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# National Identity Perceptions and the Experiences of 1.5 Generation Youth with English Learning and First Language Loss

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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NATIONAL IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS AND THE EXPERIENCES OF 1.5 GENERATION  
YOUTH WITH ENGLISH LEARNING AND FIRST LANGUAGE LOSS

(Spine title: The Experiences of 1.5 Generation Youth)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

By

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
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entitled:

**National Identity Perceptions and the Experiences of 1.5 Generation Youth with English Learning and First Language Loss**

is accepted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my dear mother for her love, support, and her encouragement to continue my education.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Julie Byrd Clark, for her continuous support for my Master's thesis study. Throughout my thesis-writing period, she provided guidance, ideas, advice, and, of course, encouragement. Dr. Byrd Clark's expertise in the area of my research study has been invaluable to me. I am grateful to my advisor for her constructive comments and for her continuous guidance throughout the whole process of my thesis study.

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## **ABSTRACT**

With the increasing number of immigrant youth, often referred to as the 1.5 generation, settling in Canada every year, it is important to understand the experiences and national identity perceptions of this immigrant generation. This qualitative case study investigates national identity perceptions and the experiences of 1.5 generation youth with English language learning and first language maintenance. A focus group was held with five high school students to understand their current experiences of being 1.5 generation. In addition, seven individual interviews were conducted with college/university students who were asked to reflect on their past and current experiences. The findings indicate that 1.5 generation youth feel comfortable with their conversational English skills but have difficulty with academic English. This study also demonstrates that even though some youth spent an almost equivalent period of time in Canada as they have in their country of birth, they do not perceive themselves solely as Canadian. Participants in this study often claimed having their national identity divided between Canada and the country of birth. Research on the experiences of immigrant youth, particularly in the Canadian context, is largely untapped and this research study contributes to our understanding of the experiences of 1.5 generation youth.

Keywords: 1.5 generation, immigrant, youth, Canada, national identity, language learning and loss

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background and of the Study

According to Statistics Canada (2008), developed countries have generally produced lower fertility rates, and Canada is no exception. Therefore, in part, to compensate for low fertility rates, Canada welcomes a high number of immigrants every year (e.g. 252,000 in 2006) and this increase in Canadian population has remained relatively constant since 1990 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Generally speaking, children represent one in five of the immigrants to Canada. Moreover, this proportion (21%) is equivalent to the proportion of Canadian-born children of the same age group (Statistics Canada, 2006). This estimation indicates that closer attention should be given to the needs of immigrant children and youth in order to help them to succeed in this country, especially as the economy relies on Canadian-born as well as immigrant children to keep this country populated and flourishing. Unfortunately, Statistics Canada does not provide a percentage of immigrant adolescents (ages 12-18) among the total number of immigrants. Thus, it makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly how many 1.5 generation individuals are in Canada in a given year. Rumbaut (1976) refers to young adults who immigrate between the ages of 12-18 and become of age in the host country as the 1.5 generation. Although, Statistics Canada (2006) does not provide a number of 1.5 generation individuals entering the country, it estimates that 21% of immigrants are children aged 14 and under and 15.1% are youth aged 15-24. The United States has a similar situation. For example, according to Fix and Passel (2003), one in five students in Grades K-12 are children of immigrants, with one quarter being foreign-born.

Individuals who arrive in Canada at an early age become fluent in English in a relatively short period of time; nevertheless, these individuals continue to have difficulties in academic English (see Singhal, 2004). Harklay, Siegal, Losey (1999) assert that although 1.5 generation

students are English-dominant bilinguals, these students are often considered learners of English because they speak a language other than English at home. Herein lies the challenge as the 1.5 generation cannot be necessarily referred to as English language learners or as native speakers. As Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) points out, “none of the generation 1.5 students self-identify with an “ESL” label, despite the fact that English is, indeed, their second language” (p. 392). Given the high number of foreign-born children and youth in Canada as well as in the United States, it is important to learn about identity perceptions and language learning experiences of the 1.5 generation and be aware of the social and academic issues this generation faces. More generally, we have to understand what constitutes a national identity and how it influences and is influenced by language learning, how identity is shaped for 1.5 generation individuals, and who has the right to claim a “national” identity. Norton (1997), for example, uses the term identity to refer to “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed...and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p.410). Furthermore, while the 1.5 generation represents a heterogeneous, diverse group of individuals with varied experiences, 1.5 generation individuals have special needs that have to be addressed in the field of education, such as low levels of academic English language proficiency and limited participation in academic content (Carhill, Suarez-Orozo, & Paez, 2008). Since the 1.5 generation plays a great role in contributing to Canadian culture and the global economy, research needs to focus more specifically on the lived experiences and needs of the 1.5 generation in order for this generation to successfully integrate and achieve their full potential.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative case study examines the experiences of 1.5 generation youth with English language learning and first language regression. Moreover, the study explores national identity perceptions of 1.5 generation youth. The intent of the study is to explore the experiences

of 1.5 generation youth immigrating to Canada, to understand identity perceptions of this immigrant generation, and to investigate if or how national identity perceptions have changed since arrival in Canada. I have decided to use a case study research approach because it maximizes what is possible to learn about a particular case. Moreover, the case study approach makes it possible to identify as well as to understand unique cases in research. Because I expected each of the study participants to have a unique story to tell, interviews were the main method employed in this study. It is important to note that none of my participants are refugees; thus, their parents made an informed decision to emigrate. Seven young people who self-identify as 1.5 generation have been interviewed for the study in order to examine linguistic practices and identity perceptions. In addition, a focus group interview consisting of five high school students has been conducted for comparative purposes (e.g. age difference, awareness of experiences). The interview schedule (see Appendix 3) was semi-structured to allow for follow-up and more in-depth questioning.

