this, they did suggest that instruction in strategy use such as sight words in combination with language development could help students with lower proficiency levels to make class time more effective (p. 16). Helman and Burns (2008), similar to Oe and Alam (2013), advocated for the use of visual support for new words or perhaps even the use of actions or

objects. Similar to the 4/3/2 group and advocates of frequency and repetition, Helman and Burns (2008) also recommended the use of personal readers where short text that the students know by memory matches the print (p. 18).

### **Assessing & Analyzing Oral Proficiency to Understand Development**

Another important research area necessary to understand how learners may come to English speaking proficiency is through assessing and analyzing learners who are considered proficient or are on the path to being considered proficient. Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, and Martinsen (2014), Escobedo et al. (2015), Iwashita, Prior, Watanabe and Lee (2008), and Riazantseva (2001) conducted research exploring how learners produced language related to their proficiency levels.

Iwashita et al. (2008) sought to determine how different assessed levels of second language speech were with the goal of aiding the development of the international TOEFL iBT test. In addition, their aim was to capture insights into the nature of oral proficiency as it developed. They determined that “exaggerated emphasis on grammatical accuracy [...was]...misplaced (p.45). Not only this, but vocabulary knowledge and production features, where Saz et al. (2015) and Snellings et al. (2002) focused their attention, seemed to play a more important role than perhaps previously thought. With this being the case, the researchers have recommended that tests should consider other features besides grammatical accuracy (including vocabulary), and that teachers take more of this into account when preparing students for tests and learning L2s in general.

Baker-Smemoe et al. (2014) aimed to assess L2 fluency utterance and how or if it related, contributed, or connected to overall oral proficiency across several

different second languages and across several different levels of proficiency. Their research suggested that teachers or institutions trying to determine whether students have reached an intermediate or an advanced level, might use utterance fluency as a way to determine that and give sufficient evidence. However, this did not appear to be the case for lower proficiency learners.

Escobedo et al. (2015), coming from the point of view of speech-language pathologists with therapy techniques, focused their study on certain elements of oral proficiency that often become a challenge for monolinguals of L1 English to comprehend within non-native English speakers' speech. The challenge was that some students could not clearly understand course material taught by international faculty in the US. Escobedo et al. (2015) conducted interviews over 13 months on international graduate and doctoral students who had spent at least three years in the US. What they determined is that auditory discrimination skills were not a good indicator of oral proficiency. They determined that rate of speech was important as well as improvement in intonation patterns, especially for Mandarin speakers of L2 English. The rate of speech was crucial. For clear intelligibility, it needed to be neither too fast nor too slow.

Also interested in a paralinguistic focus was Riazantseva (2001), who conducted research on pausing patterns. Her research focused on 30 L1 Russian L1, L2 English speakers and 20 English L1 speakers. She discovered that the Russian speakers of L2 English seemed to acquire more appropriate pausing as they reached higher proficiencies in English. The high-level learners would imitate the pausing practices of native English speakers, but the intermediate level learners stuck to their L1 Russian patterns. From this research, she concluded that adhering to native norms gives the

perception that speech is more fluent and native-like. Pausing differences with regard to duration, which deviates more from native-norms, could potentially accentuate a foreign accent (p. 521). She also discovered that pausing patterns do shift from language to language. While pausing patterns may be relatively universal, the length of time was not. The implications for teaching suggest that students need situations that illustrate native patterns of verbal communication through mediums such as television, video games, and radio programs because pausing is very difficult to teach (p. 499). Still, non-verbal communication, such as pausing, is important for oral proficiency.

### **Oral Proficiency in Study Abroad Contexts**

Cohen and Shively (2007), Mora and Valls-Ferrer (2012); Roever (2006); and Serrano, Tragant, and Llanes (2012) have determined that study abroad experiences may contribute to speaking proficiency in ways which other areas of exposure and education may not address or may address minimally. For example, an aspect of oral proficiency includes pragmalinguistics, which refers to aspects of language that include understanding how to articulate routine behavior and practices (linguistic strategies that are necessary to express intentions) (Roever, 2006, p.230). Roever (2006) has responded to a lack in the literature regarding interlanguage pragmalinguistics and valid testing of it. He explored a web-based test and determined it to be sufficiently reliable with intermediate and advanced level learners. In addition, he determined that time abroad or exposure to English speaking environments seemed to help with the ability to articulate routines. He conceded that pragmalinguistics is only a piece of pragmatic competence and that to be complete, learners need to be able to show mastery of both pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatism.

Cohen and Shively (2007), picking up where Roever (2006) ended, investigated the acquisition of requests and apologies, which are considered to be in the category of sociopragmatism, in learners studying Spanish or French abroad. They were seeking data on areas where non-native speakers diverged from native speakers in this area, and how curricular intervention should affect the acquisition of learning strategies with regard to language and culture. They noticed that many non-native speakers were unaware of many sociopragmatic norms, and awareness was found to be enhanced by a treatment of either a brief in-person orientation, or the distributing of a guidebook. While this study was unique in focusing on student language and culture-learning strategies, the researchers could not control for how well the students read the guidebook. In addition, other data is required regarding diverse speech acts besides requests and apologies to make more general conclusions. Also helpful would be a study on L2 English learners.

Mora and Valls-Ferrer (2012) conducted a study on short- term study abroad and its effects on the oral proficiency of students from Spain. The Study Abroad (SA) that provided students with extensive exposure to English as an L2 and practice of it had a positive impact on the students' oral performance. The oral performance was measured independently of accuracy and complexity (p. 635). While students participated in formal instruction at home, the largest gains in fluency were made while studying abroad (p. 635). Because the study abroad period was only three months, the research suggested that longer periods of time had the potential to produce more substantial improvements in oral competence which could extend to accuracy and complexity, as they were not modified in the three months of study (p. 636-637).

Serrano et al. (2012) discovered that oral performance increased dramatically in students who received formal instruction in their home country of Spain prior to studying abroad in England for an entire year. The oral fluency increased most in the first semester of studying abroad, while writing fluency increased in the second semester. Accuracy in oral production, on the other hand, increased in the second semester. This implied that the study abroad periods of longer than a few months were necessary for students to make gains in accuracy, and that instructional methods focusing on oral communicative skills were especially necessary in English as a Foreign Language contexts. Further research would be needed to understand and analyze cognitive fluency as well as relationships between variables and language gains abroad. In this particular study by Serrano et al. (2012), the researchers only focused on three factors that could contribute to L2 development while studying abroad. These factors were duration of stay, attitudes, and living arrangements (p. 155). The research has suggested that living arrangements and interactions of the students with English speakers as opposed to time mostly spent with Spanish speakers helped to improve lexical richness (p. 154).

### **Audiovisual Exposure & Authentic Exposure on Oral Proficiency Performance**

With more audiovisual media available to learners and teachers, many studies have focused research on how these mediums and other authentic exposure learning environments employing them have contributed to language learning and oral proficiency (Bahrani & Tam, 2012; Bylund & Athanasopoulos, 2015; Greenfader, Brouillette & Farkas, 2015; Prokhorov & Therkelsen, 2015). While studying abroad as a learning environment has many benefits on oral proficiency, not all students have the

opportunity to go, and not all universities have the requirement of sending their students abroad as the students were required to do in the study of Mora and Valls-Ferrer( 2012). Following this route of exploring oral proficiency, Bylund and Athanasopoulos (2015) conducted a study of Swedish L1 speakers who learned English, but did not necessarily study abroad. The eighty-two university students had begun learning English around age eight, but English in Sweden is not generally used for communication purposes, though it is required as a school subject and it is used frequently in higher education (p. 127). In addition, English speaking television programs take up about 33% of the public service channels and 50-90% of commercial channels according to a Swedish newspaper from 2009 (p. 133). What Bylund and Athanasopoulos (2015) were trying to determine was if the frequency of television viewing in English influenced language restructuring of categorization of motion from Swedish L1 to English L2 as Swedish does not have aspect as English does. They determined that learners who are not immersed in a L2 setting may still feel the effects of the target language exposure. This was seen most strongly in this study through the frequency of television viewing.

Bahrani and Tam (2012) also conducted a study to understand exposure to audiovisual programs in informal settings and second language acquisition regarding its effectiveness with empirical evidence. They determined that the quality of the input rather than the amount of exposure was deemed most significant. While they admit there might have been many variables influencing the informal settings, they found that audiovisual news broadcasts, with its special discourse, recycling of vocabulary, and fluency of speech, and other elements that made it most helpful in language proficiency



improvement. Films, a second runner up and cartoons, while popular, did not seem to increase proficiency when compared with the other mediums. The results are promising for language learners and teachers in Foreign Language contexts especially because there is often a limit of authentic social interaction in English.

Prokhorov and Therkelsen (2015), like Mora and Valls-Ferrer (2012) and Serrano et al. (2012) wanted to understand the effect of study abroad, though in a slightly different context. Prokhorov and Therkelsen (2015) expanded on this by looking into experiential learning in combination with media literacy and research skills on oral proficiency in a short- term study abroad program. They conducted their experiment with English L1, Russian L2 speakers in St. Petersburg, Russia. The nature of the documentary project combined story-telling and interviewing techniques, thus requiring the students to use Russian to interact with native speakers of Russian. They found that the daily routine of their documentary production increased their use of the Russian language. While the study abroad part was only six weeks of a yearlong documentary production, the project improved the students' oral proficiency, media literacy, and research skills. Through student surveys, the researchers found out that the interaction was the most difficult part, yet also the most rewarding part of their experience abroad. Upon graduation, many of the students spent time in Russian-speaking countries as Fulbright scholars, and one even gained employment as a Russian-language translator. The long-term outcomes of this project seemed to be far reaching, and this study replicated in using English as an L2 would be beneficial to the area of speaking proficiency.

The need or exigency required for using a foreign language often becomes a big motivator for some language learners depending on contexts and circumstances. Study abroad situations can bring this about as can authentic exposure through news channels or films. Language learners want to understand and be understood in these environments that require it. Even in ESL environments with plenty of English exposure, students may not always increase in oral proficiency by mere approximation. Greenfader et al. (2015) studied a number of ESL K-12 students in an Oral Performing Arts program and found that students who participated in the Teaching Artist Project (TAP) performed better on state speaking assessments than their counterparts who did not (p. 198). In fact, those who received the treatment of TAP who had the most limited English speaking skills gained the most benefit. Perhaps this was because they received the most guided interaction with both English-proficient students and adults. They may also have benefitted from the peer-to-peer English interaction and models of English (p. 199).

Modeling and imitation, whether in environments such as immersion settings or from audiovisual exposure, seem to be helpful influences for ELLs. Chiu's (2012) study focused on the pronunciation outcomes of 83 Taiwanese L2 English students through a film-dubbing project in a conversation class. Through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, Chiu (2012) learned that synchronous dubbing presentation was effective for pronunciation and intonation, an area in which previous researchers have recommended focusing on for areas of improved oral proficiency. The qualitative findings showed that the project was an effective way to improve intonation and pronunciation through fluency and repetition, though listening skills, and the

improvement of intonation, stress and linkage, through linking textbook pronunciation to actual pronunciation, in addition to meeting learners' expectations (p. E26). Most of the students placed high importance on native-like accents because of the benefits in communication. In sum, this experiment offered both authentic and contextualized situations for learners to improve their oral proficiency skills. Further research would be desired to discover more empirical evidence related to the extent of noticeable improvements to fluency, delivery and pronunciation (p. E 26).

Because so many researchers debate and discuss which ways or method might bring second language learners toward oral proficiency, there is a need to also understand what learners' (in this particular case ELLs') perceptions are of how they reach oral proficiency, and if it is comparable to that of what researchers have discovered. I plan to help narrow that gap through my research. My research seeks to find out the how three ELLs have perceived their path to oral proficiency in English through a multi-case study on two individuals from an Arabic speaking country and one Italian speaker. Individual paths to oral proficiency may vary within a classroom and across language and experience backgrounds; therefore, language teachers may need to be aware of and embrace the diversity of their students' language proficiency paths.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology, Data Collection, and Data Analysis**

#### **Objectives**

Chapter 3 is an explanation of the research method utilized, the data collected, and data analyzed. This qualitative study has been done as partial fulfillment for a master's degree from Eastern Washington University. The objective of this study is to explore, through a triple case study, how ELL adults have perceived how they came to be proficient in speaking English as a second language.

In the data collection section, I will present the first participant's interview transcript. Then, I will introduce my commentary and analysis on recurring themes within the interview. Next, I will present a table summarizing the themes and the frequency of the themes. The two subsequent participants' data have been presented in the same way. Finally, I will present a table named Themes Across Participants to show the distribution of themes across the three interviewees. Then, in Chapter 4, I will present a more in depth discussion on the findings followed by the conclusion in Chapter 5. The data and analysis have been organized in this manner to highlight the participants' voices through narrative inquiry.

TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) International Association asks that researchers follow particular guidelines in conducting studies, and case study data analysis will generally include an “iterative” or a cyclical process which may be a process applied or used over and over again (TESOL.org). In the same vein, the data analysis in this study began informally during the interview process and

gradually became more specific through recurring themes, pattern and category analysis.

While the project itself began in April of 2016, the idea had been on my mind since I was a young girl and first encountered other languages besides English. This research has come from a convenience sample through the connections of my thesis advisor and through connections I made as a teacher and traveler abroad. The first participant was the sister of a student at EWU from Saudi Arabia. In this case study, I will refer to her as Myriam. The second participant was a senior undergraduate student at EWU himself (also from Saudi Arabia). I will refer to him as Omar. I did not know much about Myriam or Omar before the interview. The third participant was an English language learner whom I met while tutoring English in Italy. I will refer to him as Francesco. Because of our previous interaction, I did know more about his language experiences (though not much more) and his personality than the two Saudi participants.

### **Methodology & Data Collection**

In order to collect data, I designed a multiple case study questionnaire with 14 open-ended questions to guide my participants and me through a series of interviews, one for each participant, for a one-time collection of data. In the end, I asked 15 questions after one additional question seemed to be necessary as I found out in the first interview (See Appendix A).

Prior to conducting the interview, I sent each participant an email explaining the project first, then I asked if they would be willing to participate in my research project in an interview- style meeting for approximately an hour in person or through

Skype. Each interview was scheduled on a separate day, the first occurring on February 28, 2017 in person, the second occurring on March 1, 2017 in person, and the final one occurring on March 6, 2017 through Skype. I conducted the in-person interviews at the EWU library, while I conducted the Skype interview on my home computer. I gave the participants the interview questions in paper or by email on the day of the interview so they could look at them if needed while I asked the questions. I gave them the IRB form to review approximately one week before the interviews (See Appendix B).

Before each interview began, the participants read and signed the IRB form. I asked if they had any questions, and then I began conducting the interview by asking the questions from Appendix A. The interviews were recorded on an iPod touch through a Voice Memos application.

I was the primary investigator for this project.

After completing the interviews, I transcribed each interview into a Microsoft Word document by listening and pausing in a recursive manner, then typing the interviews over the course of several weeks. This indicates that the analysis continued beyond the completion of the interviews. In fact, the analysis probably continued for at least two months after the interviews were transcribed, ending around the middle of May 2017.

In the transcripts, I have left everything in its original form as spoken in the interview with the exception of a few brackets of clarification information as well as a few lines with a question mark within parenthesis ( \_\_?\_\_) for a few rare sections where I attempted multiple times to decipher what was said and failed. I also withheld

the name of an individual Francesco mentioned in his interview for the sake of her privacy by placing name withheld in the place where her name would have gone.

All participants were ELLs with English being their second language. Two were native speakers of Arabic. One was a native speaker of Italian. All began their English language learning in elementary or primary school at approximately the first to third grade. The first two were educated in Saudi Arabia, while the third was educated in Italy.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed qualitatively according to several themes that arose within each interview regarding how the individual perceived his or her path to oral proficiency. I analyzed paper transcripts of the interviews according to the most frequent themes that arose in each interview. Next, I coded each theme using a colored highlighter and indicated which sections spanned multiple themes. Then I counted the occurrences of each of them and put them into tables. Finally, I created a table that incorporated the data across all the interviews as well as a chart that visually represented the top five categories and numbers mentioned for each participant. Because some of them did and did not overlap, there are 11 categories total in the chart.

As I analyzed the interviews for themes regarding perception of assistance with oral or speaking proficiency, I noticed many of the categories merged into others. For example, family influence might also coincide with education. TV and Movies as strategies might also merge into motivation. Because learning a language cannot necessarily be categorized in a black and white way, I have counted all the instances as I have found them, though I have made a note as to whether one or more of the

mentions was also considered in another category. This seems to have demonstrated how a learning strategy or method may serve several purposes at once, as teaching strategies and methods often do as well.

While there is a quite bit of discussion and array of definitions of oral or speaking proficiency within the field of TESOL, for the purposes of this study, I applied the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) guidelines to the participants' transcripts to demonstrate their level of proficiency. The ACTFL guidelines may be used to evaluate speech, and include video samples on the ACTFL website for clearer interpretation. For the purposes of this thesis, ACTFL requires that the guidelines be “reproduced in their entirety, with no alternations, and with credit to ACTFL;” therefore, they can be seen as Appendix C in their entirety (ACTFL.org). In this chapter, however, I have referred only to the categories in which I have placed Myriam, Omar, and Francesco as a reference point for this research. The categories for Speaking start with Novice and proceed to Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished.

### **Myriam's Interview Transcript**

Jena: All Right. So, uh, my first question is....what does proficiency, or what does fluency in English mean to you? So, um, how would you be able to tell if you were proficient or not in your own mind?

Myriam: Um, well, I think, um, that depends on, um, how you see yourself or how...how, um, I mean, you hear yourself speaking the language sometimes. I mean, um, eh, if you know the language and you know that, like for example, English has uh, I mean, several ways, I mean accents, like there's a British accent, the American accent.



So, I mean, when you feel that you're closer to one of the types...of...of the...the accent, I feel that, I mean...I mean where you feel that you're proficient, or...I mean like...like you're fluent more...when...when you feel that, um, native speakers understand you faster without, I mean, the typical accent that you have or something like that.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Yeah, I mean...

Jena: Okay. So, um, was there a point in your learning experience that you're like "aha, I know exactly what they're talking about!" Do you remember having that experience at all or just was it gradual?

Myriam: Um, it wasn't gradual...[laughter]

Jena: No? [laughter]

Myriam: No, well, the way, if...if you don't mind, like, if you want me to share...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...how....how I started. So...so, basically I was in a school where English wasn't, um, taught, I mean...that...I mean....they didn't focus on...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: English that much, basically...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...but they were good at everything else.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So math, science and everything...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...was good. Uh, we started learning English, em, 1<sup>st</sup> grade...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...but it was very slow, very simple. Um, thankfully, I mean,

I...I...wasn't...I...I mean I'm not bragging, but I was...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: ...a good student. Like, um, I mean, I...I studied well and my grades were well, but the English thing...I was good at what they gave us, but wasn't that...I mean...uhh...I mean...I mean, the material was very simple.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So, um, at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, was the last...I mean...ye...um, year for me in that school...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...and then my brother started his school for the first year and Mom switched us to a different school.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Um...um, there, I mean....it was a new school, but, I mean, their focus was English.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: I mean, Um, so, the students came from different schools, um...They were all, um, kind of on the same level when it was for English. They were, I mean, their background was good. Some of them came from international schools as well.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...but me, not so much. [laughter] So, what they did, um, is they placed us based on, um, levels.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...and I was placed on low level....

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...English, which is bad enough...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: ...Because, because once, I mean, like, when you are, like, used to being a good student, and, like, the star or something...

Jena: Yeah, yeah

Myriam:...and then they place you on the level low, it's not that good, but I got to... to... like, kind of ditch the, the mean students...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...because they were making fun of me...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...and that's like, uh...

Jena: Sure

Myriam:... a different story because, well, um...I kind of felt like it was new to me, the atmosphere...the idea of someone, like, picking on someone because they can't speak the language...was very new to me.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Um, I came from a school where, you know, we tease each other and, like, make fun of each other, but it's never about academics...