### **1.3 Context of the Study**

This study took place in London, Ontario, a city with total population of 352,395. A significant number of immigrants and refugees settle in London every year, thus making London a very diverse city in terms of the demographics. Total immigrant population in the city of London in year 2006 was 75,620 which is about 21% of the total city population. In 2006, according to the city's statistics, 79% of Londoners reported English as their mother tongue, 1% French, and 20% reported their mother tongue being a non-official language.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

There are two main questions that this study seeks to address. First, how and whether national identity perceptions of the 1.5 generation have changed since their arrival in Canada? Second, in what ways does the engagement in English and in the first language impact identity

perceptions of being Canadian? In other words, does this engagement, in both or either language, influence perceptions of national identity? These research questions embed other questions such as the following: 1) What sort of an investment or motivation do 1.5 generation youth have in learning English? 2) In what ways does their engagement in English impact or impede the multiple ways 1.5 generation individuals see themselves? 3) What are some ways in which the 1.5 generation see themselves and how do these perceptions impact or impede their investment or motivation in learning English? In lieu of these questions, this study addresses the kinds of experiences that have shaped identity perceptions and additionally examines the attitudes of 1.5 generation students toward native language practices and toward social integration into Canadian society.

### **1.5 Rationale**

There is a significant amount of research available on identity (Norton, 1995; Block, 2007; Byrd Clark, 2009) as well as on the 1.5 generation (McKay & Wong, 1996; Lo, 2009, Benesh, 2008), but the two concepts are rarely combined. Specifically, there is a gap in research in connecting the identities of 1.5 generation individuals with English language learning and first language attrition. As well, Kim (1999) argues that the 1.5 generation is often homogenized or categorized with either second-generation immigrants, ESL students, or international students. Further, researchers tend to blend 1.5 generation students with ESL K-12 students (Fix & Passel, 2003), and research that deals with the 1.5 generation in post-secondary institutions typically emphasizes academic writing shortcomings (Moore & Christiansen, 2005; Singhal, 2004; Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999). Rarely is the 1.5 generation's academic struggle or other experiences mentioned in Canadian research (e.g. Boyd, 2002; Steinbach, 2010; Duff, 2007). As Kim (1999) points out, in Statistics Canada's (2006b) "Youth in Transition Survey," students were asked to identify factors that can possibly interfere with their future educational plans.

Possible choices included post-secondary financing, health and psychological well-being, school achievements, influence of peers/family, etc (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Interestingly, language difficulty was not even a consideration. Elson (1992) claims that post-secondary institutions assume that students are adequately prepared for higher education in terms of language skills and that language proficiency tests serve as good screening tool for identifying students who will and who will not succeed in their studies. Elson (1992) argues that the use of “language proficiency tests allow them [universities] to avoid taking responsibility for the educational needs of students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds” (p.110). Elson (1992) further claims that language tests relieve post-secondary institutions of “the responsibilities to provide the language development framework that is the right of such students” (p.111). That being said, many 1.5 generation students in Canada who are looking to continue their education at a post-secondary institution are not even required to take language proficiency tests because they studied in an English-speaking environment for a period of four years or more, which, nonetheless, does not necessarily mean that these students would not benefit from the language development support. Language and academic experiences surrounding the 1.5 generation are indeed unique in many ways. Thus, it is my intent to shed light on the experiences and needs of the 1.5 generation, in particular, in the Canadian context.

Equally important is that research on the 1.5 generation lacks any mention of national identity perceptions. According to Rumbaut & Rumbaut (1976), this generation is often considered to have few memories of their home country and at the same time little pride of being American or Canadian because they have not been born here (e.g. North America). One can hardly find anything on identity of 1.5 generation other than a perception of “in-betweenness” (Asher & Case, 2008) or simply being caught between two cultures (Goldschmidt & Miller,

2005). Moreover, existing research on the 1.5 generation tends to focus on language learning but little attention is paid to first language skills loss among the 1.5 generation (Chiand & Schmida, 1999). The link between language and identity has been established by researchers in the past (Norton, 1995, 1997, 2000; Liang, 2006), but less research examines the relationship between identity, English language learning and first language attrition with regard to the 1.5 generation. Taking these research gaps into account, particularly in the Canadian context, the intent of this study is to examine how identity perceptions and investments of the 1.5 generation are influenced and influence (simultaneously) English language learning and maintenance of first language proficiency.

### **1.6 Locating the Researcher in the Research**

Having learned about the concept of the 1.5 generation in my undergraduate sociology course, I realized that this is me – the generation whose identity is split somewhere between two nationalities and two different cultural ideals. I started my new life in Canada at 16 years of age, and now, after having spent years in Canada and having completed my education here, I feel that I do not quite belong to either ethnic identity. My mother holds strong Russian beliefs and wants me to be Russian. She praises her culture and, more generally, her home country, but, myself, I no longer feel the attachment as I used to. My mother experiences what Rumbaut and Rumbaut (1976) call “a profound loss” of the beloved homeland. On the other hand, like other generation 1.5ers, I have what Rumbaut and Rumbaut (1976) call an “uncommitted heart,” which could be interpreted as a lack of full commitment to either the host country or the country of birth. Similarly, Smith (2009) refers to feelings of estrangement as experienced by the 1.5 generation as “discontinuity with one’s origins” or a feeling of “inherited circumstance” (p.23). To me, among many other things, being Russian means being a native speaker of the Russian language, having grown up enjoying Russian children’s stories, identifying with the culture, being able to



express one's thoughts or feelings without having to look for words and, of course, staying connected with the Russian community. On the other hand, being Canadian means speaking English without an accent, being proficient in spoken as well as academic English, having a Canadian education, enjoying the multicultural spirit of the country, and being a team player as it is a requirement in schools and in many work settings. It is difficult to say, however, what it means to be a Russian-Canadian. It seems that being Russian-Canadian, as in my case, is being an unbalanced combination of two national identities and negotiating either identity depending on the situation or social surrounding in which I find myself. To illustrate, here is an excerpt from Yang's (2010) description of his experience negotiating his identity:

I carry both sides of me, but they cannot be divided clearly. Instead, they contradict each other or even become burdensome to each other...I am walking back and forth between these roles I play and trying to look for the one I truly belong. What is my identity? I am stuck on the intersection of the two paths and do not know what to do and where to go...These conflicts between my two cultures and natures make me undefined. (p.53)

Myself, belonging to the 1.5 generation and having experienced and still experiencing national identity crises and language proficiency struggles, I have developed a great interest in identity and language issues of this generation. My lived experiences of being a 1.5er help me in providing a greater depth of understanding and empathy for individuals who fall into or who are labeled within the 1.5 generation category. Thus, the purpose of this research study is to acquire in-depth information regarding 1.5 generation identity perceptions and consequent social associations, some of the perceived difficulties in learning English as well as issues associated with first language loss. So, to recapitulate, the intent of the study is to learn about the circular relationship between identity perceptions of the 1.5 generation and their motivation to learn English and maintain their first language(s). This study also investigates how identity perceptions are influenced by personal experiences as well as by the perceptions others hold of the 1.5 generation.

## **1.7 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. In this chapter, I addressed the purpose and significance of the study. In addition, I outlined the research questions guiding the study. Also, I have explained how the researcher is located in this particular study. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I will discuss relevant literature on 1.5 generation youth in relation to my study. Following this, I will focus on the methodology and data collection in Chapter Three. Chapter Four and Five will examine the findings from the focus group and from individual interviews, respectively. Finally, Chapter Six is the concluding chapter, which will summarize the findings, discuss the implications, limitations of the study as well as suggest future directions for research.

## Chapter 2

### RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Who is the 1.5 Generation?

Among the thousands of immigrants and refugees arriving annually in Canada, there are children and adolescents, who are brought each year to the new country by their parents. Statistics Canada estimates that in 2001, about 17% (or 310,000) of all immigrants were school children between the ages of five and 16. These young individuals, according to Asher and Case (2008), are referred to as the 1.5 generation because their status is “in-between” or reflects hybridity; that is not quite Canadian, but more than a newcomer. According to Benesch (2008), they are neither first nor second, neither “newcomer” nor “U.S.-born.” Goldschmidt and Miller (2005) explain that 1.5 generation individuals live between two cultures: they are immersed in their native culture at home but participate in their adoptive culture at school, and speak their native language at home but English at school. R.G. Rumbaut (1976) coined the term “one-and-a-half generation” to describe “children of Cuban exiles who were born in Cuba but have come of age in the United States” (p.8). Later Rumbaut and Ima (1988) used the term “1.5 Generation” to refer to Southeast Asian refugee youth adapting to new life in the U.S. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) define the 1.5 generation as follows:

neither part of the ‘first’ generation of their parents, the responsible adults who were formed in the homeland, who made the fateful decision to leave it and to flee as refugees to an uncertain exile in the United States, and who are thus defined by the consequences of that decision and the need to justify it; nor are these youths part of the ‘second’ generation of children who are born in the U.S., and for whom the ‘homeland’ mainly exists as a representation consisting of parental memories and memorabilia, even though their ethnicity may remain well defined. (p.22)

Rumbaut and Ima (1988) further state that these youth constitute a distinctive cohort and are marginal to both the new and the old worlds of immigrant generation and in essence are part of neither of them. The 1.5 generation are young people who were born in their countries of

origin but who completed their education in the U.S. and thus formed their important experiences of young adulthood in the U.S. (p.22). Benesch (2008) states that the term 1.5 generation often entails negative characteristics, since “its members are seen as lacking first and second generation identities” and, consequently, are “pathologized as different, as having unique needs that create problems for educational institutions” (p.298). Roberge (2003) explains that 1.5 generation individuals come to a new country, such the U.S. or Canada, when they are young; it could be before school or it could be during high school which means that “they are partially foreign-educated, partially US-educated, that they may develop a strange pattern of language use, that they may be English-dominant, they may be home language-dominant, they may identify with one language but actually be better in the other” (p.2). Moreover, Roberge (2003) takes the definition of the 1.5 generation even further in stating that it needs to include “in-migrants” from U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico, “parachute kids” who come to the U.S to live with extended family and attend schools, “native-born non-native speakers” who are U.S. born students from linguistic enclave communities, as well as “transnationals” who have a complex pattern of back and forth migration.