Myriam:...or...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...or, how bad...

Jena: Okay. Sure.

Myriam: ...you are in school...So...

Jena: Interesting

Myriam:...that was new to me. Like, yeah, when I was in class, and I would read something and I, like, misread it, and I'm waiting for the teacher to correct me...

Jena: Mmhmm

Myriam: ...Ahh... I get so surprised that, I mean, someone's giggling or laughing, and I'm like, what's so funny? I mean, like, I made a mistake.

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: So that was new to me.

Jena: Interesting

Myriam: And, um, so, I was placed on...on a level that was low, uh, but then, uh, my teacher was so nice and, um, she improved our level, but it was very, like, slow...kind of...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...improvement...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: But then, she, like, we've all got, I mean, kind of good grades, most of us...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...because it was... it wasn't that hard...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...but then she made a move, like, uh, she took the...the highest, I mean, uh... students who...who...uh, who scored highest in the class, and she moved us to the high level again.

Jena: Mmmmm

Myriam: So she gave us that opportunity to be in the high...

Jena: Ahhhh

Myriam: ...that was on the seventh, like, when we moved to seventh grade.

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...and, um, my friends were moved with me as well. Um, they didn't feel comfortable; they switched back...

Jena: Oh, okay.

Myriam: That was an option...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: But...

Jena: Okay, that's cool.

Myriam:...Yeah, but me... I was...I was like...I was thinking, well now, because I'm on a high level, and, I mean...it looks better on the, like, your report....

Jena: Okay, sure. [laughter]

Myriam: ...when it says "high English"...and I didn't want to disappoint my parents. I said, well, I'll just stay in the class.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Um...um...Well, seventh grade was kind of... difficult when it comes, like, um, the way I learned the language. The material was difficult, um, and the teacher wasn't very committed to teaching...

Jena: Ohh

Myriam: ...it the proper way...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...But the students were fine with it because they can read and understand...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: ....But I need someone to explain things to me...

Jena: Right, sure.

Myriam:...and, like, one of the...the..., uh...[laughter]...my...uh....I think till this day, the worst thing for me is if someone asks, like, read this, like, publicly....like in the class....

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...it's reading time. You know...

Jena: Ahhh

Myriam: Yeah, so, I remember, I...I made sure, like, whenever she starts doing that part of reading, I would just, um...take an excuse and go to the bathroom.

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam:....and stay there as much as I can until I know she passed.

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: Because, she...she...like you know how teachers are. They kind of sense the one who...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: don't want to have to speak...

Jena: Yeah...

Myriam:...they pick on you...and, like, um....and I was also placed with the same students who I didn't want to be in them....with them...in the same class.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: So, being...that's cool...I mean, um, at the same time, like, um, our TV, like, our local TV...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: ...started, um, getting interest in...in...um, having um, like, uh, English shows...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...more than the Arabic shows.

Jena: Oh, interesting. Hmm.

Myriam: Yeah, so the channels were expanding...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...and they were having all...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...different kinds of things that you watch, but we...ah, or at least me, I relied so much on reading the, the translation...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Yeah, so, that was my thing. And, um, uh, so I remember, for example, they started broadcasting Friends...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Sure

Myriam: So, and because they were so much behind, they had so many seasons...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: So, they had an episode, like, every day...

Jena: Every day

Myriam: So, yeah...

Jena: Oh, interesting

Myriam: Yeah, so, I started watching, and one of the things that I do remember that I would, I... I mean, I would try not to read what's written....

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...but then I would think, I mean, they're talking so fast. I don't...I can't...

Jena: Right...

Myriam: I can't...uh, like...I can't tell the words.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Really...

Jena: Yeah...

Myriam: I...I mean that was one of the struggles...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam:...and... uh, like I wished...I was like, I wish I...I learned English to the point where I don't, like, need to read what's written.

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: Yeah, and the second wish was...I wish I can guess-spell how a word is...



Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: I mean, I'm not that good of a speller, you know.

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: But at least I can guess...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...the words...or how does it sound.

Jena: Interesting

Myriam: So, I started watching and I think from, I mean, the shows and watching that and the music as well...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...em, your ear get trained...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...and how...how...how...I mean words are...

Jena: Sure

Myriam:...and even if you think that they said, like, uh, one connected sentence, which isn't...I mean like...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam:...you couldn't tell the words

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: Um, ehm, I mean watching again or connecting with the reading...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...would help you, like, know the words by...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...I mean...themselves

Jena: So did you get to a point when you didn't have to read the...the...what do you call it? Uh, yeah, the transcript?

Myriam: Yeah...um, I think, yeah, but I wasn't, um, I feel like that happened, like, two years after.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...Where I feel that, um, I would turn the TV and I would be working on something, um, b... based on what, I mean, I'm listening, I'm understanding what's happening on the show.

Jena: Oh! That's a really interesting point...

Myriam: Yeah...

Jena: ...'cause we...sometimes we think about the...you know...voices as background noise, but once you start to understand what the background noise is saying...ahhh, that's very powerful. Interesting. Very cool. Cool. All right. So, um, if you don't mind, tell me a little bit about your family background related to English. For example, um, do your parents or close relatives or anyone speak English pretty well, like proficiency...proficiently?

Myriam: Um, yeah, my dad.

Jena: Your dad does?

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So, um, he, I mean, came to the States, I mean, before he got married...

Jena: Oh, okay.

Myriam: So, he came here and he stayed for 12 years.

Jena: Wow, okay.

Myriam: So he did his bachelor's, and his master's and he had, like, free time in between like...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...where he traveled...

Jena: Sure

Myriam:...and did stuff

Jena: Sure, sure

Myriam: So, yeah

Jena: Okay. Um, so, I don't want to guess, but did your parents encourage you to become proficient? From what you already said, it sounds like probably, but, um, yeah? Did they encourage you, or, how did they, kind of, promote...[laughter] uh, English learning?

Myriam: Uh, well, um, I guess by placing me in the school where they, they...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: ...they felt that the...I mean they focus on better um...

Jena: Yeah, yeah

Myriam:...things for you....and my dad was, like, my tutor for the language at

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...home, so...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...when we had exams or assignments or something..

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...he would help me,

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Great, perfect. Okay, um, and you already said you started learning at about first grade, right?

Myriam: Mmmhmm

Jena: Um, now...so...remind me one more time, that first grade, was that, like, a public school where you're from, or is it private, or does everyone go to that kind of school?

Myriam: Um, well, our system there, we have public and we have private...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: It's a private school...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...but, like with um, kind of um, um, not that much of a fee...it's not...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...expensive...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...that type of thing

Jena: Okay

Myriam: But the other school that I moved to was...

Jena: Was more...

Myriam: ...more expensive

Jena: Okay. All right. That makes more sense. Um, okay. Then, next question...uh, why do you believe you started learning English. That might not have been an internal thing. Or, it might have been external; I don't know, but, do you, do you have any idea...w...why your parents were encouraging you?

Myriam: Um, well, I think, I mean, um, they were just, I mean, looking at what would be beneficial in the future.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Like, what they think, um, I mean, having, um, being able to speak two languages is a good thing and...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam:...since English was, I mean, the...kind of...global language...so...yeah. It's not, I mean...and maybe because the school had it so...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: ...they're like, have to learn it...

Jena: Easy

Myriam:...anyway

Jena: Sure

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Okay....Okay, great. Um, and then, okay, so my next question is, is approximately around what age did you feel more internally motivated to learn it, learning English versus somebody was telling you, oh, you have to take this class? Do you kind of remember an age about where, ahhh, I really do want to learn English?

Myriam: Um, I think, um, that that...I mean, same time when I...

Jena: About the same time...

Myriam: ....when...like the 7<sup>th</sup> grade...

Jena: Okay, sure...

Myriam:...when I was struggling because it felt to me like a struggle and I...

Jena: Mmhmm

Myriam:...um and um...the fact that, I mean, someone just, I mean in class, would think that oh, w... you're not that good...and so that ...that I mean, like, it's not up to you to judge...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: ...what I can do and what I can learn...

Jena: Sure, sure

Myriam: And then it continued, like it continued to be um, an interest because I was watching the shows and I want to understand them and...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...um, so, and you know, um and um, also when we moved to high school...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...it became, like...okay, if I want to study abroad, then I have to...to, I mean

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...be more capable of the language and luckily, I mean...high school time, I got, um... my English teacher was....I mean one of the best teachers...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ... and I think she also, I mean, had a role in...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...in shaping how...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ... we speak.

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Great. Cool. Okay, um, then you've talked a little bit about this before, too, but if you have any other stories or any situations you can expand, but, um, so...Did you have any strategies...you talked a little bit about the TV, but were there any strategies that you came up with, or maybe some that your teachers gave you that helped you kind of to get to that higher level?...did you do anything in particular that you can remember?

Myriam: Um, uh, on a personal...like with me and myself, I think music...

Jena: Okay, sure

Myriam:...played a role. So, um, lyrics, because, you know, it's not as...as long as a story.

Jena: Mmmhmm...for sure

Myriam:... and not as complicated as...

Jena: Right...

Myriam: ... like a TV script

Jena: Right

Myriam: ... or something, so I can, like, just Google the...the lyrics

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...and read them, and if there's something I don't understand, then I'll just...and I have a habit of, like, I mean, memorizing the lyrics...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...while listening to them...

Jena: Cool

Myriam:....and I want to...to know what's...what's the word, how it's, uh, pronounced...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:....and, uh, what does it mean if I don't know...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: uh, on the, like, um...the...the school level, I would say the writing, so...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...we had, like, a lot of assignments where we had to, to write stories, use vocabulary that we have never used before...

Jena: Okay, sure

Myriam: Um, so...yeah, it was, like, kind of practice...

Jena: So, writing was pretty helpful in getting you different words, and, like, kind of moving, moving the levels.

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Okay, great. Um...and then, okay. So, next question....how has the use of technology helped you to become proficient in English, or not helped you. [laughter]

Myriam: Um... uh, maybe...like, I had an mp3 [laughter]...which I've listened to music...

Jena: Sure

Myriam:...using.



Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: Um, um, I also, at that time in high school, I got...I had my laptop...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: So that was the first thing that...I mean, so it was easier for me to have access...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:... um, previously I used to use my dad's laptop...[laughter]

Jena: [laughter] Sure..

Myriam:...I noticed ...so I didn't cause trouble...

Jena: Oh really?

Myriam: ....There were multiple times, I've like, uh, um I've caused him to...to...to...um, format the whole thing...

Jena: Oh no...

Myriam:...because by an accident, like, yeah. [laughter]

Jena: Oh no...

Myriam: So, it's good that he doesn't save his, like, his work on it, so, he was fine.

Jena: Okay, that's good.

Myriam: Yeah...

Jena: Interesting

Myriam:...so I would say that, w...I mean...and, and TV, if TV counts...

Jena: Oh, for sure, sure.

Myriam: ...as part of that.

Jena: Yeah....and then, let's see...Dun dun dun dun...Okay, so, you...you said a little bit about, um, like, students your age and kind of teasing and things like that, so....Who would you consider your English-speaking peers now?

Myriam: Um...

Jena: And not necessarily, like, "native" English-speaking, but who...like who do you talk to in English?

Myriam: Ooh, um, so um, in college I met, like, I mean, different friends, and...\_\_?\_\_ences

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...so um, uh, my closest friend is...she's half-American. Her mom is American...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...and her dad's a Saudi.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Um, so, um, she mostly use English.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: I mean....she...she's fluent in Arabic, too, but I mean, like....it's, like, her go-to language.

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...because naturally, she would do that.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So I feel like, um, and that, I mean...because of that I...I also tend to talk in English.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: We email in English, too.

Jena: Sure, sure

Myriam: And I find it, like, more popular now that even if we're both native Arabic speakers, we would both type, like on Facebook or something, we would both use English...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...language. Or at least the letters. [laughter]

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam:...like...like write in our language, but using, like...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Is it, um, this is kind of a tangent, but eh, is it easier to type in English, or Arabic, or does it not matter? Like...

Myriam: Um, I think typing in English is faster.

Jena: Is it? Okay.

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Interesting

Myriam: I think so. Um, my keyboard doesn't have [laughter], like, Arabic...

Jena:...doesn't have the Arabic?

Myriam: Um, it does type, but doesn't have the stickers on it...

Jena: Ahhh

Myriam:...because I got it from here.

Jena: Ah, you got it here. Okay.

Myriam: Yeah, and I never bought the stickers.

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: But it takes longer for some reason.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: And I feel like the English...

Jena: Is just...

Myriam: is, like, faster...

Jena: ...easier...

Myriam:...okay, yeah.

Jena: Okay. Interesting. Okay, so then my next question would be, you know, with your friends, or other people, um, approximately your age who speak English, how would you...if you had to rate yourself, I guess, on a scale of 1-10, how would you compare yourself with some of the other ones?

Myriam: Um, well, if I'm gonna compare myself with the...the people who used to tease me [laughter]...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam:....then I feel like, um...um...I'm at least their...their...uh, their equivalent...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:....or better because...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ....I took, like, different things, um, that I'm pretty sure they don't do. Um, ah, I...I started writing....

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...stories on my own

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...and

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ... I feel that's like, uh,...

Jena: ...helped..

Myriam: ...yeah, uh, a level higher than...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: ...they are...

Jena: Yeah, yeah

Myriam: [laughter] Just...just saying [laughter].

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Yeah...you...I mean...don't feel like you're...you know, being bragging or humble. I'm...I'm just curious...

Myriam: That's good

Jena: Okay, um....and then, next question, now, this sounds obvious, but I'm just gonna ask you [laughter] 'cause..

Myriam: Okay

Jena: ....not all of m...the people who are doing this, are all from the same place, so...[laughter]...did you study or travel abroad in a country where you needed to use English, or where English was the majority language?

Myriam: Oh

Jena: ...and where did you go?

Myriam: So, um, I've never been abroad, um, till I came to the States. Um...

Jena: Mmhmm

Myriam: Um, it was because of my brother's going to school...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...so I came on and off.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: I...um, so, like, I forgot the question...[laughter]

Jena: Sorry...I know that was a long question....So, um, did you study or go to any other country where you needed to use English, even with, you know, "non- native" speakers, traveling, or whatever. Um, or, did you go to another country where you needed to...where English was a majority language...country....I guess...

Myriam: Umm....so, I've only...so since I've only been to the States...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...I'd say, yeah...

Jena: Just this...

Myriam: ... that's the only place...

Jena: Okay, perfect. Um, okay, so then, my other question is...is .how often do you converse or talk with proficient English speakers whether they are "native speakers" or not?

Myriam: Um, like, you mean, like how... how good I feel I am?

Jena: Oh, no, like how often...

Myriam: Oh

Jena:....like is it every day, or is it, like...I don't know...

Myriam: Yeah, w...well, um, since I'm...I'm, like, present here, I think it's on a daily basis...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:....like if I go out, I mean, like I don't, I mean...that's the native language.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Um, before, I would say, um, it's, uh, 50/50.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Like, um, because, um, in, like, college, our...our teachers were...were English speakers, too...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So, we had to talk to them in that...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:....language.

Jena: Okay, okay.

Myriam: And then, maybe the other 50 would be, like, home and friends when you speak in Arabic.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Sure. Great. Um, there's a question I wanted to ask about that...Um, okay, so going off of...so you're in college and you have to speak English with your professors.

Um, and there's that period before college, when would you say you felt comfortable

enough to speak to them because you were “forced” to? You know what I mean? Like, so, you know, before high school, you’re getting better, you’re getting better, you’re getting better, but, like, when did you feel comfortable enough that you could, like, say what you wanted to say and be understood?

Myriam: Um, I would say, that, I mean...right away. Since I... we started college, I feel like, um...we had, like, English classes where the...the teachers are native, uh, speakers so, we had to do that, and I mean, and I was fine with it.

Jena: And that was high school?

Myriam: Uh...N...

Jena: Oh, college

Myriam: It was, uh, college...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...the first year of college...Yeah...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: And, um, uh, so, I feel like right away, um, I mean....I wasn’t, like...once I finished high school, I was comfortable with the language anyways.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So, so when I was placed, um, I mean, um, on good levels in English in college...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...because we had like um, an orientation year...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...where they do only language and like, computers...



Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...and things like that, so, um, I was fine with my teachers and writing, and also the...the speaking part. Um, but I feel like when...when we moved from those classes to other, like, business classes because that was my major.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Um, sometimes we would, like, have, uh, um, an Arabic speaker teacher, so they would explain the material in English, but, you know, the Communication class sometimes, um, switches to, to the Arabic, and[laughing] I don't prefer that.

Jena: Oh

Myriam: ...it mixes up the terminology and stuff...

Jena: Oh, I see.

Myriam:...so, because the, yeah, the exam, I mean, comes in an English language.

Jena: Sure

Myriam: So I feel like why...why won't you train us to...to ....and I understand because some of the classmates are on also different levels of English, so they feel more comfortable speaking...

Jena: Doing the switching?

Myriam: Yeah, speaking the language in Arabic than English

Jena: Interesting.

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Okay....great. Um, okay, so this might also be obvious, but how do you use English in your life now?

Myriam: Um, well, um, other than the daily, like, communication part, I would say, um, read...like online mostly with the searching things in English, um, reading, like if it's news or articles...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: or things...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Um, I also tend to write, em, emails or connect with people who also are...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...English speakers

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: Um, even sometimes, which is funny, even if I know the company, um, is a native Arabic or something, um, since they have the, like, the Arabic/English...I would sp... em, like, pick the English option and email them in English...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...because it's just easier.

Jena: Yeah, interesting

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Okay. Cool.

Myriam: Um, and...uh, I do, like, personal writings...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam:...and that happens also in English.

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: I feel more...

Jena: Comfortable?

Myriam: ...comfortable, yeah?

Jena: Okay, interesting. Um, so right now, is English a requirement for you for work or school? Or um...

Myriam: Well, um, I'm trying to apply so, I think...it counts...

Jena: It will be...

Myriam: Yeah.... as uh, yeah...

Jena: Interesting. All right. Okay, so then, here's another question you can expand on or stories, or whatever you want...

Myriam: Okay

Jena... What do you enjoy most about being proficient in English?

Myriam: Um, I...enjoy the fact that I can, like, um...um...connect with...with native speakers more. Um, I also, because of watching TV and watching all of that, I happen to know, like, the same, um, as they say, pop culture kind of....

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...thing, and that, I feel like, um, I mean, it...it...it seems interesting coming from someone who is not, like, here...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:... like... from the country

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: And, um, and...um, I enjoy the fact that I can look back and [laughter] just remember that I had, like, um, struggles and...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:... like, um, they're no longer, thankfully,

Jena: Yeah...

Myriam:...that...that kind of...I mean, and um...It feels, like, rewarding in a way...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:... when you look back...

Jena: Yeah...

Myriam:...and you feel, like, that was a goal, and I, like, achieved...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: ....it so, I can do that with other things.

Jena: Yeah, absolutely. That's great. Um, okay, so what...what's your future plan for your use of English. Like, do you plan to...I don't know...what do you plan to do with it?

Myriam: Um, well, I hope, I mean, if I get the chance to ...to work or study and stay here, so, my use would be, like, uh, 100% of the language because, I mean, like, on daily basis...

Jena: Mmm hmm

Myriam: ...I would still, I mean, practice it and...

Jena: Sure

Myriam:...like and...I hope also when I have, like, kids...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:... I would like, help, I mean, or...or make sure that they learn that earlier...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...even before I did.

Jena: Sure

Myriam: So, yeah.

Jena: Interesting.

Myriam: And, um, if I have a chance of putting them in...like, if they're...for example, if they are in a country like this...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: ... so, they'll have the chance of connecting with natives, like, from an earlier age...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: ....they have, like, even...they won't have, like, my accent issues, or something like that...

Jena: Oh, come on [laughter]...no accent issues.

Myriam: [laughter] ....Um, I still hear it, like, this is funny because, um, sometimes when I take rides in, like, um, with the cab drivers, or someone like that, they say, well I can still hear that you have your accent...where are you from?