Different researchers seem to have different ideas as to who or what exactly constitutes the 1.5 generation. Chiang-Hom (2004), for example, defines the 1.5 generation as those who arrived to the country during their primary school years. Similarly, Zhou (2004) defines the 1.5 generation as those who arrived prior to adolescence. Gans (2000), however, is very specific with immigrant generations and takes on the challenge of dividing immigrant youth into three distinct groups: Generation 1.25, Generation 1.5, and Generation 1.75. Nonetheless, Gans does not state the age groups that would categorize immigrant youth into the above mentioned categories; though he does state that the 1.5 generation refers to those individuals who receive

some or most of their education in the U.S. For Vigil, Yun, & Chung (2004) as well as Lay (2004), on the other hand, all individuals who immigrated before or during secondary school are “immigrant youth.” Definitions of the 1.5 generation do vary but most researchers would agree that the 1.5 generation is a unique group that does not neatly fall into either the first or the second immigrant generation (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988; Danico, 2004; Roberge, 2003) and, thus, is an immigrant generation in its own right that deserves more attention than it has so far received. For the purposes of this study, I place the age bracket for constituting the 1.5 generation between the ages of 12-18 (Finkelpearl, 2009; Smith, 2009).

## **2.2 Growing up as 1.5 Generation Immigrant**

Kasinitz (2009) argues that every adolescent is in some sense an immigrant, exploring a “dangerous land of adulthood” (p.163). However, as Kasinitz points out, coming of age for the 1.5 generation is complicated by the need to “master new languages, new geographies, new ways of seeing and behaving” (p.163). Equally important, according to Phinney & Rotheram (1987), are the developmental changes (both physical and cognitive) as well as experiential changes that influence the process of defining one’s identity. In addition, Phinney & Rotheram (1987) assert that for immigrant youth choices are made within the constraints of the society. The degree of support provided for ethnic activities, such as the opportunity to speak a native language will vary and may even not be possible in certain circumstances (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987 p.153). Kasinitz goes on to state that people who should be the most important guides for immigrant adolescents, their parents, are at a loss as to how to help because they are not familiar with how things work in the new country. Moreover, according to Stepick et al. (2001) with or without parents realizing it, children of immigrants may use their “greater knowledge of American culture as a tool against their less-informed parents.” For example, immigrant youth may say that a ‘grade of F means ‘fine’ ” (p.233). Furthermore, it is often the adolescent children of

immigrants who must help their parents with simple things as, for example, discussing issues in English with a landlord (Norton, 1997), and, generally, “explain the new society to their bewildered parents” (Kasinitz, 2009, p.163). Kasinitz et al. (2008) provide an example of a Chinese respondent who recalls how his parents brought a washing machine home when he was 10 years old and asked him to translate the manual: “They expected me to be able to install a washing machine at ten years old just because I could speak English” (p. 251). Thus, immigrant youth and children, apart from dealing with developmental changes, having to master the English language, and yet still learning about the new culture, may additionally have to assist their parents in adjusting to new life in a foreign land and succeeding with new endeavours. On the other hand, it may be the case that children of immigrants may be faced with parents’ apathy in creating their own success story in the new land of opportunities. Yang (2010) reveals his experience of living with his parents who did not show much interest in integrating into the culture of the new country and still following their own beliefs and traditions:

they [parents] are in their own little world, thinking they will eventually go back to China even though my father has lived here for about ten years. From the way they talk, I know that they never put themselves into the society. ‘Why do Americans have so many holidays?’ my father used to say. He always uses the term ‘the Americans,’ which demonstrates his role as a visitor. (p.53)

Berry (1997) reminds us that adolescent immigrants have to face the issues of adaptation to the culture of the new country while still being immersed in the culture of origin at home. Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang (2001) suggest that immigrant parents desire their children to maintain their cultural values, traditions, and, of course, the mother tongue in the new country. McCoy (1992) believes that even though immigrant adolescents receive most of their education and spend much of their lifetime in the U.S., these young people are likely to retain their ethnic characteristics throughout their lives because they have been socialized by their parents who carry with them the language and values of their homeland. Phinney et al. (2001), however,

argue that “the differences between two cultures present these adolescents with many choices in areas such as cultural practices, language use, and friendship” (p.136). Phinney et al. (2001) add that the values expressed by their parents and attitudes encountered among peers can influence the ethnic identity perceptions of young immigrants. Rosenthal (1987), however, is confident that if immigrant parents keep clinging to their old culture while their children strive to assimilate into the majority cultures, conflict is more than likely to arise in the family. Moreover, according to Rosenthal (1987), immigrant parents often put pressure on their children to excel in academics and, consequently, achieve a better life, which is likely to lead to frustration and resentment from immigrant youth who may be having a difficult time succeeding in academics and still struggling to adjust in the world.