Jena:[incredulous laughter]

Myriam: [laughter]....well thank you...

Jena: Even I have an accent...I mean, it just depends on where you're coming from, but that's an interesting...interesting way to think about it.

Myriam: Yeah

Jena: Okay

Myriam: So, yeah, I would love for them to ...to, like, have a um, um, like, uh, very...or kind of a better education when it comes to the language. Yeah.

Jena: Sure, sure. Okay, so speaking of kids, if you...so hypothetically, um, if you had to give advice to either your kids, or somebody else's kids, or the future...

Myriam: Yeah...

Jena: ...generations, what, what would you recommend for them in order to become proficient?

Myriam: Um, well, um, if I'm basing that on where I came from...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam:...I would say it's very, uh, strange now because I feel that kids nowadays are more familiar with the English language than the Arabic, which is, in a very weird way that they don't even know how to put...like...proper sentences...which is kind of embarrassing because if it's your native language [laughter]....like they would tell them like, um...um, and I'm not sure if it's just a joke, or, like, there are shows where they go around and ask kids, like, uh, can you tell us what's the name of this animal, and they would guess, like the English names, and not...have no clue what is it in Arabic.

Jena: Interesting...

Myriam: Yeah...so, um, I think it changed because schools changed and also...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ...the...now they have, like, access to YouTube...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...and stuff and they may be see, um, see more of, uh, English stuff than we used to. We had kind of a balance.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: We were raised on Arabic stuff first, then English came, like, when we were older.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: But I think they're...they're...they were born into, um, a generation that speaks English....\_\_?\_\_and...

Jena: Interesting

Myriam: And also their school helps...if, if they're going to...to, um, good private schools so...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: So, um, so you asked...I think you asked me what's the advice I would give?

Jena: Oh, yeah, but this is all good...

Myriam: Oh

Jena:...So yeah, what um, I don't know....maybe part of that advice would be keeping the balance...I don't know...

Myriam: Yeah, I...I would think, like, um...um...I mean...I...I still believe the native language also matters, so, it's kind of, I mean, [laughter] shameful for you to not know, I mean, just the...the um, proper.....because you, you can hear them [laughter]...now they have the accent in the native language. It's funny.

Jena: Oh, really? [laughter]

Myriam: Yeah, so they would, like, start speaking and it feels like it's a broken... language...

Jena: Interesting

Myriam: ...and you're like, this is your language. How come it doesn't, I mean, you're not speaking it properly.

Jena: Interesting

Myriam: So...

Jena: So if you were, again, hypothetically, like, if you had a child and you were trying to teach them to be balanced, would you...would you start off speaking in Arabic and then gradually introduce English, or would you do both...or, how would you...

Myriam: Um, well...

Jena: ...how would you...what do you think you'd do?

Myriam: ...my hopes are, um...um, well, if I...um, I would love for them to grow in a place like this, because I love the country here; It's not just because of the language.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: So, um, I'll be, like, sure, that they....their English is gonna be good because of the school.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: But, at home, like, I'm assuming, that I...I would be, like, the... the person responsible to...to teach them the...the native language.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: So, I would...the...there's, like, a good show I used to watch when I was a kid. Um, it's called...if you need... um, I'm not sure if...It's called Almanahil if you want to spell it. It's A...L....or you want to write it...

Jena: Here, I'll let you do it. [laughter]

Myriam: Yeah, Okay. So, it's um, basically, it's not like Sesame Street.



Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: But, kind of, something similar. Yeah. Yeah.

Jena: Something similar...

Myriam: It's an old 80's, 90's show.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: And, oh, um, I mean, the whole program is based on the fact of, um, speaking the, um, what they call it, the, um, formal Arabic because...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...we have also, like, uh, the accents...

Jena: Right, right

Myriam: and stuff, so, they teach you, like, proper grammar, proper pronunciation of things...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:...and all of that...so, I thought it was very entertaining...

Jena: Sure, sure

Myriam:...first of all, and, uh, if I'm not around to teach them, then I will just play that...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: [laughter]....and just let them learn.

Jena: Gotcha

Myriam: Because it's got songs and it got...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...and um, yeah, I would, I mean... I want to also be strong in their native as well...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ....since it's mine... yeah

Jena: Absolutely. Okay, then last question... thank you so much... is there anything else you'd like to add about how you believe you became proficient in English. Is there anything else you're like, hmm...

Myriam: Um, well, I think, um, 'cause, um, I think, tomorrow you're going to meet my brother whose... yeah... so, uh, even though we grew up in the same home, I feel like our... our perspectives on how... how we learned the language is different.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: He also thinks it's TV, but, um, he grew up on a time where... where um, he was watching Cartoon Network most of the time.

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: Yeah, and that... that... what... it turned out...

Jena: That's a lot of *fast* speaking.

Myriam: Yeah, so, um, and I believe that our... he also, I think, would agree that's where he, like, um, picked up... the... the accents, so...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...we do sound different, so I feel like he's on a better level than I am.

Jena: Mm

Myriam: Um, I grew up on a time where...where we were watching, like, shows in Arabic most of the time, and English wasn't that, I mean, it wasn't on TV that much.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: You watched things, but we didn't understand...

Jena: Okay

Myriam:... them as good...

Jena: Okay, gotcha

Myriam: So, we've seen, like, [laughter] America's Funniest Home Videos...

Jena: Okay, sure

Myriam: But, you don't need to know, like...

Jena: Right...

Myriam: ...you just watch...[laughter]

Jena: you just watch...[laughter]

Myriam: Yeah, and, um, other shows...I'm not sure...I think, uh, there's, like a yellow...little cartoon... he's called, I think... Mr. Bogus...is that...

Jena: Ah

Myriam: ...do you that?

Jena: I'm not sure I know, but I...I bet I could find out.

Myriam: So, um, he, um, in, um....it was, I mean, fun to watch, but since, I mean, it had, like, uh, conversation, and I don't understand what it is...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam: ...so I just get bored and, I mean, kind of not continue watching.

Jena: Sure

Myriam: Um, but, em, and like, uh, I mean, in comparison, I would say, um, Arabic shows were most interesting...

Jena: Mmm

Myriam:...because, uh, we feel, like, connected...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...and understand what they're saying...

Jena: Sure

Myriam: ...and stuff like that.

Jena: Sure....Okay, that was the last question, but I have one more quick question.

Myriam: Yeah, that's fine.

Jena: Um, did you ever watch shows from different countries in English, or was it mostly just US shows?

Myriam: Um, well, that's a good question. I think, um, well, um, uh, as a kid, um, I would say that all the cartoons they had um...they...they had like Japanese stuff...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: ... but they were dubbed up to our...in

Jena: Ahh, in...interesting.

Myriam: ...So, uh, it was all, like, Arabic for us as kids.

Jena: Okay

Myriam: But, they came from, like, different sources...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: But then, as, uh, I grew up, I'd say all, like, my teenage years were only US shows...

Jena: Okay

Myriam: Um, college-time, I would say I got, like, an interest in...in, uh, British shows, so...

Jena: Sure

Myriam:...and the funny thing is, although I was like, um, I felt that I was on, like, a good level in English...

Jena: Uh huh

Myriam:...at college, eh, whenever I listened to the British accent [laughter] I would ask my sister, I was like, I have no idea what they're saying...

Jena: [laughter]

Myriam: [laughter]...cause it sounded different...

Jena: Yeah

Myriam: I was more familiar with the American accent...

Jena: Gotcha. Okay.

Myriam: Um, and then, uh, I would say any shows or, any...any, um, like, um, movies, I would watch, um, at least I would...if...if they're, like, foreign, like Italian, Spanish, or something like that...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Myriam: ...I would have, like, at least the English, because I can at least understand...

Jena: Yeah, yeah. For sure. Great, well I really appreciate everything...

Myriam: [laughter] Yeah

Jena: This is really, really interesting to me, so...

Myriam: Thank you.

Myriam is a 27 year-old female from Saudi Arabia. Following the ACTFL guidelines, I have placed her in the speaking category of Superior.

In Myriam's case, she showed ease, fluency and accuracy without unnaturally lengthy hesitations, spoke about social and personal issues, structured arguments especially related to the challenges with balanced bilingualism in Saudi Arabia, and took turns through interactive discourse. Myriam explored lengthy narrations regarding her personal education and the challenges she faced in middle school. She constructed and developed hypotheses regarding how she became orally proficient in English, and she also explored alternate possibilities such as those of her brother. In an abstract way, she referred to ideas for her future children or other language learners related to becoming proficient. Perhaps there were a few instances where some of the discourse might have been influenced by a language other than English, but the instances were rare. In addition, with regarding small errors, Myriam's did not distract or interfere with communication. Superior ACTFL guidelines are as follows:

#### **SUPERIOR**

Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They present their opinions on a number of issues of interest to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured arguments to support these opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities.

When appropriate, these speakers use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by

language patterns other than those of the target language. Superior-level speakers employ a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices.

Speakers at the Superior level demonstrate no pattern of error in the use of basic structures, although they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in complex high-frequency structures. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication. (ACTFL.org)

### **Themes from Myriam's Experience**

Myriam's educational experience included learning mostly within private school settings. In her interview, she also referred to her brother, Omar, the second interview participant. While they grew up in the same family, their paths to oral proficiency and even their levels were different as mentioned by themselves. This was also demonstrated in their narrated experiences. Myriam made a point of specifically expressing her awareness of this; however, it is not my intention to do a contrastive analysis between them.

In reflecting on her language learning experience and what helped her most in reaching oral proficiency in English, Myriam referred to ten themes in particular. These themes included Formal English Education, Internal Motivations, Family Influence, TV and Movies as Strategies, Music as a Strategy, Personal Writing as Strategy, Reading to Speaking strategies, Speaking and/or Learning with Peers who were at a Higher Level, Traveling Abroad, and Use of English in Current Daily Life.

I defined Formal English Education as anything related to Myriam's school education of English that pertained to speaking proficiency. She mentioned English Formal Education the most out of any of her other categories (23 times), which made

me assume it had a large effect on her oral proficiency. Her formal English education began in the first grade, and it will most likely progress into the near future as she plans to continue her higher education through a writing program. When asked about initial motivations for learning English at a young age, Myriam mentioned the following: “...since English was...global language...and maybe the school had it so...they’re like... have to learn it...” suggesting that it was a useful school requirement, and she just learned it with the rest of her school subjects.

The next category with the highest number of mentions by Myriam was TV and Movies as Strategies. These strategies were mentioned 12 times. One example of these strategy uses fits within a mixed category. Myriam, explaining about English television shows with Arabic subtitles, admitted, “...I wished...I learned English to the point where I don’t, like, need to read what’s written.” This is an example of dual themes, which include the categories of both internal motivation and television as a learning strategy, helping her to eventually become orally proficient.

Beyond simply feeling the external force of mandatory school English classes, Myriam became internally motivated. This is the next most mentioned category at 10 mentions. Perhaps this was due to learning challenges. She found that when she switched schools, she was not a “star” student anymore because she was placed on “low level” English in seventh grade. She also wanted to understand what was being said on the television without reading the subtitles just as she wanted to know what songs meant as she listened to them. When she achieved proficiency, she mentioned that it felt “rewarding in a way...that was a goal, and I, like, achieved...” In other words, all her hard work of studying, practicing, and pushing herself paid off. She



explained that she was at a point where she could look back and give advice to others who wished to do the same.

Following Internal Motivation came the theme of Speaking and/or Learning with Peers Who Were at a Higher Level. Myriam brought this topic up eight times, mentioning that her closest friend is half-American and they conversed in English most of the time. She also mentioned that being put with peers who were better than her provided negative feedback that prompted her to respond and improve her English. It seemed that it was helpful for her because they were “picking on” her because she was not as strong in it as they were at the time.

The next highest category was Use of English in Current Daily Life, which had seven mentions. For this category, Myriam mentioned, “Um, well, um, other than the daily, like, communication part, I would say, um, read...like online mostly with the searching things in English, um, reading, like if it’s news or articles...” At the time of the interview, she was in the US using English on a daily basis to communicate with others and get around.

Myriam mentioned the theme of Traveling Abroad five times related to both her personal experiences and the influence that her father's experiences ( mixed category with Family Influence) had on her after he spent so much time in the US before he married. Myriam traveled off and on to the US to visit when her brother was earning a degree at a US university.

The next came included Family Influence (five mentions), Music as a Strategy (four mentions), and Reading to Speaking as Strategies (four mentions). The family influence came most in the form of parental encouragement through placing her in an

English focus school or aiding her as a family English tutor. Music as a strategy helped with pronunciation and memorization of lyrics and aided with ease of learning since Myriam claimed that a song was much more manageable than an entire story or a TV script. Reading to Speaking as a strategy for Myriam came in the form of mostly reading subtitles or with oral school reading.

The final category for Myriam was a unique theme out of all three participants. She mentioned Personal Writing two times in tandem with oral proficiency achievements. First the writing was for school assignments, then she expanded her learning and writing to her own personal writings later on.

Table 1 <i>Myriam's Recurring Themes of Becoming Orally Proficient in English</i>	Number of times appeared
1. English Formal Education	23
2. TV and Movies as Strategies	12/1 mixed motivation
3. Internal Motivation	10/ 1 mixed TV & movies strategy/1 mixed music as a strategy
4. Speaking and/or learning with Peers ( at a higher level) practice	8
5. Use of English in Current Daily Life	7
6. Traveling Abroad	5/1 mixed Family Influence
7. Reading to Speaking strategies	4
8. Music as a Strategy	4/1 mixed internal motivation
9. Family Influence	5/1 mixed Travel

	Abroad
10. Personal Writing as a Strategy	2

The second participant was Omar.

### **Omar's Interview Transcript**

Jena: All right. Here we go. Okay, so, my first question is...what does English proficiency mean to you? So, kind of, what does fluency of English...um, it can mean different things to different people...what, what does it mean to you?

Omar: Mmmhmm. I'm kind of uh...I guess I expect too much, but I guess, to me, proficiency means to me totally elimination of an accent, I guess, 'cause, it proves absolute domination over a language to the point where it's static with the...the origin point of the language itself, I guess.

Jena: MMkay. So, the second question might seem a little obvious, now, but how would you, so, tell me, like, maybe an example...how would you be able to define or tell if you were proficient or not.

Omar: Mmmhmm. So, in addition to just basic understanding of a language and its multiple constructs, I guess, escaping the small errors. Like, for example, I'm Arabic...a lot of people where I come from have troubles with p's and b's, so I guess just differentiating the small things constitutes mastery...

Jena: Okay

Omar:...to me.

Jena: Okay. All right, um, and if you don't mind...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena:...tell me a little bit of your family background related to English. Like, for example, do any of your parents or relatives, or, it could even be friends, I guess...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena:...Uh, do they speak English proficen...proficiently in your opinion? Or your thoughts...

Omar: Um, my mother doesn't speak a whole lot of English, sadly, but I guess the main, uh, let's see, the main, uh, English suppository....ah....w...whoops... [I think he meant repository]....Um, I guess, the main source of English in the household was mainly my father.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: 'Cause he grew up, uh, in Saudi Arabia, but he actually went to the US for around, um, 12 years in California and actually toured the States to his pleasure, but I guess he did have pretty good, uh, comprehension of the language and how it worked.

Jena: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm. Interesting. Um, so, if you know, did your father start studying English...well, I assume he did...before he went abroad, but do you know how far back...

Omar: I don't think it stretched...

Jena:...he \_?\_\_ his study?

Omar: ....before his, like, high school years.

Jena: Okay

Omar: Times back then...they were very limited in second language...

Jena: Sure

Omar: teaching...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: So, I guess he just got the chance and went for it there and acquired the language as he moved on...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar:....I suppose.

Jena: How interesting. Um, did he ever, kind of, share his beginning experiences? Or, um, kind of talk to you about...ah, when I was learning English, I did this...Did he ever share...

Omar: Ah, [laughter] no.

Jena: No? He was like...

Omar: He was an oddball. He didn't really talk about the origin; he just liked to state that he had spent 12 years in the United States, and that didn't really help me back then...

Jena: [laughter]

Omar: ...but thanks, Dad.

Jena: Okay, and so then the next question is...did, um, your parents or your relatives, or anyone, um, encourage you to become proficient in English.

Omar: I guess both my mom and dad...did encourage me to pick up English 'cause it's a very common, uh, language in the world and it would definitely help in the future, yeah.

Jena: Sure. And then, quick question, um, so, when...um, so I'll ask, I guess, the next question...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: ...and then I'll related it back. Uh, at what age did you begin studying English?

Omar: Officially, I think it began around the third grade for me. That's when you begin with the ABC's...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: It might have been actually the second grade as well, but from that point on it just got more and more extensive as we delved into grammar and spelling and stuff like that.

Jena: Mmmhmm. So, at that, kind of third grade...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: ...or second grade, um, did you understand why you were learning English, or was it just a school subject?

Omar: I thought it was just, like, a standard thing, really.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: I didn't really know any better back then, but, yeah

Jena: Sure, okay. All right, um, so then, what type of learning situation was your introduction to English? Was it, um, like for example, did it happen in the elem... um...well I assume, elementary school...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: ...but where specifically was it...a public school? Parents? Like...how.?

Omar: I suppose, like, the bulk of the learning itself happened in a private school that I went to...in the English classes...

Jena: Okay

Omar: ...but, like since back then, I was always an introvert type of kid, so I used to...

Jena: [laughter] ...me too...

Omar: [laughter] That was a.... I used to like, uh, sitting in my room playing video games and just immersing myself in media.

Jena: Okay

Omar: And that doesn't really count as curriculum, but I believe it did help somewhat in my acquisition of the language.

Jena: Sure, absolutely. Um, okay. So, and then...we kind of, a little, talked about why, so it seemed to be the kind of...you just study it...um....

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: Uh...is there anything else you want to add about why you began to study English, or does that cover it? School.

Omar: I guess, like, at the beginning, I really didn't know anything better, but as I went on, I actually started enjoying the medium of English, especially in stories and what-not because...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar:...I found it very fun. I wasn't that immersed in Arabic, for some reason...

Jena: Interesting

Omar:...which was kind of weird for a guy like me. I didn't really fancy Arabic music, Arabic stories, but English, that was...that was fun for me for some reason.

Jena: Interesting, so did your first, kind of, story experiences with English begin in that earlier time, like 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, or was it later on?

Omar: Uh, it did progress, but it...it..it...

Jena: Started...

Omar: ...started then. Yeah.

Jena: Any chance you remember any of the stories?

Omar: Uh, I wish I did...

Jena: It's okay; no worries.

Omar:...I wish I did.

Jena: Cool. Um...all right. So then the next question is...uh, at what age did you, um, at age...what age were you when you felt intrinsically motivated to become proficient, which basically is just...when were you internally motivated on your own...ah, I want to learn English versus somebody else telling you...ah, you know, you have to study this?

Omar: I would have to say, like, uh my middle school days.

Jena: Okay

Omar: 'Cause I just found it fun, and just for my sake I wanted to learn more and just to experience more movies, video games...

Jena: Sure, sure

Omar:...and like that. I just...I wanted to have as much fun as possible, I suppose.

Jena: Yeah, okay. So, I guess that gets kind of the second question, like, it started you getting motivated ...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: ...because you were like, well, I want to have fun...

Omar: [laughter]

Jena: Do you want to add anything to that? Is there anything else that....I don't know... comes to mind about learning fun with English?



Omar: I suppose, like, I saw the true potential value at the end of my, uh, middle school years in terms of, like, further education and personal future, and I saw, like, how good it can do me as a human being instead of just, like, having fun for myself.

Jena: Sure, okay. And what...did you think of anything in particular that, uh....or have, like, an experience where you thought...oh, gosh, English is really useful for more than having fun? Did that ever occur, or was...kind of...like....what am I trying to say?

Like, was there a specific situation you found yourself in that made you think...ah, I should learn English more. Did that ever happen? Or...