### **2.3 Becoming a Proficient Speaker of English**

Research has long established that younger children rapidly achieve high levels of second language proficiency and native-like pronunciation while adults often struggle to acquire a second language (Marinova-Todd, Marshall, Snow, 2000). Adolescent language learners, however, do not fit neatly into the ongoing debate about age-related thresholds (Carhill et al., 2008). Although 1.5 generation students continue to develop their language skills throughout middle and high school, relative to their native speaker peers, English proficiency of immigrant students has been shown to decline as grade level increases (Carhill et al., 2008; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Jia and Aaronson (2003) refer to this phenomenon as the long-term L2 attainment decline or arrival age effect. Most researchers agree that after the sensitive period of language acquisition around age 12, native-like English language proficiency is difficult to achieve, though not impossible, as Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) in their study showed that deterioration in subjects’ second language proficiency occurs only after age 20. Taking into account the significant amount of research conducted on the sensitive or critical period of language

acquisition (Bialystok & Miller, 1999; Bialystok, 1997; Singleton, 2005; Bongaerts, 2005), we can conclude that adolescent immigrant students may or may not acquire native-like English language proficiency depending on many factors; nevertheless, it is clear that the 1.5 generation is caught in the middle between the almost guaranteed native-like English proficiency of younger immigrant children and poorer English language skills of adult immigrants.

Carhill et al., (2008) argue that “adolescent immigrants negotiate among home, school, and peer contexts in ways that are distinct from adults and children” (p. 1160) – although this claim can be applied to many aspects of adolescent immigrants’ life, it most definitely applies to young immigrants’ exposure to the English language. For those students whose immigrant parents do not speak any English, school is the primary source of language learning through instruction and, mainly, through socialization with English-speaking peers and adults (Roberge, 2003; Carhill et al., 2008). According to Halpern (2001), school teachers often report that second language speakers never voluntarily raise their hand in class. In fact, Halpern (2001) claims that students who arrive in Canada as adolescents speak very little during a typical school day. Norton (2000) explains that immigrants are afraid of making errors in front of English speakers as well as in front speakers of their own language. Halpern (2001) provides an example of a student he had from Ukraine. This 18 year old Ukrainian girl was always successful in school back home; here, she felt stupid because of her accent and refused to talk in her classes and, consequently, her self-esteem was suffering. Nevertheless, Roberge (2003) asserts that 1.5 generation students learn much of their English through interactions with friends/classmates and English-dominant siblings. This, however, means that students who acquire language predominantly through oral-aural interaction often miss non-salient grammatical features and, consequently, these features may never become part of their syntactic or morphological



repertoire (Roberge, 2003). Benesh (2008) agrees that acquiring English outside of school can negatively affect both spoken and written English (in an academic sense). Accordingly, these students easily become comfortable using conversational English, which, nonetheless, “often reflects fossilized language errors” (Blumenthal, 2002, p.49).

## **2.4 Language as a Barrier in Academia**

In recent years, various researchers (Asher & Case, 2008; Goldschmidt & Miller, 2008; Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007) have been reporting that the number of adolescent immigrant students in the U.S. in grades 6-12 has been increasing. Nevertheless, according to Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix (2000), this immigrant population is often overlooked in academic research and in school programs. Similarly, Faltis (1999) argues that the majority of research on immigrant students does not address adolescents but focuses on younger children. Therefore, Carhill, Suarez-Orozco, and Paez (2008) conclude:

immigrant students who arrive in the middle and high school years encounter less support for language learning in school, have more complex academic content to learn, and have less time to catch up to their native-speaking peers before encountering gate-keeping assessments that have serious consequences for their future. (p.1156).

According to Carhill et al., (2008), research indicates that with no intervention in middle or high school, 1.5 generation students continue to have low academic English language proficiency which is clearly an obstacle to academic success. Singhal (2004) explains that 1.5 generation students are U.S. educated English language learners who have limited proficiency in the first language and who have not acquired the academic English necessary to succeed in academia. Moreover, she makes a strong statement by referring to 1.5 generation students as “dual non-native speakers because they are not fully proficient in either their L1 or their L2-English” (p.2). Further, Singhal (2004) points out that 1.5 generation students perceive themselves as native-like English speakers because of their social skills; nevertheless, they are

often not very skilled in the academic skills required for the cognitive and linguistic demands of discipline-specific academic classes in English. Asher and Case (2008) support the same idea that 1.5 generation students are those who appear fully conversant in English as well as American culture but are still in the process of learning English when they enter higher education. Cummins (2000) would agree, as he predicts that it will take longer to acquire academic language (4-7 years or more) than conversational English (about 2 years), because academic language is less contextualized and more cognitively demanding. Asher and Case (2008) elaborate that 1.5 generation college students often have reading and writing difficulties which become obvious and problematic in courses that require a lot of writing. With the increasing numbers of 1.5 generation students in colleges and universities in the U.S., Asher and Case (2008) urge academic institution and, in particular, public libraries to identify and assist these students in their academic studies.