Omar: I suppose it's...that was around the high school years when you're future thinking and you're thinking about applying to colleges and just...getting everything done perfectly so you can get accepted. I suppose that was when I decided to buckle down.

Jena: Ah, okay. All right. Cool. All right. So then my next question is...was there a moment in your mind or memory or situation when you felt you were proficient. Like, did you have a time when all of a sudden, you're like, Ahhh, I've mastered it?

[laughter]

Omar: [laughter] Um, I'd have to say...like throughout my life I've....I guess I've been categorized as ahead of the curb in terms of my English classes. I was, like, basically the kid to...to go to for English homework...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ...in some terms, I suppose...but, I guess around my high school years where I just thought...Okay, I think I have sufficient knowledge of the language itself and how it works to say that I am proficient.

Jena: Mmmhmm. Cool. All right, um, and then, did you use any particular strategies, um, or...where there any situations where you feel were really useful in helping you get to that level of Ahhh, I've got it. Did...was there anything that you did...I know you mentioned music and things like that [actually, he didn't mention he used music as a previous strategy; it was movies], but was there anything in particular that you thought that was helpful for you.

Omar: Ahh, I'd have to say just reading. I loved stories and I loved, like, fantasy and fiction, and just the more I read, the more, uh, grammar and vocabulary developed by themselves...

Jena: Uh huh

Omar:...and I suppose it all tied in together as I progressed through my life.

Jena: Sure. Okay. Cool. Um....so, then then the next question is....how has the use of technology helped you with you with your English or....not helped.....

Omar: Ohhh[laughter]

Jena: ...you. [laughter]

Omar: So, yeah, uh, I got into video games and stuff like that on multiple consoles and computers...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ...but I suppose it just took off with...I su...I think it's the early 2000s when you have, like, voice chat and that...

Jena: Okay

Omar:...I wasn't particularly interested, but you can hear people shouting, yelling, screaming, etcetera in games, and I... I think it did help to an extent...

Jena: Interesting

Omar:...it its own accord...

Jena: That's interesting...

Participant ...Yeah

Jena:... 'cause I never even thought about that, so that's really cool. Um... okay.

Anything, like, any other uses of technology that you think, uh, assisted in your English learning? Anything else? Or, that was pretty much the specific one?

Omar: Well, I guess, like, a fork of, um, talking, uh, listening to people online, I actually, like, joined servers on a computer, and I actually engage with people there...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ...and we give and take, and stuff like that, so, yeah, depends on...

Jena: Yeah, just kind of the context...

Omar: Yeah

Jena: Okay, cool. Um, so then...next question...and this is not just like, native versus non, but any English speakers, so, who would you consider your English-speaking peers?

Omar: Um, just about anyone who tries their best not to make, uh, speeches in error. [laughter] Because I personally...I can't take it. I'm sorry, but it does happen frequently. And I think just, like, it...if you see someone in their own language when they talk, they have, a cool mastery of the language and they avoid mistakes, you can kind of tell that... at least somewhat they are on l...another level...

Jena: Mmm hmm

Omar:...and compared to the others..

Jena Uh huh

Omar:...I suppose.

Jena: Okay. So then, kind of in this circle of peers, how would you compare yourself to your peers. And don't feel like your bragging...

Omar: [laughter]

Jena:...or being modest, like, your own opinion, like, uh...

Omar: Uh

Jena:...what do you really...how would you really consider...

Omar: So...

Jena:...yourself

Omar:...According to my college experience, I...I guess I'm again, once again, ahead of the curve... 'cause, I just like....one time I, like, compared essays that I've written in classes, and I just...I see, like, my analyses and discussions sort of follow a certain structure and don't deviate from that, but other people, just, sort of shoot for the bare bones, get it out of the way, and they don't put that much effort...

Jena: Mmhm

Omar:...it just doesn't seem, um, kind to the language itself or doing it any form of justice by just doing the basic minimum...

Jena: Mmhmm

Omar:...I suppose.

Jena: Okay. So then, kind of a side questions, uh, did you ever find yourself in a situation in a class where you had to look at a peer's written work...

Omar: Yes...[laughter]

Jena: ...and... [laughter] Okay, tell me about that.

Omar: So, I've had that with multiple classes, but I suppose it's most commonly found in English classes, so, yeah, when you look at their papers, they just...they don't use that much expression and, it just doesn't...as a fan of fiction, that doesn't set the setting correctly to me...

Jena: Mmhmm

Omar: ...and it just doesn't seem right in my...own mind, I suppose.

Jena: Mmhmm. Interesting. So then...another side question, sorry. So, do you think that, um, was kind of showing not quite a mastery of the language, or not using it enough, or kind of...what did you...what did you think about that when you looked at theirs and you thought...[laughter] ...not quite there yet.

Omar: [laughter] Hmm. I suppose, like, their utilization of the language wasn't as high as it should be, and that let, uh, at least some de...degradation of the language usage, perhaps like vocal or written or any form.

Jena: Okay. Cool. Thanks. Thank you for letting me go on that tangent. Okay, so next question...did you study or have you studied or traveled abroad in a country where you needed to use English, or a country where English was the majority language.

Omar: Yes.[laughter] Yes, I have. I suppose the earliest instance was...I came to Disneyland with my folks around, uh, 2006-2007. That was the first time where...I...been into another country and it was kind of a fun experience, yeah.

Jena: Interesting. So, at that point when...did you have to engage with other people in English, or was it mostly just your parents and you kind of...

Omar: No, I actually, I had to engage 'cause [laughter] ...that's a funny story. Um, we...we went to Florida and took a place there, but anyway, my mom does not like snakes... at all. So, I was watching TV downstairs, and she was with me, but all of a sudden, like, this black snake was seen crawling through the grass, uh...in front of the window and I've never seen a black snake like that before so that was kind of interesting to me, but my mom just, like, freaked out...

Jena: Yeah

Omar:...and told me to call, like uh, someone to, uh, help...

Jena: Help take care of it...

Omar: Yeah. So anyway, they came and I talked to them. I didn't actually ask them what type of snake that was...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar:...or what it was supposed to be...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: I suppose that was the first time I actually had to use language in another country...

Jena: Yeah...

Omar: Face -to-face

Jena: Do you remember any, like, reactions besides ahh, it was the snake? Did you think about, oh, I just spoke in English...to somebody...

Omar: [laughter]

Jena: or did it just not even register?

Omar: Oh, no, the only thing floating through my head was "cool."

Jena: [laughter]

Omar: ...I saw a snake. That was just the only thing going through my mind.

Jena: Yeah. Sounds good. Um, oh, did you happen to go to any other countries where you needed to use English whether it was, you know, people spoke that in a...as a majority language, or was this pretty much your...

Omar: I suppose...

Jena:...first experience?

Omar:...not spending too much time there, but, like, Dubai.

Jena: Okay

Omar: ...that's usually the go-to port between here and, uh, the Middle East...

Jena: Uh huh

Omar:...so I suppose going there and just, yeah, with the hotel staff...

Jena: Okay

Omar: ...and the airport staff and stuff like that.

Jena: Okay. Cool. Now, quick question about that... wha...did you ever mix English and Arabic, or was it all English, or, like, how did that experience...

Omar: It was mostly just, yeah, English...

Jena: Interesting, even in a country where there are a lot of Arabic speakers...

Omar: Yeah, but they...strangely, they don't use it as much from what I've seen.

Jena: Huh. Fascinating.

Omar: It might have been the areas that I've been to...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar:...but who knows.

Jena: Okay. Interesting. Um... okay, and kind of an open-ended question...do you have any other stories you want to share about, like, kind of, beginning English experiences with, you know, speaking with others?

Omar: Um...I suppose...uh...a good one might be from my high school English teacher, who was originally from Texas...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar:...and strangely enough, was an atheist...

Jena: Mmm

Omar:...so, that kind of struck me as odd as, like, why did you even come here? Like I...I wondered, and I talked to him about it, and he just, like,...meh...like he...to him it was trying different things, and I suppose, like, I found that's cool and interesting in a way that he went out of his own way to do...to come here and teach.

Jena: Interesting. So...so the... did the interest of him having, like a different view, did that, kind of pull out more language skills? Like, did you talk more about that, like, being interested in it, or was it just...I spoke in English....'cause, uh, I could?

Omar: [laughter] No, I do su....I...I do think that, um, it did pull some inspirations on me 'cause I would actually arrive early to his class, and he would be sitting there playing jazz...playing, I think it was like, uh...I forgot what it was... Quake II or something...a very old school game, and he was actually very good at it, and it just... it was so...fun to find a down- to- earth person...

Jena: Sure

Omar: ...to sort of be my mentor in a way, and he liked me and...yeah, I guess he pushed me on.



Jena: Mmmhmm. Interesting. Okay. So then, my next question would be, uh, how often do you converse with proficient English speaker whether they are native speakers or non-native speakers?

Omar: Um, here I do converse quite a lot. I...uh...every time I am out of the house...

Jena: Right

Omar: ...I basically go English-mode, but inside, it's just when I retire and when I just...enjoy myself.

Jena: Okay, cool. Thanks.....All right, um...and then...so, the next question is...how do you use English in your life now. Um, is it a requirement for work or school or...do you use it just because you want to?

Omar: Part of it is just using it for school and getting around, and another part is actually, like, my own brain sort of thinks in that language now...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ...sort of like switch between the two...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ...when I monologue to myself...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ... so, that's kind of interesting.

Jena: Oh, that is interesting. I wish I were at the level...

Omar: [laughter]

Jena...where I could do that in another language.[laughter] I hope there is hope for me.

[laughter] Okay, so then the next question is...what do you enjoy most about being proficient in English?

Omar: Uh, just, like, talking to other people, to appreciate how stories are made

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ... in the English language, and trying to contribute to them in some manner.

Jena: Yeah. Oh, that's really interesting. I'm really interested in fiction as well. In fact,

I...I've written a novel; I haven't done anything with it, but I think that's interesting.

So, I wonder if I were to get involved in another language's, you know, fiction...

Omar: Mmmmhmmmm

Jena...would that help me? So...

Omar: It does help.

Jena: You think so? Awesome. I'll check that out. Cool. Um, and then the next question is...what is your plan in the future for your use of English? And that could be a broad, but, I mean, like, as in...a broad answer...

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: ...but, yeah, how do you think English... you'll use English in the future?

Omar: I guess I'll...I'll try my best to maintain my level of pro...proficiency in the language. I'm not a social butterfly. So, I do mess up when talking to people sometimes and use the wrong words and stuff like that, so, that's on my end to fix in terms of language, but hopefully it's in the ballpark of where it should be, and the only think I should do is, like, maintain it and evolve it whenever it needs to evolve.

Jena: Sure. I mean, even I make tons of mistakes. I'm just like...blah blah blah. So, okay. And then...is there anything else you would like to add about how you believe you became proficient?

Omar: Oh, I've got a good one for this one.

Jena:[ laughter] Great!

Omar: So, I believe my first video game console was a Super Nintendo. I forgot, it was like the early nineties, but I was born in '93, so I think I started playing in like '98 or '99.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: And my mother would always tell me that video games would rot my brain, and she is right...

Jena:[laughter]

Omar: They did, in fact, rot my brain, but I think, like, absorbing the language through the text and video games helped. Back then it was only, like, text 'cause it was ....

Jena: Mmhmm

Omar: ... 16 bit cartridges, but I did move on to, like, an Xbox and there were voice acting in the game...

Jena: Oh, okay

Omar: ...and so I suppose, in a way, it did affect me 'cause I wanted to have fun with this medium...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: .... And by....association it did affect my language and proficiency....

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ....I believe.

Jena: Interesting. Okay. And then the one question that's not on here....

Omar: Mmmhmm

Jena: ...um, do you have any advice for anyone who's trying to learn English to become proficient? What advice would you give to them?

Omar: Mmm. I think the best part of our day and age is that you have so many mediums available, whether it be music, TV shows, video games...what have you. And, as people differ in their interests, hopefully they'll have something that they can interact with, without them seeing it as homework...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Omar: ...or an obligation for them to fulfil and it, in a sense, does help them progress their language usage.

Jena: Mmmhmm. Great. Anything else that you want to share, or feel like you... got out what you want to say?

Omar: Um... I can't think of anything else, actually, right now. So...

Jena: Mmmkay. Perfect. Great.

### **Omar's Speaking Proficiency Level**

I placed Omar in the ACTFL category of Distinguished. Omar perhaps even exceeded ACTFL's Distinguished category in that he lacked a non-native accent. Omar demonstrated his ability to self-correct during an isolated error incident when he used the word "suppository," to refer to his father as the household repository of English. He noticed immediately and accounted for it by saying, "Whoops." This showed that he knew he made an error, but continued the interview without disruption. Omar's oral language resembled written discourse using very articulate speech. His speech was full of "adaptations of the register in culturally authentic manners" (ACTFL.org). He consistently used colloquial language, idioms and phrasal verbs such

as “my folks,” “ahead of the curve,” down-to-Earth,” “English-mode,” “social butterfly,” “bare bones,” “fan of fiction,” and “pushed me on.” These cultural references allowed him to say more with fewer words and get across his meanings to an audience of native speakers specifically.

### **DISTINGUISHED**

Speakers at the Distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. They can reflect on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner. Distinguished-level speakers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse for representational purposes, allowing them to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own. They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic.

Speakers at the Distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse. At the same time, they can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to allow them to say less and mean more. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse.

A non-native accent, a lack of a native-like economy of expression, a limited control of deeply embedded cultural references, and/or an occasional isolated language error may still be present at this level. (ACTFL.org)

### **Themes from Omar's Experience**

Omar is a twenty-four year-old male from Saudi Arabia. His background, similar to Myriam’s as he is her younger brother, included mostly a private school and English-focused educational experience. Omar’s expression of how he came to oral proficiency showed mixing in nearly every category. His categories blended into each other and rarely were distinct among them, even in the first category of enjoyment.

The highest category of mentions by Omar was Enjoyment of the English Language at 13 mentions. Omar frequently expressed his enjoyment of English from a

young age. He mentioned, "...I found it very fun. I wasn't that immersed in Arabic, for some reason...which was kind of weird for a guy like me. I didn't really fancy Arabic music, Arabic stories..." Omar also loved reading stories, which fit into the category of Reading to Speaking as well. He mentioned being a "fan of fiction," and how he enjoyed, "talking to other people, to appreciate how stories are made."

Next on the list of highest mentions came Video Games as a Strategy, which Omar mentioned nine times. He explained, "I used to like, uh, sitting in my room playing video games and just immersing myself in media....And that doesn't really count as curriculum, but I believe it did help somewhat in my acquisition of the language." During Omar's middle school days, he found English fun explaining, "...just for my sake I wanted to learn more and just to experience more movies, video games..." He also brought up the thought that video games and voice chat in particular helped with his English oral proficiency "...to an extent..." In addition to that, Omar mentioned that his first video game console, Super Nintendo, helped him absorb the language through text. With the Xbox console, Omar explained that there was "voice acting in the game..." Again, he expressed how much fun it was and "by ...association it did affect my language and proficiency."

Third in the list of mentions for Omar was English in Education with a total of seven mentions. He explained, "I suppose, like, the bulk of the learning itself happened in a private school that I went to...in the English classes." It was in school, he pointed out, "That's when you begin with the ABC's," which was standard according to Omar. He learned English, he clarified, because "...at the beginning, I really didn't know anything better..." Later on in school, Omar became what he refers

to as “basically the kid to...to go to for English homework,” which suggested high mastery of the language compared to his peers. Omar also mentioned his “college experience” in which he was in the process of earning his degree at a US university (Eastern Washington University).

The category of Traveling Abroad came in with five mentions by Omar. His first experience was when he took a trip to Disney World in Florida. He explained, “I came to Disneyland [he meant Disney World in Florida, actually, not Disneyland in California] with my folks around, uh 2006-2007. That was the first time where...I ...been into another country, and it was kind of a fun experience, yeah.” Though he did not mention it directly, Omar did express that his mastery of the language enabled him to speak with other English speakers to resolve a “snake” problem. Even when asked, he did not seem to think of the situation as one in which it was challenging to express himself in English. Omar explained, “Oh, no, the only thing floating through my head was “cool.” To me, this shows evidence of proficiency at the young age of 13 or 14.

Besides visiting Florida, other instances of Traveling Abroad contributing to or indicating evidence of Omar's oral proficiency included his experiences in Dubai, especially in the airport. Instead of traveling abroad contributing to awareness about his level of proficiency, it seemed to confirm it and allow him to practice English.

The next category was Peer Influence as a Superior with five mentions. Instead of seeking out help from students better than him, Omar helped the students who were at levels lower than he was. This also demonstrated the high level of proficiency he seemed to obtain at an early age. Perhaps, as he mentioned frequently, this was due to his enjoyment of English rather than seeing it as a chore or obligation.

Teacher Influence came next with four mentions. Omar mentioned that a particular teacher in high school piqued his curiosity, motivated him, yet also gave him an opportunity to practice his English in a fun way. His teacher was also his “mentor, in a way.” This teacher “pushed” him on with the language learning. In addition to explaining how his teacher motivated him, Omar mentioned, “...it was so fun to find a down-to-earth person.” This also illustrated how connected enjoyment was with many of Omar’s categories.

Omar’s category of Stories as a Strategy should almost be Stories and Fun as a Strategy. Nearly all of his four mentions of using stories as a way to become orally proficient in English were tied to having fun. Omar explained, “I actually started enjoying the medium of English, especially in stories and what-not ....because I found it very fun.”

When expressing what strategy was helpful for him, Omar answered, “Ahh, I’d have to say just reading. I loved stories and I loved, like fantasy, and fiction, and just the more I read, the more uh, grammar and vocabulary developed by themselves....and I suppose it all tied together as I progressed through my life.”

Parent Influence as motivation for becoming orally proficient came in at three mentions. For example, he explained, “I guess both my mom and dad....did encourage me to pick up English ’cause it’s a very common, uh, language in the world and it would definitely help in the future, yeah.”

Television and movies received three mentions as did Parent Influences. This was surprising due to the fact that his sister brought it up in her interview regarding how they came to be orally proficient in English explaining that, “He also thinks it’s



TV, but, um, he grew up on a time where...where um, he was watching Cartoon Network most of the time.” Perhaps Omar did not mention television more because he had become accustomed to it. In fact, he did mention watching television in Florida during his Disney World trip and did not think to mention it as significant or evidence of his proficiency at all. While listening proficiency is not the highest focus in this study, it is required for dialogue and thus his ability to listen effortlessly and comprehend did demonstrate his high level. In addition, I highly doubt that Disney World was showing television shows in Arabic, which seemed to point to the fact that Omar probably felt very comfortable watching television in English because he also did this at home and could understand easily. Omar also recommended that people who were trying to become orally proficient in English seek out a medium in which they find an interest. Television was included in those categories.

The final category, which received only two mentions, was Studying Abroad. Again, like most of the others, this category was mixed in mentions. Because Omar was participating in a study abroad context during the interview, he might not have thought it pertinent to mention that or even to expand on the studying abroad subject. Perhaps he had not considered the larger effects of studying abroad on his English speaking proficiency. In study abroad contexts, students must interact with other students and their professors. Students probably have to use English to communicate daily with needs. The list could go on related to how one might use or learn more English in a study abroad context, but Omar did not mention any of these potentially mundane situations using English in a study abroad context. He did explain that, “ part of it is just using it for school and getting around, and another part is actually, like, my

own brain sort of thinks in that language now.” This has demonstrated to me that Omar’s use of English is so distinguished that he did not even seem to dwell on how proficient he was compared with other ELLs (except in a writing or thinking capacity with his peers, perhaps). Because of this, perhaps he did not feel the need to express how much studying abroad improved his oral proficiency.

Overall, in this interview, Omar seemed to have demonstrated just as much or more about how he *is* orally proficient rather than specifics on what exactly brought him to oral proficiency in English.