On a similar note, Goldschmidt and Miller (2005) state that many of the 1.5 generation students in Penn State University are encountering academic difficulties and that by the middle of the first semester these students start dropping general education courses, such as psychology or history, because they are unable to meet the course requirements. Supporting Asher and Case's (2008) argument, Goldschmidt and Miller (2008) claim that the work required in classes that involve essay or report writing are overwhelming for 1.5 generation college/university students. Moreover, these students may be reluctant to participate in class or ask for clarification because of language and cultural barriers, and, generally, college seems like a vague phenomenon for these students because of the unfamiliarity with the language of education. Nevertheless, according to Goldschmidt and Miller (2008), by providing 1.5 generation students with opportunities to discuss their misunderstood identities and confusing feeling about

themselves and their studies, these students begin to go through what Harklau (1998) refers to as the “ongoing process of readjustment of identity formation”. Goldschmidt and Miller (2008) are confident that group and individual discussions allow 1.5 generation students to get a better sense of who they are as individuals and as students. Most importantly, Goldschmidt and Miller (2008) claim that by the end of the semester the 1.5 generation student participants involved in their study believed that they could “cross over the gate.”

## **2.5 Transition from First Language Proficiency to Second Language Proficiency**

Thinking is a complex process that although taken for granted by many, may be considered a form of luxury for immigrant adolescents. Pavlenko (2011) explains that being caught between two languages, which is the case with many young newcomers, means not being able to render one’s thoughts in either. Hoffman (1989) writes:

I wait for that spontaneous flow of inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself...Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don’t apply to my new experiences...In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed. (p.107)

Mar (1999), who came as a child of an immigrant family from China, reflects on her experiences as a child in a school in America:

There was nothing worse than knowing the answers and not being able to say them...I felt trapped inside my body. Language seemed a purely physical limitation. Thoughts existed inside my head, but I wasn’t able to make them into words. (p.66)

A similar reflection on the past is recalled by Kim (2000), who also came as a child of an immigrant family from Korea:

at the age of twelve... I wasn’t learning any more Korean, and my English wasn’t good enough to describe the complex emotions I was beginning to experience. I remember sometime around age fourteen visualizing what I wanted to express and consciously leaving out the words because they were inadequate. (p. 122)

Many others report similar experiences of being caught between two languages and having to actually think about how to articulate thoughts in a language (Zhengdao Ye, 2004; Dorfman, 1998; Lerner, 1997; Yang, 2010; Mori, 1997). Pavlenko (2011) believes that the ability to fully express oneself with words whether through one's thoughts or actual speech cannot be explained by the dominant second language acquisition constructs of proficiency, because "it involves something that goes far beyond lexical richness or speedy lexical retrieval, namely, the skill of selecting the word, the expression, the perspective that fits the new circumstances best" (p.7). She further argues that in order to transfer the thought process into another language the speakers have to adopt a new way of seeing and perceiving. Once this is achieved, however, a whole new troubling experience sets in – first language regression. Huss (2008) defines language loss as "a societal or individual loss in use or the ability to use a language, implying that another language is replacing it" (p.69). Huss (2008) further cites Lambert (1974) who explains that language loss is often the result of subtractive bilingualism which implies that a new language is learned at the cost of the first language. Hoffman (1989) describes her experience of starting to think in English at a cost of losing first language proficiency:

If I tried talking to myself in my native tongue, it would be a stumbling conversation indeed, interlaced with English expressions. So, at those moments when I am alone, walking, or letting my thoughts meander before falling asleep, the internal dialogue proceeds in English. I no longer triangulate to Polish as to an authentic criterion, no longer refer back to it as to a point of origin. (p.272)

Pavlenko (1998), who has experienced firsthand the transition in language dominance from Russian to English, suggests two stages in the process of language learning in immigration: 1) the stage of continuous losses which is a contrast to the generally accepted language learning as "acquisition." This stage is further subdivided into:

- "careless baptism:" loss of one's linguistic identity;
- loss of all subjectiveness;

- loss of the frame of reference and the link between the signifier and the signified;
- loss of the inner voice;
- first language attrition.

2) the stage of gains and (re)construction. Pavlenko (1998), however, believes that once the cross-over is complete, new challenges arise for bilingual speakers, such as finding their own ways to “mean” and to translate, as the meaning is not equivalent in any two discursive systems (p.12). Although Pavlenko focuses on adult immigrant experiences in becoming bilingual, her stages in the process of language learning in immigration can be applied to the 1.5 generation as well. The 1.5 generation individuals are likely to become English dominant speakers in a relatively short time (e.g. Cummins (2000): conversational – 2 years; academic – 4-7 years) since they come to the new country at a fairly young age. This, however, means that the 1.5 generation is susceptible to losing whatever native language skills they have acquired so far in a relatively short time as well (e.g. Hoffman, 1989; Mar, 1999). As Benesch (2008) points out, 1.5 generation individuals are often described as partial speakers of their first language. Block (2007) acknowledges that “birthright says nothing about one’s expertise in the putative language or dialect ... One can inherit a language or dialect, but feel no affiliation towards it nor have expertise in it” (p.40). Block (2007) is confident that being born into a language community does not guarantee expertise in that particular language, since language identities can shift over one’s lifetime.