Table 2 <i>Omar’s Recurring Themes of Becoming Orally Proficient in English</i>	Number of times appeared
1. Enjoyment of the English Language	13 total/3 mixed video games/ 3 mixed stories as motivation strategy/1 travel abroad/ 1 television & movies/
2. Video Games	9 total/3 mixed enjoyment/1 mixed movies
3. Education in English	7 total/1 mixed study abroad/ 1 mixed teacher influence/1 Peer influence as a superior/1 Parental influence
4. Travel Abroad	5 total

5. Peer Influence as a Superior	5 total/1 education
6. Teacher influence	4 total
7. Stories as Motivation Strategy	4 total/3 mixed enjoyment
8. Parent influence	3 total/1 education/
9. Television & Movies	3 total/ 1 mixed fun
10. Study Abroad	2

The last individual to be interviewed was Francesco.

### **Francesco's Interview Transcript**

Jena: Here goes. So, the first question. Um, So, what does proficiency in English mean to you personally? Like, uh, how would you be able to tell, er, how... yeah, how would be able to define or tell whether you were proficient in English or not?... According to you.

Francesco: Ehh, about myself?

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: Em, actually, depending on several factors. One of them, of course, is the effectiveness. If others can understand me, that's the first, the first point. Em, em, and then, how easily I can speak.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Because, of course, if I attempt to slow down, to, uh, to think, to to look for words, or whatever, something is not going... not going well. Eh, so I think these two things would be the key drivers, or key indicators....

Jena: Okay

Francesco: ...for proficiency or not

Jena: Okay

Francesco: It can depend on the situation, actually...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: because maybe in some, eh, eh, context I can, eh, feel more confident or maybe I know more vocabulary or whatever.

Jena: Mmhm. Mmhm. Okay.

Francesco: Okay

Jena: Okay....Okay. Second question. Um, tell me a little bit of background related to English, um, like related to your family. Do any of your parents or relatives speak English proficiently? Um, well that's...

Francesco: No.

Jena: ...the first question. No. [laughter] Okay.

Francesco: None of them.

Jena: [laughter] Okay. Okay. Then the second question is: did, um, anyone in your family encourage you to become proficient in English?

Francesco: No.

Jena: No? Okay. All right. So then the next question is. Um, at what age did you begin studying English?

Francesco; Okay, I, I began eh, studying English around maybe.... seven.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: Around seven because I was forced to. [laughter]

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: I was....so...and so uh, it was mandatory.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Eh, even if my school was a bit experimental because we started, uh, earlier than usual.

Jena: Oh, Okay. That's interesting.

Francesco: Yeah, because usually they...they, they start a bit later.

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: But, uh, of course in Italy, the method is not great. So we started from grammar, grammar, grammar.

Jena: Oooh

Francesco: So, boring, boring... and then when you, you thought that maybe grammar was enough, we started with literature.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: So, it can be even more boring. So, yes, basically it was useless until I finished my school at 18.

Jena: Really?

Francesco: It was completely useless.

Jena: Interesting, interesting.

Francesco: Yeah. Never watched a movie. Uh, never played a game, never, uh, acted, um some maybe role playing game. Uh, school. Nothing.

Jena: Really?

Francesco: Just reading literature. Yeah

Jena: Interesting, okay.

Francesco: Oooh, very interesting.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: You can imagine.

Jena: All right, so, you already kind of explained where you were and the type of the learning situation and that it was mandatory, uh, is there anything you want to add about why you began learning English. I mean, I know it was mandatory, but later on did...

Francesco: Later on, I, I wanted to learn English because I needed it. Eh, uh, so, in order to improve my chess...

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: I had to access the, the, em, literature, uh chess literature, eh, which was in English.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: So at the beginning, I waited for, uh, books being translated into Italian.

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: But ,uh, of course the, the, the amount of titles translated were limited...

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: ...and it was also a bit slow. So by learning English, I was able to get more variety, more books, and it was quicker.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: So, that's why I started....actually in a personal way, so I just started reading...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...and looking up for words that I didn't know...

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco:...and just memorize what was more, uh, frequent.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: And that's why my pronunciation was terrible. [laughter]

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: because I learned from books. [laughter]

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: [laughter] So, uh, em, pronunciation is quite difficult for Italians because we have less sounds than in English and I because I have never watched a movie.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: So, it was...yes, I just used to read books, by pronounce...with an Italian pronunciation....in my mind.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: So it was bad because I got some vocabulary, but then, eh, I found that I memorized a lot of, uh, things with the wrong pronunciation.

Jena: Ahh, I see. Interesting.

Participant3 : Yeah, so it is still difficult to remove...

Jena: Ahh

Francesco: ...that kind of, uh, stuff...

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: ....that is printed in my mind...

Jena: Yeah, for sure. That's interesting. There's actually, like, uh, a term called, like, fossilization. I don't know if it would apply...

Francesco: Yeah

Jena: You know that one? Where it gets stuck, and it's like...it's just there. Interesting, okay...

Francesco: Yeah

Jena: Um, next question. Okay, you kind of explained this a little bit too, but at age were you when you felt intrinsic motivation, which is, you know, the internal motivating factor, um, to learn English for your own reasons instead of, you know, for somebody else's?

Francesco: Eh, actually, I, I, I mean, I felt the need a bit before, uh, ending the, the school, but, um, I was a bit rebel to accept that English was useful...

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: ...so at the beginning, it was, uh, representing the school, so I refused, uh, it completely.

Jena: Yeah.

Francesco: Then, when I was free to choose, I chose [laughter]...

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: ...to learn English. So I would say from 19 on...

Jena: Sure. Okay. Umm...and then, so, would you say that the catalyst was chess, or were there any other reasons?

Francesco: Yeah...else it was chess.

Jena: Mostly chess, okay. Cool.



Francesco: Yes, mostly chess, mostly chess.

Jena: Okay. Um...

Francesco: Actually, something like that happened to other people as well.

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: For example, the...the...American chess champion, eh, um, learnt Russian for the very same reason.

Jena: Interesting.

Francesco: Because he needed to access the...the... Russian literature.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: And of course, it was in the 70's and uh, early, eh, no 60's,

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: ... early 70's...

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: So, it was of course, much more difficult for him to find uh, good literature,

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: ...translated or whatever...

Jena: Sure.

Francesco: So he, uh, uh just learnt, uh Russian

Jena: Ahhh

Francesco: ... which is of course...[laughter] ...incredible, but anyway...

Jena: [laughter]

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: So for the same reason.

Jena. Okay. That's really interesting. I didn't know that. Okay, so then, the next question is...at what point did you feel you were orally proficient in English. Um, so at what point did you think, aha, I can speak English well, you know, proficiently. Do you remember a moment when that, when you were like...Ahhh....that happened?  
[laughter] Do you just not remember...

Francesco: Eh, actually, I, I, think eh, it has not happened yet.

Jena: [laughter] Ohh, really?

Francesco: [laughter]... but because I am still, uh, not happy with my English, but, uh, when I went to the US...

Jena: Mmmhmmm.

Francesco:... and I found that after the first day, it was terrible.

Jena: Oh no.

Francesco: because I couldn't understand uh, uh, almost, anything. Eh, so. But after maybe one day....

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: ...eh, I found that it was easier than expected.

Jena: Sure.

Francesco: Eh, both for understanding and for speaking.

Jena: Mmhmm.

Francesco: So I said, okay, eh, my pronunciation sucks.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: My listening abilities.... eh, skills, suck, but still, eh, eh, I do know a lot of words.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: So, somehow, eh, I can do.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: Em, And...and, in fact, the vacation went quite well.

Jena: Mmm hmm.

Francesco: Yeah.

Jena: Good. Okay. Um, so...

Francesco: But it was 3 years ago...4 years ago...

Jena: Sure.

Francesco: So, not so much.

Jena: Okay. Um, and then the next question is, um, what were the strategies or situations, I guess, you believe were instrumental, really helpful, for you to become proficient.

Francesco: Eh, I think, em, it was, uh, mmm, I think it was... eh, reading eh, books, even if I didn't know everything.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: So I, I realized that giving up the, the...em, I mean the, the, idea of perfection,

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: eh, helped me a lot.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: Yeah, because I said, okay, maybe I, I ...I can uh, uh, take, uh, what I can, uh, just what I can, uh, get.

Jena: Sure.

Francesco: And look up for maybe unknown words...

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: And, uh, just, uh, accept that maybe some constructions, or uh, uhm, I mean, uh, sentences uh, are not familiar to me.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: And I can learn them this way.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: So let's see if I can see something repeating or whatever. And sometimes I found, the, the, grammar rules I studied.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Sometimes, eh, I just found uh, mm, particular constructions

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:... uh just by, by, yes, a pattern.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco:...or something like that.

Jena: Sure. Yeah, that makes sense. Cool. Umm, okay. Do you have, uh, I know you gave me a couple of examples...did you have any other examples of, I don't know, any other strategies that you used to go from reading to speaking...or anything like that?

Francesco: Right now, uh, I, I em, I try to force myself to watch TV series...

Jena: Mmhmm.

Francesco: ... and movies...

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: eh...with subtitles.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: So...

Jena: In English?

Francesco: Sometimes...

Jena: Or... oop... Sorry.

Francesco: In English...both in English.

Jena: In English

Francesco: Eh, sometimes I try to, um, avoid, eh, looking at subtitles...

Jena: Mmm hmm.

Francesco: But, eh, I find it difficult when the tone of voice is too low.

Jena: Yeah.

Francesco: So, maybe, eh, if I can, ehm, listen to it loud, maybe it's a bit easier.

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: ....but very often when the speaker is too fast.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: or just em, em, crunches too much [laughter] the, the, his words, or maybe his voice is too low...

Jena: Mmmmmhmm

Francesco: eh, it gets very difficult for me.

Jena: Gotcha. Okay. So, quick question about that...How long have you been watching, uh, TV or movies in, in English?

Francesco: Eh, a few years.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: A few years. Not many.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: Not many.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Yes, maybe 3 or 4.

Jena: Yeah...well

Francesco: Maybe after the vacation...

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: After the vacation in the US, so...I... I'll say 4.

Jena: Okay. So...and I guess....that seems a bit...sometimes it seems a bit difficult because I know that in Italy they dub almost everything...

Francesco: Everything....no, no...not almost...everything.

Jena: Everything

Francesco: Everything. Absolutely everything. Yes.

Jena: [laughter] So...

Francesco: And...the, the dubbing school is quite good, so we, eh, we don't miss the original, uh, language, because it's not like maybe in Poland.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: They have only one speaker, male, for all the voices...

Jena: Oh boy...

Francesco: And, yeah, and with the same tone, eh, like....[monotone] "Oh, there is a fire. Let's run away."

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: Something, something like that...So, uh, yes. Ah, once I... with a friend in university, I watched a, a TV series...eh....eh... with Polish subtitles.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...and dubbing, it was hilarious. It was hilarious. Yes. I still can remember. It was a MacGyver episode. Of course, people uh flying, fire, going off or whatever, and still with the single male voice for everything. So for example...yes, the Italian dubbing is excellent, actually. So, yes, original language is never used in Italy.

Jena: Inter...That's so interesting to me. Okay. Um, next question, uh, so how has the use of technology helped you become proficient in English, or how has it not helped you?

Francesco: Yeah, for, for example....technology helped me a lot when Netflix became available in Italy.

Jena: Mmm. Yeah.

Francesco: Which is a bit more than one year ago.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: Eh, because, uh, it was not so easy to find an English movie with subtitles.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...Subtitles before...so wanted to take something, ehm, pirate, or something like that...

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: Or maybe, eh, renting a DVD, or something not very convenient.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: I mean, now with Netflix, it is super useful, and uh, almost all of them, all of the movies and TV series are in both languages.

Jena: Oh, okay, yeah.

Francesco: Before, I did something like that with the iTunes movies, but not all of them were in both languages.

Jena: Yeah.

Francesco: Usually, the, ehm, the cheap ones were only in Italian.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: So, of course, you, you....Oh, there is a special offer. Okay, I download it and uh, the special offer was without the original language.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: So, yes, holy Netflix.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: Holy Netflix, for sure. My best spent 9.99 Euros per month. Yes, yes, yes.

Jena: Okay, all right. Next question. Who would you consider your English speaking peers? Like, other people who speak English around you?

Francesco: Ehm, actually, at office, I have two English teachers. Right now I'm going to change them, because, of course, I am moving to Rome. So, I think, mmm, they are the most frequent, yes, eh, partners for...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...uh, speaking English.

Jena: Mmmhmm



Francesco: Yeah, and sometimes, yes, sometimes...not frequent... I go abroad for ehm, job reasons....

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...so I can practice a bit.

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: Yes.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: But for conversation, mainly them...

Jena: Mainly the teachers. Okay. And then, so, my other question with that is, um. Yeah, who, who else do you use...well, I guess you already answered that...Is there anyone else in your office, I guess, who you know speaks English. I assume you always speak in Italian, but is there anyone else who, I don't know, you might be able to compare or contrast yourself with?

Francesco: Yeah, ehm, my, uh, mmm, roommate in uh, in Genoa, is very good at English.

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: Eh, he's very, very good.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: Ehm. So sometimes I, eh, used to tell me, eh, a curiosity or we just exchanged opinions

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco: ... about eh, something, a construction or whatever...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...and, eh, sometimes I also do it with my friends who live abroad.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: ....like uh, a Ger, a friend who lives in London and another one in Germany.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: So, sometimes we share eh, opinions....

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...on English. Yeah.

Jena: Uh huh. Okay. Okay. And then.... oh, really quickly.... So you mean, by roommate, do you mean like office mate at...at your work?

Francesco: Yes

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Yes, yes. Eh, at office.

Jena: Mmmkay.

Francesco: I used to share a, a, my, my office

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: with, with a guy...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: Yes, yes, he's, maybe he's the best, uh, English speaker, eh, in my company.

Jena: Ah okay.

Francesco: Yeah

Jena: Cool. Um... Okay, so the dreaded question. [laughter] How would...and maybe you already kind of did this, but how would you compare yourself to the people you just described as far as your proficiency goes?

Francesco: Oh, oh okay. Uh, all of them are much better than me.[laughter]

Jena: Oh really? Come on. [laughter]

Francesco: For sure. Yes, because he is of course the, the, the... best English speaker in the whole company. Eh, the guy who lives, eh, in London, eh, of course, lives in London. [laughter] He has lived abroad for maybe 15 years.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: The guy in Germany also has lived abroad for, uh, maybe 14 years and the English speakers are English speakers[laughter], so they are both from, uh, Canada and they are bilingual, uh, both of them. Eh, now one of them is bilingual Italian and English.

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco:... but the mother tongue is English.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: The other one, maybe, even more because is from the French Canada...

Jena: Okay

Francesco: ....so she speaks, uh, at least four languages perfectly. [ laughter]

Jena: Wow....lucky her.

Francesco: So, uh, and she has a family name which is Italian...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ... so her Italian is perfect, and of course, French and English are also perfect. [laughter]

Jena: Wow

Francesco: Uh, yes. Yes. She, uh, eh, she is name withheld by...by.... the way.

Jena: Mmm. Gotcha, Gotcha. Yeah. Lucky girl. [laughter]

Francesco: [laughter]

Jena: Okay, cool. So, next question. Uh, did you study abroad or have you travelled abroad to a country where you needed to use English, well, you kind of already answered this, but anyway...Um, or been to a country where the majority language was English?

Francesco: Yes, uh, I, I played quite a few chess tournaments around.

Jena: Uh huh,

Francesco: Eh, then I spent, um, I mean, nine days...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:...in Miami as a vacation.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: but, maybe eight years ago, seven years ago, I also, um, ehm... asked, ehm... for an English course, eh, in UK.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:....to my company

Jena: Sure

Francesco: and got it.

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco: So I went there for two weeks.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: Eh, in a college

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: Uh, so I was maybe, yes, 31...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...and I was the oldest [laughter] in the group. [laughter] A lot....All of them were younger, a lot of....even... uh, much younger, but I didn't care so [laughter]I spent two weeks there and there were...quite useful.

Jena: Mmmhmm. Yeah, I think you should not care about the age. [laughter]

Francesco: Oh, no.[laughter] Zero.

Jena: Okay, um, so do you have any stories from there about, I don't know, speaking English or anything in particular that you remember as, I don't know....helpful...or funny...or...

Francesco: Mmm....no, maybe, no, nothing.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: ...funny...or

Jena: Nothing in particular...

Francesco: No, nothing in particular, no.

Jena: Okay. So, after you came back, did you feel that your English level had improved even after just two... two weeks?

Francesco: Eh, yes. Yes, eh because, of course, during the course, I was put in real life situations.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: Ehm. For example, I had an opportunity to live in a family.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: So for two weeks, it was good.

Jena: Sure. Uh huh.

Francesco: Eh, family. I mean, only one member of family[laughter] because...the wife....because the husband, eh, was, eh... abroad, eh... for a long period.

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco: Eh, maybe he was in the Navy...

Jena: Ah, okay.

Francesco: ...or something like that. Ehm., So, but she was very, very nice , and, uh, it was very useful eh, I had to survive somehow.

Jena: Yeah [laughter]

Francesco: [laughter] So, I had to...to...eh...learn...eh...to...to...listen, I mean.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...and also to feel more confident to speak.

Jena: Uh huh. Yeah.

Francesco: So...yes. Yes...for sure it was useful, yes.

Jena: Good. Okay. Um... so the next question is how often do you converse with proficient English speakers whether they are native speakers or not.

Francesco: Eh, when I am regular with my lessons, eh, two times per week.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: Two hours per week.

Jena: Okay. Cool. All right. Next question, um, is....How do you use English in your life now? So, is it a requirement for like work or school, or... how do you use English in your daily life?

Francesco: Yes, I would say just for conversation during my English lessons, an occasional email.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Eh, yes, reading news...

Jena: Mmhmm

Francesco: ...or books

Jena: Sure....Um

Francesco: ...this way

Jena: Okay. Do you...what was my other question? ...Ah, how often do you use English for work, or at work, or...

Francesco: Eh, Not very often, actually.

Jena: Not very often. Okay.

Francesco: So, yes, maybe sometimes there is, eh, eh, yes, occasional emails.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: ....in English...

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: Sometimes maybe, ehm.... a paper

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: Eh, in English, or maybe a contract

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Ehm, yes, and occasional...maybe, ehm.... a training course.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...or event

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ....or summer... Summit...or something like that.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: But yes, quite rare.

Jena: Okay, but...is it still a requirement for your job, that you have it?

Francesco: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Jena: Okay.

Francesco: For sure it's a requirement...and ehm... it's quite useful. So, I, ...had...had the opportunity to go to several, uh, Summits...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:....and in few of them, I also delivered a presentation...

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco: ...

or, uh, joined a panel discussion...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:...or something like that

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Of course the panel discussion was the scariest. [laughter]

Jena: [laughter] I bet! I'm sure you did fine. Uh...

Francesco: Yes, because it....there was also some preparation...

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco: And at the phone, there, there... was a, a, German native speaker

Jena: Uh huh



Francesco: ...and his English was terrible

Jena: [surprise] [laughter]

Francesco: It was, it was good as a vocabulary, but the pronunciation was very difficult to understand.

Jena: Ah, I see.

Francesco: In a live situation, it was better...

Jena: Yeah, okay...

Francesco: Yes

Jena: ...That makes sense.

Francesco: Because...eh...I was able...to...to get more information by non-verbal, uh, communication.

Jena: Sure, sure. That makes sense. Um, so just a few more questions. Uh, what do you enjoy most about being proficient in English?

Francesco: ...Eh, the fact I can...actually can communicate.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: So, I can understand[laughter]... eh, the...incoming message...

Jena: Mhmm

Francesco: ...and I can deliver a, a message on my own. [laughter] So, [laughter] for sure. It's just that, eh, because it works. [laughter]

Jena: [laughter] Because it's functional...

Francesco:[laughter] Yes, for sure, for sure.

Jena: All right.

Francesco: But, sometimes I...I like it when I find, eh...mm...that it is more... efficient....than my... native language.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: So for a lot of things, English is more efficient.

Jena: Interesting...

Francesco: For another lot of things, I think Italian is more efficient.

Jena: Yeah, that makes sense. Can you think of an example, maybe off the top of your head, of what might be more, eh, efficient in English than in Italian...Can you think of anything?

Francesco: Eh, yes for sure. Uh, I mean, the...the...the...eh, how verbs are used....

Jena: Mmhmm

Francesco:...is more efficient in English because there are not many variations.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Ehm...and also phrasal verbs are very efficient even if they are almost impossible [laughter]to, to learn.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: And, yes, very, eh, very often when maybe English can just, uh, use a noun as a verb

Jena: Oh okay...yeah.

Francesco: Or something like that...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: So, it's a bit, ehm, easier. And also for example, a very recent, eh, one.

Ehm... For example, the, the... "walk-in wardrobe."

Jena: Uh huh.

Francesco: Eh, yes, it's obvious. In English, eh, you say it and it's obvious that it's "walk-in wardrobe" because you can walk in it.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: In Italian, is ah, *cabina armadio*, which is a... something very convolute...

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: ...So, no, no, no English is more efficient. But, the other way around, for pronunciation, Italian is *way* more efficient.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: Yes[laughter], I discovered lately, that, eh, Italian, ehm, can of course, has seven sounds, but actually only five of them are, eh,...would be needed.

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco: Because a lot of dialects only need, uh, five of them...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: And... actually, we can pronounce every word [laughter] with only five sounds.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: So, it's, eh, of course, a matter of efficiency...instead of 14 or whatever....

Jena: Sure

Francesco: in English. Actually, the...the...I mean, when a word is written, it can be read in several ways...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...of course. So, from a pure, uh, perspective of efficiency...

Jena: Uh huh

Francesco: ...five vowels sounds are enough.

Jena: [laughter]

Francesco: [laughter]....because you can do everything with those five. [laughter]

Actually, eh, of course, language goes...developed...eh, its own way, but as matter of efficiency... the same way, eh, one doesn't need to change the verb because, eh, one...uh, in English you only need to add the subject and you are fine...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...and, uh, of course, it's not needed to...to...to change the verb...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...the same way it's not needed to have, uh, so many, eh, sounds...for...eh...pure, uh, efficiency perspective.

Jena: Sure, sure....Interesting. Okay, so, uh....what...two....three questions. So, what is your future, er, what's your plan in the future of your use with English? Um, do you plan to maintain it, improve it? Wh...How do you see that happening?

Francesco: Okay, for sure I want to maintain my level...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:... and if possible, to increase it.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: I....I don't know how much I can increase it because, uh, for example, uh, one of my, eh, English teachers...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...told me that it will be difficult for me to improve substantially without be exposed to English, eh...I mean in a massive way.

Jena: Yeah... that makes sense.

Francesco: So, mmm, yes, maybe, eh, okay, I can, uh, do some, uh, uh ...small improvement, but not too much without being, uh, more, more exposed.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: So, that's why I try to...to watch more...ehm, TV series...

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...or movies or whatever...

Jena: Ummhmm

Francesco: ...but , of course, eh, if 90-95 percent of my communication is in Italian, eh, I cannot do much more than this.

Jena: Mm

Francesco: ...and I'm not sure I...I am going to go abroad, eh, just because it's not needed.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: I mean, if ...if in the future I need to...to move abroad, then, of course, uh, I can, uh, consider it, eh, and, eh, that would be....maybe....a chance to...to improve my English, but right now, uh, I...I think that....yes, I have um....maybe it's not part of my plan...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...right, right now.

Jena: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm. Okay....um...and then, is there anything else you'd like to add about how you believe you became proficient in English? Anything, anything else you want to add?

Francesco: Yeah, just that...uh....ehm...it's a matter of need.

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco:...like whe...when...eh...uh...I mean, a very young person starts...to, to learn a language...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...also the, the, the...mother...eh....tongue...it's out of need because, eh, of course, there is a toy, there is eh, food, eh, which he or she *needs*. So, somehow, ehm, that way....eh, the...the...thehm...there can be the development...

Jena: Mmmhmm.

Francesco:...of the language...

Jen,a: Mmmhmm

Francesco: So the same for the same language....at least for me.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: I...I...I needed it.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: When I was, uh, forced to learn it. Ehhh, it didn't work.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: So, maybe with other methods, maybe...eh...this need can be replicated.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: So, maybe, okay, let's watch a movie. And then, make...let's make a summary. Okay. That's a need.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: Or, maybe, to be thrown into a conversation.

Jena: [nervous laughter]

Francesco: Okay, you need to survive somehow.

Jena: Yeah

Francesco: So, yes, to...to...by replicating this need.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: Because out of curiosity...yes, it can work, but you need, uh, passion...

Jena: Sure. Sure.

Francesco: ...for that

Jena: Sure. That makes sense.

Francesco: Okay....you...you can learn something out of passion, but it's *rare*.

Jena: [laughter] mmkay.

Francesco: Yes, ehm...sometimes you can...it can be English. Sometimes it can be chess. It can be music, or something else.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco:...You need to be very lucky for it to be English.

Jena: [laughter] Okay....and then my last question is....what advice would you give to...somebody else who is trying to learn English whether it's a young age or old age or anyone, what...what would you recommend?

Francesco: I recommend a mix of, uh, reading, and uh, reading maybe books...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ... or articles, uh...pieces of, uh, news or whatever...

Jena: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm

Francesco: ....and, uh, watching TV series, or movies, or...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...something like that.

Jena: Sure

Francesco: ...a combination, but because, of course, for pronunciation

...the...the...the...ehm...the movie can be very, very good.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...but, eh, it has, eh, its own, uhm, rhythm, its own, uh, uhm....speed.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: While maybe a text, eh, can be more...uhm, relaxing...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...from that point of view

Jena: Sure

Francesco: So one can concentrate on, uh, understanding, eh, on... yes, recognizing patterns...

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: ...instead maybe with a speed of the movie, eh...one can, I mean, can just get what is possible.

Jena: Mmmhmm

Francesco: So, there's no time for optimization or, yes, something like that.



Jena: Okay.

Francesco: So, I think a combination of both is...uh, my recommendation.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: It's something that can be done alone.

Jena: Okay

Francesco: Of course if...if you can force other people[laughter] to teach you

English[laughter], is even better[laughter], but to do it alone, is, yes, maybe is the best way.

Jena: [laughter] Okay.

### **Francesco's Speaking Proficiency Level**

I placed Francesco in the ACTFL category of Advanced High. He explained through his narratives with detail and narrated in time frames accurately. In addition, he exhibited, in a comfortable way, the language learning similarities that he and a famous American chess player shared as they took to learning a second language in order to access the literature to help them elevate their chess playing skills. Later, he was able to discuss topics abstractly through detailing how a language learner might "need" a language. Francesco demonstrated his ability to compensate for occasional limitations in vocabulary through illustration. He used the phrase "for example," and would give frequent illustrations of what he meant. Then, he often followed up with the phrase "something like that." In addition, he was able to use precise vocabulary such as "particular constructions," "panel discussion," and "walk-in wardrobe." He also used intonation to express meaning with regard to needing English and to express his discontent with his education in the Italian public school system. Beyond these

examples, he made a joke using intonation regarding the dubbing of TV shows in Poland.

### ADVANCED

Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner in order to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of Advanced-level speakers is abundant, the oral paragraph being the measure of Advanced-level length and discourse. Advanced-level speakers have sufficient control of basic structures and generic vocabulary to be understood by native speakers of the language, including those unaccustomed to non-native speech.

### ADVANCED HIGH

Speakers at the Advanced High sublevel perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence, and competence. They are consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics. They may provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.

Advanced High speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration. They use precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech. However, when called on to perform the complex tasks associated with the Superior level over a variety of topics, their language will at times break down or prove inadequate, or they may avoid the task altogether, for example, by resorting to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis.

### **Themes from Francesco's Experience**

Francesco's experience becoming orally proficient in English was very different from Myriam's and Omar's. Again, while there is no intention to do a contrastive analysis in this study, it is helpful to note background and circumstances related to his learning experience. Francesco is a 39 year- old male from Italy. He grew up in the Italian public school system and did not attend any additional English classes public or private until participating in a study abroad experience for two weeks at the age of 31 through work sponsorship. Currently through work, he converses two hours a week with English tutors.

In Francesco's interview, I identified nine categories he mentioned frequently which contributed to his becoming orally proficient in English. These categories included Need, Reading to Speaking strategies, TV and Movies as Strategies, Use of English in Current Daily Life, Grammar Training & Vocabulary Training, Recognition, or Use, Peer and Teacher Influence, Traveling Abroad, Working Abroad, and Studying Abroad.

Francesco mentioned the *need* for English 31 times, the highest out of all his categories; however, he also pointed out that this need did not become evident to him (or at least convincing to him as internal motivation) until around the age of 18 to 19. He mentioned, "Later on, I, I wanted to learn English because I needed it." He continued expressing that he "...had to access the, the, em, literature...which was in English," referring to chess books in English. Francesco came to need English through chess playing because the literature he required for studying it was not in Italian. He admitted,"...the amount of titles translated were limited..." Additionally, being able to speak English became a work requirement for him. He explained, "For sure it's a

requirement...it's quite useful.” After Francesco took a vacation to Miami three or four years ago, he realized his English needed some improvement. This was an example of an area of mixed categories of both Need and Traveling Abroad. He determined that on the first day in Miami, he struggled, but after that, it was easier than he had expected in both the categories of speaking and listening comprehension. After the vacation, he realized he needed a bit more English support. In a sense, this experience probably contributed to his motivation to continue improving his oral proficiency level in English.

The next category with the highest mentions was Francesco's use of TV and Movies as Strategies. Francesco noted the lack of movies and other authentic materials in his public English education first, later addressing how he now used television and movies to improve his English for both listening and speaking. He explained, “I try to force myself to watch TV series...and movies.” He also noted that this occurred recently when English language movies became available through iTunes. He also mentioned, “Netflix....is super useful...all of the movies and TV series are in both languages.” Netflix did not become available to Italy, according to Francesco, until about 2016. He explained this medium provided extremely useful exposure to English speaking by expressing, “...Holy Netflix. Holy Netflix for sure. My best spent nine point nine nine Euros per month.” Movies, according to Francesco, are also helpful for pronunciation. He mentioned, “....for pronunciation....the movie can be very, very good...it has its own rhythm...speed.”

The next highest category for Francesco was Reading to Speaking Strategies. He also mentioned these 12 times in relation to both reading subtitles and reading

books. Reading subtitles also contributed to the categories of TV and Movies as Strategies. He explained, “I just used to read books...” He mentioned that reading occurred at a slower pace in comparison to movies. He explained, “... maybe a text, eh, can be more...uhm...relaxing...” He further explained that when watching movies, “...sometimes I try to, um, avoid, eh, looking at subtitles...” In this way, it seemed he used the subtitles to help him connect the meaning of the English words to what he understood in Italian, then, he tried to wean himself off the subtitles. In his recommendation to others being able to be orally proficient in English through a reading to speaking strategy, he said, “I recommend reading a mix of, uh, reading, and uh, reading maybe books...articles, uh...pieces of news, or whatever...”

Next in order of frequent mentions in Francesco’s interview was Use of English Daily in Current Life. I suspect that the reason Francesco mentioned this category so frequently was because he did and does not tend to use English every day. When English became more of an easy habit, it seemed to be less intrusive as being against the norm. Francesco mentioned this nine times partially in how he used English in daily life, but also how he recognized that *not* using it every day detracted from his improvement in oral proficiency. He mentioned that he used English occasionally for work with emails, papers, contracts or training courses, but it was not every day. He also mentioned his English lessons expressing, “...when I am regular with my lessons, eh, two times per week....two hours per week” to refer to how often he spoke in English.

Francesco mentioned grammar training, recognition, and practice seven times. Most of this was related to seeing patterns. He mentioned that reading books was fine

for grammar and vocabulary, but terrible for pronunciation. He said, “I got some vocabulary, but I memorized a lot of, uh, things with the wrong pronunciation.” He also mentioned that he took what he could get and looked up “unknown words.”

While grammar training, recognition, and practice were important (though not always exciting) to Francesco, peer interaction was also beneficial, especially peer interaction that included speakers who were stronger in English than he was, mentioning this category seven times as well. He explained, “I have two English teachers...they are the most frequent partners for...uh, speaking English...” Further, he explains sharing opinions regarding English with work colleagues or friends who lived abroad noting, “All of them are much better than me...” In the end, Francesco laughed, explaining, “Of course, if...if you can force other people [laughter] to teach you English [laughter], is even better [laughter]. This seems to highlight the need for authentic exposure, interaction, and instruction to assist with building and improving oral proficiency.

The third category of Francesco’s trio of seven mentions was Traveling Abroad. He mentioned this category in conjunction with his trips to the US and the UK where he felt more confident to speak.

The last two categories Francesco mentioned several times were Working Abroad and Studying Abroad. He mentioned Working Abroad three times in relation to how he could improve or has improved his oral proficiency. He explained a situation where he had to speak with a German English speaker and expressed, “At the phone...there was....a German speaker....and his English was terrible...It was, it was very good as a vocabulary, but the pronunciation was very difficult to understand...in a

live situation, it was better.” I expect this experience helped to improve both his oral proficiency skills and his listening skills abroad. He would not have necessarily met with a German English speaker in his work place in Italy, but abroad, he was exposed to not only other native English speakers in the UK, but other English speakers from different language backgrounds. In a work situation, one often cannot bail out of required communications despite any potential accent or pronunciation challenges, thus providing quite an authentic language experience.

Francesco’s Studying Abroad mixed with a few categories, one of which was also the Need category, and the other one was in the Traveling Abroad category. The reason for the dual study-travel abroad category was because Francesco mentioned, “I had an opportunity to live in a family.” This occurred simultaneously during his study abroad time in the UK. He not only had to communicate in his English classes, but he had to communicate outside of them in more “travel-like” circumstances. This, according to Francesco, gave him more confidence to speak, which might not have occurred in just a formal educational setting.

Overall, it seemed that most of Francesco’s themes fit under an umbrella category of Authentic Exposure and Practice. In his learning situations, as many other Italians find themselves in, he had to try with quite a bit of effort to find ways to expose himself to English in order for him to become orally proficient. Much of it came from a need for it combined with internal motivation.

Table 3 <i>Francesco’s Recurring Themes of Becoming Orally Proficient in English</i>	Number of times appeared
1. Need	31/1 mixed Travel

	Abroad
2. TV and Movies as Strategies	12/1 mixed need
3. Reading to Speaking Strategies	12/2 mixed TV & Movies as Strategies
4. Use of English in Current Daily Life	9/1 mixed Peer Influence
5. Grammar Training & Vocabulary Training, Recognition, or Use	7
6. Peer & Teacher ( at a higher level) Influence	7
7. Traveling Abroad	7/ 1 mixed need/1 mixed study abroad
8. Working Abroad	3
9. Studying Abroad	2

Table 4 below shows themes related to how the three participants believe they came to be orally proficient in English in no particular order. For the sake of clarity, I did not include in this table the numbers that were mixed in other categories. Some differences between the individual tables and Table 4 are the categories that received zero to two mentions. For example, in Francesco's case, I did not include his one mention of internal motivation (chess) in his chart. In the case of Myriam, I did not include in her chart the one mention where she felt the need to be proficient in English if she ever wanted to study abroad. Additionally, some of the topics may have been mentioned by participants, but the mention of the topic was not in relation to how they became proficient. An example of this is in the category of Enjoyment. Neither Myriam nor Francesco mentioned how enjoying English helped them to become orally proficient. Enjoyment may have been a result of proficiency (in the case of Myriam),



but it was not necessarily something that assisted her to become proficient. Another example of this is regarding the category of Music as a strategy. Neither Francesco nor Omar mentioned music as being a strategy they used, but they did acknowledge it as a strategy others might use.

One of the conclusions that may be drawn from this chart is the breadth, depth and variety of ways that the participants believe assisted them on their path to oral proficiency. Even with a multiple case study of only three participants, the number of themes and number of times they arise shows the complex nature of how language learners may become proficient. While I have frequently mentioned this case study was not meant to be contrastive, it may be helpful to point out themes that resonated with multiple participants. Out of all the categories, the highest mentions were formal education (Myriam), enjoyment (Omar) and need (Francesco). None of the participants shared a “highest mentioned category” with any of the others. It is important to note, however, that TV and Movies as a strategy received the same high number (12 mentions) in the case of two participants (Myriam and Francesco). This was the only category that came anywhere close to being equal for any of the participants.

Table 4 <i>Themes Across the Participants</i>			
Themes	Myriam	Omar	Francesco
Internal Motivations	10	2	1
Formal English Education	23	7	0
Family Influence	5	3	0
Specific Teacher as Influence	2	4	0
Peer Influence	8	5	4
TV & Movies as Strategies	12	3	12

Music as Strategy	4	0	0
Stories( but not writing) as Motivation Strategy	0	4	0
Personal Writing as Strategy	2	0	0
Reading to Speaking as Strategy	4	1	12
Traveling Abroad	5	5	7
Studying Abroad	0	2	2
Need	2	1	31
Grammar Training & Vocabulary Training, Recognition or Use	1	2	7
Working Abroad	1	0	3
Use of English in Daily Life	7	2	9
Fun/Enjoyment	0	13	0

After determining which categories received the highest mentions in the participants' interviews, I created a chart to show the top categories mentioned by each participant. The chart has visually demonstrated which categories seem to be the most important for them. For example, the categories of Traveling Abroad and Daily Use of English in connection to all participants appeared to be nearly equal in number. Instead of conducting a comparative analysis though, this is meant to show a snapshot view of how these individuals perceive they arrived at oral proficiency. What this chart also has indicated, to some extent, is a further breakdown into categories that explain how the participants believe they came to proficiency. When I further categorized the top five categories of each individual included here, four more broad themes arose. These themes included Authentic Exposure to the Language, Frequent exposure, Interactive Practice with Peers or Others, and finally, a Reason or Reasons to Study. For the

purposes of this analysis, I will define Authentic Exposure to include examples such as traveling abroad and media exposure (movies, television, radio, magazines, books, cartoons, and etcetera). Secondly, I will define Frequent Exposure to include repetition, education, daily use, and practice. Next, I will define Interactive Practice as interacting with peers or others using English. Lastly, I will define a Reason to Study to include motivation combined with personal interests whether it be need, enjoyment or personal achievement. These four themes closely connect with what the literature has relayed about how language learners may become proficient.

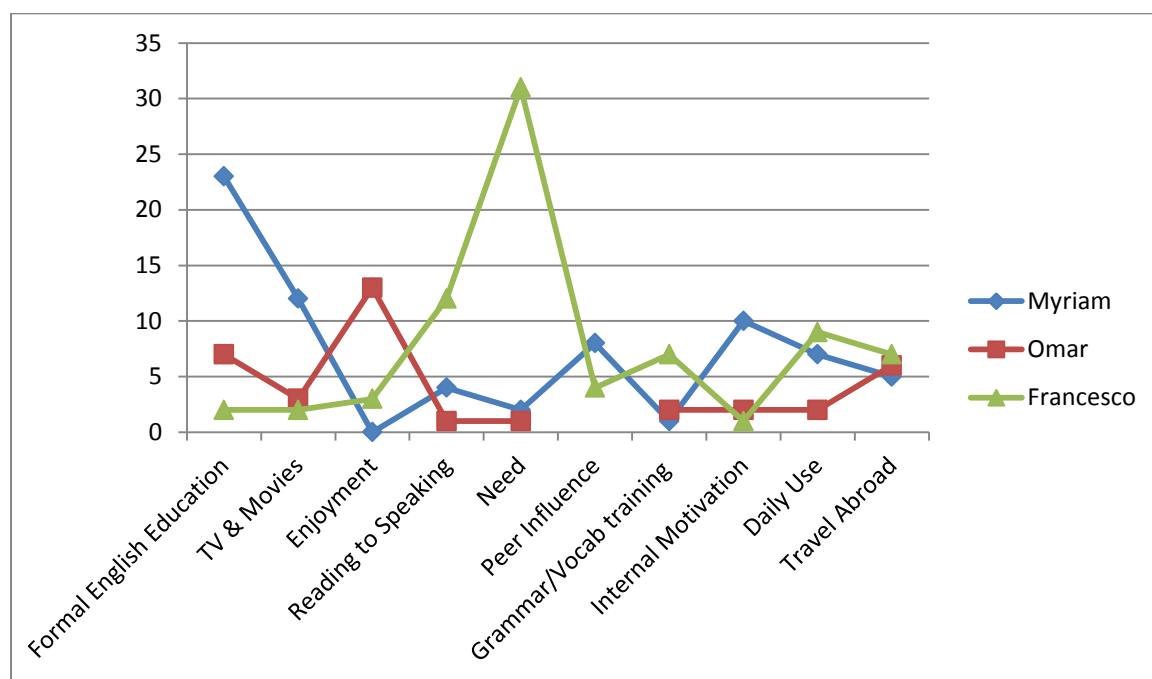


Figure 2 *Top Categories for How Participants Perceive they Reached Oral Proficiency*

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion, Summary of Findings, Implications, and Suggestions**

Chapter 4 is a discussion of the assumptions I had as a researcher and research questions answered, the summary of findings from the study, and implications for teachers as well as suggestions for future research.