## **2.6 First Language Skills and Cultural Loss**

Having spent my childhood in China and a large percentage of my teenage years here make neither side of me comprehensible. One plus one never equals two lives to me, but a zero...Having only four years of experience with English makes me feel like a baby who has just begun to talk – lost, wondering, and seeking. Meanwhile, my first language, the one I used to be familiar with, starts to fade away as I abandon reading and writing in it. It fades away time after time and then stops at one point where it stays. But I still own it. It’s somewhere inside of me just to remind me of who I am. (Yang, 2010, p.51-52)

This excerpt taken from a young person's description of his experiences being a 1.5er, supports Benesch's (2008) claim that generation 1.5ers are caught in a linguistic limbo. Coming to the U.S. or Canada, generation 1.5ers have little or no command of English; however, over time and often at the expense of the first language skills, generation 1.5ers become proficient in the English language. Sad reality is that many individuals belonging to the 1.5 generation never acquire native-like proficiency in English and at the same time lose the fluency in their first language; some are even not literate in any language (Benesch, 2008). On a similar note, Harklay, Siegal, Losey (1999) argue that some immigrant youth may have excellent literacy skills in their native language and feel "comparatively ill at ease with English language literacy practices," whereas others may be literate only in English because that is the language in which they received most of their schooling. (p.5) "Although at ease with their ethnic culture, these students do not possess the full linguistic facility to participate fully as members of a cultural group, particularly so if we view language as a transmitter of culture". (Chiang & Schmida, 1999, p. 86)

Rosenthal (1987) argues that adolescent immigrants often have a limited command of their first language skills, whereas their parents may have an equally limited command of the English language. Therefore, as Rosenthal (1987) explains, communication between parents and their children about more complex issues becomes difficult and can result in not simply frustration but also misunderstanding. Kasinitz et al. (2008) point out that immigrants come to America to improve their lives and the lives of the children which, however, often involves overcoming hardships and obstacles. Immigrant parents hope to give their children the chance to become "American." Nonetheless, according to Kasinitz et al. (2008), parents soon become

anxious about the “future of new Americans they have created” (p. 5). Lahiri (1999) illustrates an immigrant couple who are afraid their son at Harvard will forget his heritage:

we drive to Cambridge to visit him or bring him home for the weekend so that he can eat rice with us with his hands and speak Bengali, things we sometimes worry he will no longer do after we die. (p.197)

Kasinitz et al. (2008) elaborates that immigrant parents make every effort to instill traditional values in their children who start losing touch with their native culture once immersed in the American lifestyle. Likewise, first generation immigrants insist that their children maintain the parental language. Yet, parents support their children’s use of English and send them to “better” or less ethnic schools (Kasinitz et al., 2008, p. 11). As can be seen, parents want their children to become proficient English speakers, but, as Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue, when children abandon their parent’s language and culture, parents feel as if they lost control and may pressure their children to retain an affinity with their cultural roots. It is not uncommon for young people who grew up speaking their native language to lose their fluency in it. Because children of immigrants live and attend school in an English-speaking country, speaking English is like second nature to them. As Kasinitz et al. (2008) point out, it is a common pattern for immigrant parents to speak Spanish, or Russian, or Chinese and for children to respond in English. Kasinitz et al. (2008) provide an example of a 30-year-old Chinese woman who described her experience: “it was a ‘watershed moment’ when her grandmother died and the family no longer had a reason to speak Chinese. After that, she quickly lost her facility in Chinese” (p. 248).

## **2.7 Language and Identity**

According to Liang (2006), language constructs and is constructed by identities (p.145). Likewise, Heller (1987) explains that through language a person negotiates a sense of self within and across situations at different points in time. This has relevance for the ways in which a

person self represents but, more importantly, how a person is seen by others (Byrd Clark, 2012). Kiang, Perreira, and Fuligni (2011) go on to state that language proficiency can influence youths' ethnic identity. For example, Kiang (2008) reports that among Chinese adults, greater English proficiency decreased the likelihood of using heritage labels. Similarly, Fuligni, Witkow, Kiang, & Baldeloar (2008) point out that for Asian and Latin American youth greater native language proficiency decreased the likelihood of using an American label. Following this further, Kiang et al. (2011) assert:

greater facility with the language of one's ethnic group appears to relate to a strong identification with one's ethnic group, whereas English proficiency may motivate adolescents to more strongly identify with mainstream America and loosen ties with one's heritage culture. (p. 721)

Given these points, it is important to examine young immigrants' comfort level with both languages, that is, their first language and English (in this case). Kasinitz et al. (2008) conducted telephone survey interviews where the researchers asked questions about the degree to which the respondent spoke another language growing up; the respondent's ability to understand, speak, and read the parents' language; the language they use most frequently now; and the language they prefer to use. Although it does not come as a surprise, Kasinitz et al. (2008) found differences in language proficiency between children born in the U.S. and those who learned to speak in another country and then came to the U.S. as well as differences by ethnic group. According to Kasinitz et al. (2008), among those who were born in China and came after the age of six, 86 percent can speak Chinese well and far fewer can read or write in it. Russian Jews who came after the age of six fared better – 91 percent can speak Russian well, compared to 77 percent of those born in America. Among South Americans who came after the age of six, an impressive 98 percent can speak Spanish well. Similarly, 99 percent of Dominicans who came after the age of six can speak Spanish fluently. As far as the language preference, Kasinitz et al.