My assumptions, in relation to the conclusions through this case study, were confirmed in most instances.

1. I assumed that the participants were more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated. In other words, they have motivated themselves to become proficient in English rather than have many outside forces encourage them to. Perhaps it is a mix, but I assumed they had internal motivation as all participants learned English as a Foreign Language.

This assumption was confirmed in the case of Myriam as I defined internal motivation as motivation to learn English for the sake of learning it for rather than because another person, idea or force caused them to learn it. While Omar and Francesco both had intrinsic motivating factors to become proficient in English, they did not become orally proficient in English for the sake of learning English as a sort of inner satisfaction, at least not at first. Omar found that he enjoyed English, which seemed to lead to him learning it and using it more. Francesco learned English to enable him to play chess. Chess and the improvement of his game was more of the motivator, though chess was for enjoyment.

2. I assumed that the participants had to put in extra effort above and beyond what any classes in the equivalent of middle or high school would teach in order to

become orally proficient. This might include English schools within their own country, studying abroad, having English tutors, having parents who advocated for and used English as a Foreign Language, or other motivating factors.

For this particular study, I found this assumption to be true. All participants practiced and encountered English outside of school. They watched movies, TV, listened to music, played video games, read, and participated in study and travel abroad. They did not just encounter English, but they persisted in learning and understanding it on their own beyond the classroom. Omar and Myriam attended schools that focused on English. Francesco occasionally used English when he went abroad for work. He also had conversation hours with tutors sponsored through work. In Omar and Myriam's case, their parents were strong advocates for learning English.

3. I assumed the exigence to learn English and to have a high oral proficiency may have started from a need to use English to avoid being a language interloper, so to speak, in some kind of social activity requiring English. Perhaps extrinsic motivation could have stemmed from a job or from parents, too.

This particular assumption was true in some respects. In Francesco's case, his need to learn English and use it was very evident as a contributor to his oral proficiency from his point of view. The highest category of responses that he believed contributed to his ability to become proficient in English was Need. He also experienced being an outsider when he studied abroad in the UK and lived with a family as well as when he vacationed in Miami. He needed it to "survive." Extrinsic motivation, in the case of Francesco, did not come from family influences, but it did seem to come in the form of his job. English proficiency was required for his position.

In Myriam's case, she seemed either to feel like either an outsider, or at least slightly marginalized when she switched to an English focus school around the fifth grade. While this was not necessarily a positive experience, this social situation might have contributed to her motivating factors to improve her English as she did not enjoy being at a "low level" in comparison to her new peers. Myriam was also encouraged by her parents to become proficient through formal education opportunities and a desire to not disappoint her parents.

Omar, while he did not particularly focus on being an outsider during video game play, he did mention that listening and participating in video game chat helped him to become proficient. There is a chance my assumption also was true for Omar, but it would probably require posing the question to Omar explicitly.

4. I assumed the language learners began learning English at a young age, perhaps in elementary school.

This assumption was confirmed. All three participants began learning English between first and third grade in their elementary schools.

5. I assumed that the language learners continue to use their English frequently in the present for work or social situations.

This assumption was confirmed as well; however, the degree that it was true varied across participants. At the time of the interview, both Myriam and Omar were living in travel abroad or study abroad circumstances in the US. By default and by their own explanations, they were using English frequently to participate in everyday behaviors such as through taking public transportation, or conversing with other students or professors. In the case of Francesco, he did not use English

for social situations in daily life. He used it for two hours a week during conversation sessions with tutors with the occasional use for working abroad.

6. I assumed that the language learners did employ specific strategies that helped them become proficient, but I am unsure about what they were or how they helped.

Using Brown's (2000) explanation of learner strategies as ways to approach a task to achieve a particular result, and Oxford's (1990) explanation of defining strategies as as specific actions used to help the learning becomes more self-directed, fun, effective, and easier, I have seen that all the participants have used learning strategies of some sort. However, the actions and the participants' detailing learning strategies might not have been as specific as might be helpful for others to model.

The participants all expressed themselves in ways that suggested they used strategies to become orally proficient, but most of them did not consciously detail specific strategies that they employed to become proficient. Most of the participants detailed the "what" of their strategies, but not the "how." For example, one form of a compensatory strategy might be to use gestures and guess the meaning of a speaker. Francesco brought this up in his interview by explaining how he interacted with a German L1, English L2 speaker, but he did not explain that it was a strategy of his; he just did it. On the other hand, Myriam mentioned a memorization strategy for using music lyrics to help her become proficient, but she did not volunteer more details on how that worked for her. Omar mentioned enjoying English and especially enjoying reading. Therefore, my conclusion is that it is possible that the participants used

specific strategies, but they may have used them subconsciously without paring a particular name with them such as “compensatory strategy” or “metacognitive strategy.”

### **Research Questions Answered**

#### **What do adults English Language Learners perceive oral proficiency to be?**

Myriam’s definition of oral proficiency partially matched experts’ definitions of oral proficiency related to the ability to communicate. According to her, proficiency meant that she could speak quickly with native English speakers. In addition, she referred to the approximation of an American or British accent, and how the lack of an accent contributed to better understanding by others. In Myriam’s definition, what did not seem to match the definitions of experts in the field was relatively similar to Omar’s definition, however. In Omar’s case, he defined oral proficiency as “total elimination of an accent,” which experts did not seem to point to as a definition of proficiency. Francesco, on the other hand, pointed to accuracy, fluency, vocabulary depth and breadth, and speed in how he defined oral proficiency. Again, his definition focused on if others could understand him, and how easily he could speak.

#### **How do adult ELLs perceive the way they became orally proficient?**

Based on this case study, ELLs believe themselves to reach oral proficiency most successfully through authentic exposure, frequent exposure, interactive practice and motivational factors which combine interests whether they be need, enjoyment or personal achievement.

#### **What are the different strategies adult ELLS have used to reach oral proficiency?**



Scarcella and Oxford (1992) explained that finding opportunities to interact with more proficient peers and native speakers was important for speaking proficiency. This was an activity or a strategy which all the participants took advantage of as expressed in their interviews. All participants did this or mentioned this strategy through formal and informal educational environments as well as informal environment such as conversation hours, daily interaction, and social interaction through video games, for example.

In addition to peer interaction, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) explained that conversation tools such as ways to take turns and interrupt are considered strategies and ones that can be taught and practiced as a communication aid. These phrases might include “Could you slow down, please” or “Excuse me,” or “Can you explain what you mean by that?” Back channel cues also may be used as conversation tools moving the exchange along. These could be words such as “right,” “uhuh,” and “that’s interesting” (p.156). In fact, over the course of these interviews, as a researcher and English L1 speaker, I employed these frequently to keep the conversation flowing as encouragement to the participants. Omar also employed or mirrored these strategies to show his side of the conversation. His choice was “mmhmm.” From my point of view, these were effective as oral proficiency strategies both as Omar and I used them to signal interest and participation in the conversations. I cannot say whether Omar used these to reach proficiency, but by using them, he has shown evidence of their usefulness in exhibiting speaking proficiency.

One particular strategy Francesco frequently employed was the compensatory strategy. This, explained by Green and Oxford (1995), relates to making up for limited

knowledge (p. 265). This could be through guessing by the context, gesturing to convey meaning, using synonyms, circumlocution, and seeing and using patterns for learning something unknown. Francesco mentioned that he gave up on the idea of perfection, which also enabled learning. Rubin (1975) has explained that this is exactly what a “good learner” does. Good learners focus on patterns, take opportunities for practicing, and are willing to make mistakes as they learn.

Myriam specifically mentioned the memorization of music lyrics as a strategy she employed. She expressed that using songs was a strategy that made learning easier compared with focusing on a book because it was shorter. This, I assume, also was a bit of an affective strategy as she would be able to give herself encouragement by finishing and understanding a song versus a book. Music also exposed her to unknown words, prompting her to look them up, which then contributed to a growing vocabulary. This practice also enabled her to grow in her oral proficiency due to repetition and pronunciation practice as she memorized lyrics singing along. In addition to music use as a strategy, Myriam also mentioned the end-product of knowing about pop culture and being able to connect with native speakers. Both of these could be evidence of some type of strategy use (which perhaps she did not mention or think of) as she accomplished them.

While perhaps Omar did not explicitly express his strategies besides reading and enjoyment, his interview shows evidence of well-learned strategies. For example, he evidenced active use of self-monitoring as a strategy by acknowledging that “suppository” was probably not the word he intended to describe the main source of English within his household growing up.

All participants employed hesitation markers and pausing as strategies to keep conversation going such as “um,” or “ehm,” giving them time to think or to guide their answers.

### **Summary of Findings**

Based on this study, the findings indicate that in order for students to reach oral proficiency in English, they may need to focus their attention on four particular areas. The first area is having authentic and media- related exposure from a variety of sources such as studying abroad, media, radio, books, magazines, movies and television to name a few. This finding confirms the findings of researchers who also discovered or confirmed the importance of authentic and media exposure for language learners related to language learners’ proficiency (AlShaiji, 2015; Bahrani & Tam, 2015; Blake, 2009; Bylund & Athanasopoulos, 2015; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008; Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012; Nakatani, 2006; Oe & Alam, 2013; Prokhorov & Therkelsen, 2015; Riazantseva, 2001; Roever, 2006; Razagifard 2013; and Satar & Özdener, 2008). In addition, the findings show frequency of exposure through practice of a variety of contexts is valuable. These contexts could be a mix of formal or informal educational situations and authentic situations where repetition and practice happen frequently, as other researchers have also found (Boers, 2014; de Jong & Perfetti, 2011; Lynch & Maclean, 2000; and Nation, 1989). A third area for focus based on these findings in alignment with Scarcella and Oxford’s (1992) and Greenfader et al.’s (2015) views or findings, is the significance of interactive practice with both peers and others who have a higher level of proficiency. Lastly, students or teachers focusing their attention on teaching English

as a second language may need to encourage or model how students may find a personal reason to study that motivates them and combines their interests whether it be need as Francesco pointed out, enjoyment as Omar frequently mentioned, or through personal achievement as Myriam discovered. These findings have confirmed what researchers have pointed out about language learners: there are many paths to proficiency.

### **Limitations of the Project**

The biggest limitation for this project was time. The interviews took several weeks to transcribe by hand, which took away from the potential to conduct follow up interviews.

### **Implications for Language Learning and Language Use**

This research has brought up the challenges of balancing language use and language learning within different countries. On the one hand, some individuals and perhaps even countries may see English as necessary for showing ability to modernize or to provide evidence of a modern identity (Baumgardner & Brown, 2012; Pètery, 2011; Troyer, 2012; Vettorel, 2013). Some countries have a connection to English through imperialism, which has created another push and pull between appropriation and resistance of the English language regarding learning and use (Canagarajah, 2006). English media exposure through television especially has, in some countries, increased the balance of bilingualism (Bylund & Athanasopoulos, 2015), while according to Myriam, English media in Saudi Arabia may have a challenge with the English language overpowering the native language without balance for some of the younger generations learning English now. The subject of English dubbing in Polish television,

brought up by Francesco, though this was many years ago, may be an insight to the challenge some countries are dealing with related to English use. Poland has actively fought against this recently, though still focuses on the pragmatic aspects of using and learning English (Kasztalska, 2014).

Other countries in Europe may see English as a bit of an invasion as well, but in Poland particularly, English has been seen as the cause of “cognitive dissonance.” English may be seen as an economic asset, yet it is also viewed as a negative influence, which is changing Polish linguistic and social norms. Poland, like English, adopted a Latin alphabet due to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church (Kasztalska, 2014, p. 244), though it was much later (12<sup>th</sup> century) than English’s adaptation of the Latin alphabet (sixth century) (Millward & Hayes, 2012, p.95). Due to partitions and regimes ruling Poland, the Polish people (or at least enough people to create a law) have seen their language as the “keeper” of their national identity, thus the Polish Language Act came about in 1999 to protect it (Kasztalska, 2014, p. 245).

English loans to Polish came about usually due to Polish lacking an equivalent. English in advertising came to Poland through the cosmetic world, then later through avenues such as *PC World* magazine or magazines for teenage girls (Kasztalska, 2014, p. 254). Unlike in Italy, English in Poland seems to be used least for decorative roles and is used more as an informative function (News, Technology, Internet, Social Media, TV, Business or persuasive reasons). The contention with English in Poland is that it seems to be influencing the language through loans and sheer permeation. Polish linguists and language experts have lamented, “Our language is dying” (Kasztalska, 2014, p. 254).

From another point of view, it seems that Italy, with its superb dubbing capabilities for movies and television, may be removing one option for English learners to expose themselves to authentic material in an inexpensive fashion compared to its numerous private English schools with their native English teachers (in large cities anyway). While English language education begins in elementary school in Italy, it is a small part of the curriculum. In Italy, English seems to be used for pragmatic purposes focused on tourism in places such as at transportation ticket machines, shopping, and in airports. Some professionals use English for business as Francesco expressed he did for work. I found this to also be the case based on my interaction with various Italian professionals and my own English L2 (or more) speaking Italian connections in Italy.

On the other hand, English has been used in Italy beyond areas of pragmatics. Vettorel (2013) explored the use of English in regard to “sophistication” of it in Italian advertising beyond titles, and has suggested that English has been taken advantage of and turned into a “social stereotype” that signals a movement into the future, modernity, globalization, progress, sophistication, and a symbol of success, among other stereotypes (p. 262). She continued to explain that in English-Italian mixing advertising, language creativity seems to exploit English for things such as slogans, headlines, a local/global appeal, a “cool hue” and an attention getter. Often times, after attention has been captivated, the explanation of the advertisement is left to Italian (p. 262).

In a similar way, Francesco also explained how Italian seems to also be preferred or at least pushed in media areas beyond advertising such as in films. This makes sense to an extent since Standard Italian seems to be the national language in Italy (There are many other dialects and languages spoken there). He mentioned the

lack of movies, even at the cinema in original languages with subtitles, for example, due to the superb dubbing in Italian. This seemed to point out that English is not expected in mainstream Italian society. English is used in many recognizable brands, though, which often target younger audiences who are expected to be at least slightly familiar with English. According to Vettorel (2013), in Italy, English is considered the most successful language in international marketing, and the advertisements often target bilinguals. In addition to using English to achieve multiple special effects that could not be achieved in one language, advertisers carefully and creatively use English to create positive associations with brands in order to create an emotional appeal (p. 263). The use of English loanwords is also preferred due to stylistic needs or a need to increase the impact of a message (p. 264).

Vettorel (2013) wrapped up her analysis expressing that English in Italian advertising does some “winking” at the “consumers’ self-perceived competence in English”( p. 275 ). While some ads target bilinguals, most of the English mixed into Italian advertising does not have to be fully comprehended in order to understand the advertising message. In fact, advertising provides gratification for the consumer as they comprehend the “easy” English words, which can lead to them feeling better about themselves and possibly more sophisticated (p. 262).

This concept of “winking” at “self-perceived confidence” related to language, though relating to completely different categories, immediately reminded me of the idea of *fare una bella figura* in Italy, or make a good impression. Many countries, including Korea, (another country where I taught English) have certain ways and expectations of “saving- face” or making a person look presentable in public, but I did

not expect to find it also in the use of English in advertising. Since Italy is well known (especially in Milan) for fashion, it is possible that the use of English does carry over into the fashion world to be also exploited for prestige reasons. Perhaps this connects with what Francesco mentioned about how he felt his English education was not so useful in his opinion. Perhaps it has been used to “make a good impression” or to give just enough to learners to understand the very basics. More studies would be needed to uncover details regarding this.

The use of English in Polish advertising seems to be tied heavily to pragmatic uses, especially in regards to information and technology, but there seems to be a line drawn in the sand in Poland between pragmatic and other uses of English. Many Poles used English as a rebellious act to align with the West after Soviet influences, and English was never imposed on them. Poles, according to Kasztalska (2014), see the usefulness of English in interacting with other countries, and some see the low English proficiency in Poland as a “national flaw” (p. 257). This tugging back and forth with regard to identity and usefulness, and prestige and distrust, seems problematic. Identity is extremely important, and by acknowledging this in language learning, perhaps Polish students may come to terms with English not taking away from their heritage. In a similar way, perhaps Saudi and Italian ELLs may also embrace more of a balance with language so that language heritage may be preserved and English can be of benefit as well.

### **Implications for Teachers**

While I am not certain what the solutions are in the broad category of English Education in Poland, Saudi Arabia and Italy, as an English teacher, I may continue to



focus and suggest that language teachers aim for additive bilingualism with their students. With this goal, I would aim to promote positive attitudes toward both English as a target language and learners' native languages, though this might only be possible in contexts such as universities, bilingual schools, and specific forms of education (art and science) depending on country rules.

In addition to having implications on balanced bilingualism in general, this study also has more specific implications for language teachers. Based on the research, the participants have suggested that ELLs need to incorporate authentic material and authentic use, and more authentic and frequent exposure. Wu et al. (2017) confirmed this finding in their recent study, which I referred to previously. In their study, the students also found the English language learning effective and were able to become more autonomous in their learning and practice because it was needed, a factor which Francesco brought up time after time in his interview. If students did not prepare through partnerships and outside learning via the app, they could become a “drag on mutual learning,” which demonstrated awareness of a type of need, a need to be prepared and a need to avoid being the passive learner (p.151). Similar to other studies that focused on the importance of repetition, this study enabled students to practice their oral skills over and over again, but in meaningful ways (p.147).

Wu et al.'s study (2017) not only confirmed this case study's findings regarding the importance of authentic, frequent and significant use and practice of English, but they went several steps further and successfully demonstrated a way in which teachers and perhaps students could incorporate the findings and methodology into actual classroom or learning environment use. In addition, Wu et al. (2017) collected both

qualitative and quantitative data that enabled them to understand students' perceptions (as this study did) regarding their learning through focus-group interviews and students' actual learning amounts through pre- and post-tests and questionnaires. The field of TESOL would benefit greatly from this timely study being replicated in different countries with different language backgrounds and perhaps with students used to conventional styles.

While Wu et al.'s study (2017) did not focus on study abroad, studying abroad may still be beneficial for students' oral proficiency improvement. Perhaps teachers and parents could encourage or support traveling and studying abroad when possible. While money may be a factor in avoiding travel, learners could receive encouragement at home by making friends, meeting peers or participating in classes (with an English focus or not) with peers who speak the language at a higher level than they do. According to Francesco, learners must figure out a way to "need" English enough to become orally proficient. According to Omar and Myriam, older Arabic speakers not as exposed to English as many young children are may need to increase their exposure. In this way, teachers of Arabic students from Saudi Arabia in particular, may need to prepare for a huge variety of skill levels depending on ages, for example. Teachers of younger Arabic speakers from Saudi Arabia may need to tie in cultural material related to the language learning and encourage balanced bilingualism. Balanced bilingualism, Ellis (1994) has explained, often will occur when a learner has a positive stance regarding both the target language culture (in Myriam's case, American English culture) and his or her own language and ethnic identity (in Myriam's case, Arabic and Saudi

culture), which Myriam exhibited within the interview and her advice to other language learners of English (p. 208).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

In a discussion with my thesis chair upon completion of the research, we thought it would have been helpful to interview the mother of Omar and Myriam to see her perspective on the language learning since she was a teacher in Saudi Arabia. I also might have interviewed the older sibling who resides in Saudi Arabia with their father. I would also have liked to conduct an additional interview with Omar and Myriam together. This might have drawn out more information or reflection on their experiences growing up together with English language learning. It might have also triggered memories that they might not have mentioned in their separate interviews. This could be an area for future research. Perhaps researchers could interview siblings together and separately related to how they believe they came to oral proficiency.

Another area to explore in further research might be to understand what and how Italy is currently doing to improve English language education and how they balance it with Italian language education. In this way, they might avoid Poland's challenge, but also use English to be more of a benefit.

Finally, conducting research using Nakatani's (2006) eight speaking and seven listening strategies could be of benefit. Researchers could explicitly teach the strategies and ask students to employ them. Then, they could evaluate how helpful the strategies were in helping the students to achieve oral proficiency as well as determine what the students' perceptions were.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 5 is a conclusion of this study on English speaking proficiency, a brief discussion on how other fields use narrative inquiry, and closing thoughts on what I learned as a researcher.

With the challenge of balanced bilingualism being a potential issue in many countries, future research conducted on how balanced bilingual programs may be beneficial to inform public and private education systems in Saudi Arabia, Italy, and other countries. While I understand (partially from personal teaching experience) that there are trends around the world focusing on authentic exposure to English, more research on these programs' effectiveness may assist governments, teachers, and learners in promoting or participating in language programs that help students reach oral proficiency in English. Perhaps research could also encourage practicing the balance of English with students' heritage or native languages. Myriam mentioned that more balance with Arabic might be helpful for young learners these days. Francesco mentioned that more authentic exposure to English would be beneficial to him, and perhaps in the same way, it might help improve the language balance for younger Italians who will eventually need to use English for work or travel purposes. In some cases, English speaking proficiency is required with certain jobs in Italy, and the formal education in the public system may be wanting in the ability to meet this goal.

Francesco also mentioned how compulsory English did not encourage him to learn the language. Perhaps researching and employing different motivational factors would be helpful for other learners as well. For Omar, he seemed to prefer speaking

and thinking in English rather than his native language. This was his personal choice, which also affected language learning.

Another idea to consider is the importance of interviewing language learners, both in teaching contexts and research contexts. Giving learners narrative voice through interviewing can be very powerful for personal reflection as well. The participants in this study were honored (as was I in being able to facilitate the interviews) that someone had been interested enough in them to interview them and ask about their stories. Leiva (2014), too, found that narrative inquiry enabled her to illuminate further through interviews, as she wanted to explore, through her research, the challenges many Latino students faced (p. 29).

Based on this case study, it seemed that interviewing gave participants an opportunity to exhibit their skills and to express their ideas, especially if they were not able to in other contexts. It also allowed participants to share significant stories that might not have been told otherwise. Interviewing allowed participants to feel important and valued. In fact, narrative inquiry is often used in and outside of TESOL research. Occupational Therapy (OT) research also uses narrative inquiry to increase understanding and explore social aspects of challenges or of lack of clarity in particular areas of research. Grunhurd, Lu, Mullenbach and Renteria (2017) in an unpublished group research project report, explored a particular population at a women's drop-in shelter through narrative inquiry as part of an analytical framework. They discovered that these narrative accounts demonstrated that both art and community were significant parts to their interviewees' lives and stories (p. 2). Similarly, Andres, Smith and Wingo (2017) in another unpublished group research project report, explored the

unique needs of veterans in a community through narrative inquiry, with the goal to raise awareness and highlight the veterans' voices. This way of drawing out and exploring others' lives and stories could be an area teachers might take advantage of as a method for increasing speaking skills of students, teacher understanding of students in a communicative environment, and general awareness about the students being taught.

Before I began the master's degree, I had been teaching EFL in Korea and Italy, and after I complete the degree, I intend to return to EFL teaching contexts, most likely in Europe. This means that what I have discovered through this research may become even more relevant. I may find myself in a situation where language learners lack opportunities for authentic or frequent exposure to English in Italy, or perhaps I will find myself in educational environments where students do not know how to find a way to "need" English and could use my guidance as a language teacher.

One of the most important recommendations I learned from this research was that language learners (including myself) need to make an effort to immerse themselves in authentic language situations that provide significant opportunities for practice with the language. Learning English as a Foreign Language makes this need more challenging to meet. In order to bridge this gap for some learners, I look forward to meeting locals who are interested in furthering their English skills through authentic interaction. I can imagine stopping at a café (a bar in Italy) to grab an espresso (*un caffè* in Italian) with ELL friends, then taking a stroll around the city discussing fun topics such as why one should never ask for a cappuccino after 12pm, in English first, then perhaps in Italian when I have gotten closer to oral proficiency myself

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A- Sample Interview Questions**

1. What does proficiency in English mean to you? How would you be able to define or tell if you were proficient or not?
2. Tell me a little bit about your family background related to English. Do any of your parents or other close relatives speak English proficiently? Did they encourage you to become proficient in English?
3. At what age did you begin studying English? Where were you? What type of learning situation was it? Why did you begin learning English?
4. At what age were you when you felt intrinsic motivation (you wanted to learn English for your own reasons rather than someone else's reasons) to become proficient? What was the catalyst (what started this motivation)?
5. At what moment did you feel you were proficient in English? Do you have an "epiphany" story?
6. What were the strategies or situations you believe were instrumental in helping you become proficient? Do you have any examples?
7. How has the use of technology helped you become proficient in English( or not)?
8. Who are your English speaking peers? How would you compare yourself to them?



9. Did you study or travel abroad in a country where you needed to use English or a country where English was the majority language? Where did you go? How long were you there? Do you have any stories about it?
10. How often do you converse with proficient English speakers whether they are “native” speakers or not?
11. How do you use English in your life now? Is it a requirement for work or school?
12. What do you enjoy most about being proficient in English?
13. What’s your plan in the future for your use of English? Planning or maintaining?
14. Is there anything else you’d like to add about how you believe you became proficient in English?
15. What advice would you give or recommendations you would make to others in order for them to become proficient in speaking English?

## Appendix B- IRB Consent Form for Graduate Thesis Research

Case Study Interviews:

Language Learners' Self-Perceptions of Target Language (TL) Oral Proficiency: A  
Case Study

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by:

<b>Principal Investigator &amp; Instructor of Record</b> Jena Robinson Master of Arts in English/TESL Student English Department Hargreaves Hall 013 Cheney, WA 99004 Email: <a href="mailto:jrobinson8@ewu.edu">jrobinson8@ewu.edu</a> <a href="mailto:Jena18152@gmail.com">Jena18152@gmail.com</a>	<b>Responsible Project Investigator</b> Dr. LaVona Reeves MA-TESL Program Director English Department Patterson Hall 211I Cheney, WA 99004 Phone: (509) 359-7060 Email: <a href="mailto:lreeves@ewu.edu">lreeves@ewu.edu</a>
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**Purpose and Benefits:** The purpose of this study is to determine and analyze the strategies English language learners use in order to overcome challenges when becoming proficient speakers. I will conduct, record, and analyze the interviews in order to understand your perceived success with your oral English language strategies in becoming proficient. This research will contribute to the field of existing knowledge in the use of self-prescribed strategies to facilitate English language learning at the proficient and/or professional level.

**Procedures:** I am asking for permission to interview you for approximately 30-60 minutes and to allow me to include quotations from your interview answers in this master's thesis. Washington State law provides that private conversations may not be recorded, intercepted, or divulged without permission of the individual(s) involved. I will collect, digitally audio record, transcribe and analyze the interview to understand perceived language fluency strategies as part of the thesis research. An example question would be: Do any of your parents or close relatives speak English proficiently? If so, did they also encourage you to become fluent in English?

If you choose to participate in this study, your name will not appear in the thesis. You will be assigned a random number, letter, or name, and identifying information will be removed. This project fulfills requirements for the Master of Arts in English with an emphasis in Teaching English as a Second Language.

**Risk, Stress or Discomfort** By signing this form, you are giving me consent to conduct the interview, record it, and analyze it. The risks of participating in this study are not expected to exceed those encountered in daily life. Your responses will appear in the master's thesis only with your written permission from this form, and I will give you a draft copy of the chapter in which your responses are included in my thesis. I will also change or omit any part you ask.

**Other Information:** Participation is voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time, even during the interview. Only Ms. Robinson and Dr. Reeves will know your real name and they will not share it in any part of this study. Any recordings or writing collected for this study will be kept confidential and your name will not appear anywhere in the master's thesis. You will also have the option to skip questions you are not comfortable answering.

Jena Robinson

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Primary Investigator

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

### **Consent Form for Graduate Thesis Research**

Please return this form only if you are participating:

Yes, I will participate.

The study described above has been explained to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate in graduate thesis research including direct quotations from the interview. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and understand the intended use of this research. I give permission to record selections or quotations from my interviews as part of this research, however, no identifying information including my name will be shared. I give permission to record conversations (as appropriate) in which I participate during this interview. I understand that by signing this form I am not waiving my legal rights. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

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Student's printed name

Signature of Subject

Date

If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this research or any complaints you wish to make, you may contact Ruth Galm, Human Protection Administrator, at (509) 359-7971 or rgalm@ewu.edu.

## Appendix C ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012-Speaking

For the purposes of this thesis, ACTFL requires that the guidelines be “reproduced in their entirety, with no alternations, and with credit to ACTFL;” therefore, they can be seen here in their entirety (ACTFL.org).

[Distinguished](#) | [Superior](#) | [Advanced](#) | [Intermediate](#) | [Novice](#)

## PREFACE

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012—Speaking describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.

The Guidelines describe the tasks that speakers can handle at each level, as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with tasks at each level. They also present the limits that speakers encounter when attempting to function at the next higher major level.

These Guidelines can be used to evaluate speech that is either Interpersonal (interactive, two-way communication) or Presentational (one-way, non-interactive).

The written descriptions of speaking proficiency are accompanied online by speech samples illustrating the features of each major level.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012—Speaking may be used for non-profit, educational purposes only, provided that they are reproduced in their entirety, with no alterations, and with credit to ACTFL.

## DISTINGUISHED

Speakers at the Distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. They can reflect on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner. Distinguished-level speakers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse for representational purposes, allowing them to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own. They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic.

Speakers at the Distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended

discourse. At the same time, they can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to allow them to say less and mean more. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse.

A non-native accent, a lack of a native-like economy of expression, a limited control of deeply embedded cultural references, and/or an occasional isolated language error may still be present at this level.

[VIEW SAMPLE](#)

## SUPERIOR

Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They present their opinions on a number of issues of interest to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured arguments to support these opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities.

When appropriate, these speakers use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by language patterns other than those of the target language. Superior-level speakers employ a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices.

Speakers at the Superior level demonstrate no pattern of error in the use of basic structures, although they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in complex high-frequency structures. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication.

## ADVANCED

Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner in order to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of Advanced-level speakers is abundant, the oral paragraph being the measure of Advanced-level length and discourse. Advanced-level speakers have sufficient control of basic structures and generic vocabulary to be understood by native speakers of the language, including those unaccustomed to non-native speech.

## ADVANCED HIGH

Speakers at the Advanced High sublevel perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence, and competence. They are consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics. They may provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.

Advanced High speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration. They use precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech. However, when called on to perform the complex tasks associated with the Superior level over a variety of topics, their language will at times break down or prove inadequate, or they may avoid the task altogether, for example, by resorting to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis.

## ADVANCED MID

Speakers at the Advanced Mid sublevel are able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks. They participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to work, school, home, and leisure activities, as well as topics relating to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.

Advanced Mid speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future by providing a full account, with good control of aspect. Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse.

Advanced Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose. The speech of Advanced Mid speakers performing Advanced-level tasks is marked by substantial flow. Their vocabulary is fairly extensive although primarily generic in nature, except in the case of a particular area of specialization or interest. Their discourse may still reflect the oral paragraph structure of their own language rather than that of the target language.

Advanced Mid speakers contribute to conversations on a variety of familiar topics, dealt with concretely, with much accuracy, clarity and precision, and they convey their intended message

without misrepresentation or confusion. They are readily understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the quality and/or quantity of their speech will generally decline.

## ADVANCED LOW

Speakers at the Advanced Low sublevel are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks. They are able to participate in most informal and some formal conversations on topics related to school, home, and leisure activities. They can also speak about some topics related to employment, current events, and matters of public and community interest.

Advanced Low speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future in paragraph-length discourse with some control of aspect. In these narrations and descriptions, Advanced Low speakers combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length, although these narrations and descriptions tend to be handled separately rather than interwoven. They can handle appropriately the essential linguistic challenges presented by a complication or an unexpected turn of events.

Responses produced by Advanced Low speakers are typically not longer than a single paragraph. The speaker's dominant language may be evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of that language. At times their discourse may be minimal for the level, marked by an irregular flow, and containing noticeable self-correction. More generally, the performance of Advanced Low speakers tends to be uneven.

Advanced Low speech is typically marked by a certain grammatical roughness (e.g., inconsistent control of verb endings), but the overall performance of the Advanced-level tasks is sustained, albeit minimally. The vocabulary of Advanced Low speakers often lacks specificity. Nevertheless, Advanced Low speakers are able to use communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution.

Advanced Low speakers contribute to the conversation with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion. Their speech can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may require some repetition or restatement. When attempting to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

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## INTERMEDIATE

Speakers at the Intermediate level are distinguished primarily by their ability to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They are able to recombine learned material in

order to express personal meaning. Intermediate-level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time. Intermediate-level speakers are understood by interlocutors who are accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.

## INTERMEDIATE HIGH

Intermediate High speakers are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with the routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level. They are able to handle successfully uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to their work, school, recreation, particular interests, and areas of competence.

Intermediate High speakers can handle a substantial number of tasks associated with the Advanced level, but they are unable to sustain performance of all of these tasks all of the time. Intermediate High speakers can narrate and describe in all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length, but not all the time. Typically, when Intermediate High speakers attempt to perform Advanced-level tasks, their speech exhibits one or more features of breakdown, such as the failure to carry out fully the narration or description in the appropriate major time frame, an inability to maintain paragraph-length discourse, or a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary.

Intermediate High speakers can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although interference from another language may be evident (e.g., use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translations), and a pattern of gaps in communication may occur.

## INTERMEDIATE MID

Speakers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is generally limited to those predictable and concrete exchanges necessary for survival in the target culture. These include personal information related to self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel, and lodging.

Intermediate Mid speakers tend to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information. However, they are capable of asking a variety of questions when necessary to obtain simple information to satisfy basic needs, such as directions, prices, and services. When called on to perform functions or handle topics at the Advanced level, they provide some information but have difficulty linking ideas, manipulating time and aspect, and using communicative strategies, such as circumlocution.

Intermediate Mid speakers are able to express personal meaning by creating with the language,



in part by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to produce responses typically consisting of sentences and strings of sentences. Their speech may contain pauses, reformulations, and self-corrections as they search for adequate vocabulary and appropriate language forms to express themselves. In spite of the limitations in their vocabulary and/or pronunciation and/or grammar and/or syntax, Intermediate Mid speakers are generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

Overall, Intermediate Mid speakers are at ease when performing Intermediate-level tasks and do so with significant quantity and quality of Intermediate-level language.

## INTERMEDIATE LOW

Speakers at the Intermediate Low sublevel are able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks by creating with the language in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to some of the concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival in the target-language culture. These topics relate to basic personal information; for example, self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences, and some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases. At the Intermediate Low sublevel, speakers are primarily reactive and struggle to answer direct questions or requests for information. They are also able to ask a few appropriate questions. Intermediate Low speakers manage to sustain the functions of the Intermediate level, although just barely.

Intermediate Low speakers express personal meaning by combining and recombining what they know and what they hear from their interlocutors into short statements and discrete sentences. Their responses are often filled with hesitancy and inaccuracies as they search for appropriate linguistic forms and vocabulary while attempting to give form to the message. Their speech is characterized by frequent pauses, ineffective reformulations and self-corrections. Their pronunciation, vocabulary and syntax are strongly influenced by their first language. In spite of frequent misunderstandings that may require repetition or rephrasing, Intermediate Low speakers can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors, particularly by those accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

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## NOVICE

Novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly. They do so primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled. Novice-level speakers may be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech.

## NOVICE HIGH

Speakers at the Novice High sublevel are able to handle a variety of tasks pertaining to the Intermediate level, but are unable to sustain performance at that level. They are able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs. Novice High speakers respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information. They are also able to ask a few formulaic questions.

Novice High speakers are able to express personal meaning by relying heavily on learned phrases or recombinations of these and what they hear from their interlocutor. Their language consists primarily of short and some times incomplete sentences in the present, and may be hesitant or inaccurate. On the other hand, since their language often consists of expansions of learned material and stock phrases, they may sometimes sound surprisingly fluent and accurate. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax may be strongly influenced by the first language. Frequent misunderstandings may arise but, with repetition or rephrasing, Novice High speakers can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors used to non-natives. When called on to handle a variety of topics and perform functions pertaining to the Intermediate level, a Novice High speaker can sometimes respond in intelligible sentences, but will not be able to sustain sentence-level discourse.

## NOVICE MID

Speakers at the Novice Mid sublevel communicate minimally by using a number of isolated words and memorized phrases limited by the particular context in which the language has been learned. When responding to direct questions, they may say only two or three words at a time or give an occasional stock answer. They pause frequently as they search for simple vocabulary or attempt to recycle their own and their interlocutor's words. Novice Mid speakers may be understood with difficulty even by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to handle topics and perform functions associated with the Intermediate level, they frequently resort to repetition, words from their native language, or silence.

## NOVICE LOW

Speakers at the Novice Low sublevel have no real functional ability and, because of their pronunciation, may be unintelligible. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they may be able to exchange greetings, give their identity, and name a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment. They are unable to perform functions or handle topics pertaining to the Intermediate level, and cannot therefore participate in a true conversational exchange. (ACTFL.org)

# VITA

## JENA M. ROBINSON

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### Education

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2017	M.A. Eastern Washington University Concentration: TESL (Department of English)
2006	B.A., University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington Major: English, Writing Rhetoric and Culture

### Academic Positions

Instructor of Record, English Washington University, Department of English, 2015-present

### Courses Taught

English 101: College Composition, Exposition and Argumentation	2015-2016
English 201: College Composition, Analysis Research, and Documentation	2016-2017
English 112: Composition for Multilingual Students	2017
English 101: College Composition for Second language learners	2017

### Other Relevant Experience

Guest English Teacher, Geumjang Elementary School, English Program in Korea (EPIK)	2013-2015
English Language Tutor, Private Tutoring, Milan, Italy    Selected months	2015
Guest English Teacher, Direzione Didattica Segreteria Statale F. S. Cabrini (Italian Primary School)	May 2015

## **Selected Academic Honors and Awards**

2015- 2017      Graduate Service Appointment, English Department

## **Professional Service**

Internship: Composition for Multilingual Students

Internship: Eastern Washington University Writers' Center

## **Presentations**

Bringing Multimodality to the Invention Process

Inland Northwest Infolit

November 2017

A Triple Case Study of Two Saudi and One Italian Language Learners' Self-Perceptions of Target Language (TL) Speaking Proficiency

Thesis. Eastern Washington University (EWU)

expected June 2017

## **Certifications**

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**TESOL** (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Certificate)

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Midwest Education Group

Certificate in the Teaching of Writing

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