(2008) reports high preference for English and lowest preference for home language among the Chinese and the Russians. Home language preference is highest among Dominicans. In the larger picture, all the groups prefer English; the Chinese are losing their parents' language most rapidly, with Puerto Ricans and Russians being the runner-ups with regard to native language loss (p. 245). Given this research, Kiang et al. (2011) would argue, assuming full English language proficiency, that Chinese and Russian immigrant adolescents are likely to claim "American" or "Canadian" as their national identity, since language proficiency appears to influence the youth's ethnic identity.

## **2.8 Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Nationality**

Before going further into the discussion on the perceptions of 1.5 generation, it is important to distinguish between citizenship, ethnicity, and nationality in relation to identity. Citizenship is an official residence status with the rights and duties given by a nation-state based on the place of a person's birth or on the legal procedure of naturalization (Patrick, 1999). National identity and ethnic identity are complex constructs that involve "feelings of belonging to, and attitudes toward, the larger society" (Phinney et al., 2001, p.497). According to Phinney et al. (2001), ethnic identity encompasses self-identification, feelings of belongingness and commitment to an ethnic group as well as a sense of shared values. Comparatively, national identity, as Phinney et al. (2001) claim, is a label based on the country of origin (e.g. Russian) but can change to a compound label (hyphenated identity, e.g. Russian-Canadian) or to the single national label (e.g. Canadian). National and ethnic identity are not mutually exclusive, and as Parpola (2004) argues, most people in multi-ethnic host countries have, "in addition to their national identity, one or more ethnic identities" (p.6). First generation immigrants, after years spent in the host country, may start developing a second national identity (e.g. Canadian),

whereas their children who were born in the new country or came at an early age may take on solely Canadian identity while maintaining a strong ethnic identity because of the exposure to the parent's native language and culture. As Parpola (2004) points out, the development of national identity "goes hand in hand with language acquisition and social integration;" and once a newcomer fully masters the language of the country s/he comes to live in, "internalizes its customs, traditions, and values, s/he becomes a fully integrated member of the society...and shares its collective identity" (p.7). Parpola adds that the presence of ethnic communities in the host country may help maintain the ethnic identities of immigrants, but cannot prevent the assimilation process.

## **2.9 Identity and the 1.5 Generation**

National identity perceptions of the 1.5 generation are very complex. This generation, as Rumbaut and Ima (1998) assert, is "marginal to both the new and the old worlds, for while they straddle both worlds they are in some profound sense fully part of neither of them" (p.22). Likewise, Oudenhoven (2006) argues that as immigrant adolescents struggle to create new lives and form new identities, they get caught between two cultures, two languages, and, most importantly, two identities (p.318). Burke (2006) believes that "identity change involves changes in the meaning of the self: changes in what it means to be who one is as a member of a group, who one is in a role, or who one is as a person" (p. 92) For Norton (1997), identity is "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p.410). Norton (1995) views identity as a site of struggle and subject to change. Likewise, Hall (2006) asserts that everybody assumes different identities at different times and "identities are not unified around a coherent self" (p.250). Moreover, Bauman (1996) nicely explains:

one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. (p.19)

Identity is a very complex construct and, as discussed above, scholars seem to agree that identity is subject to change (Norton, 1995; Hall, 2006; Burke, 2006). The issue of identity, however, is even more complex for the 1.5 generation because they are born in one country but raised in another and yet have to adjust to a new life during the turbulent period of the adolescent years. Thus, it is easy to see that national identity perceptions can be very confusing for the 1.5 generation. For Anderson (1983), national identity is an imagined community, and it is imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (p.15). Renan (1990) explains that three factors constitute an imagined community: memories from the past, the desire to live together, and the perpetuation of the heritage. Although such "prerequisites" for an imagined community or national identity are very sensible, they complicate things for the 1.5 generation because immigrant adolescents have few memories from the past and, consequently, do not necessarily perpetuate their heritage. In addition, immigrant youth have not established any ties with a new country, thus do not have a strong commitment to a new country either. It is clear to see then that identity perceptions for the 1.5 generation can be very confusing and contradictory at times.

According to Byrd Clark (2009), a powerful mechanism of identity construction is social categorization, which functions by creating social categories through discourses of language. Social categories classify individuals according to their similarities or traits. Ethnicity and language, for example, can form the base for social categorization and for the construction of identity/ies. Ethnic identities may be imagined, but because of processes like social

categorization, they can take on a primordial sense or appear as something “one is born with” (Byrd Clark, personal communication). Pavlenko and Blackridge (2004) differentiate three types of identities: imposed identities (non-negotiable in a particular time and place), assumed identities (accepted and not negotiated), and negotiable identities (can be contested). For the 1.5 generation, the negotiable identity type appears most applicable. Pavlenko and Blackridge claim that negotiable identities refer to all identity options which can be contested, including such areas as ethnicity/ nationality and linguistic competence. Thus, identity constructed on the mechanism of social categorization corresponding to nationality and linguistic competence can and is negotiated, particularly for the 1.5 generation, in a variety of sites, which include family, peers, and educational contexts.

## **2.10 Ethnic Self-Identification**

Phinney and Rotheram (1987) define ethnic identity as “one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership” (p.13). Although Phinney and Rotheram (1987) primarily examine children’s ethnic socialization, their research can be applied to adolescent immigrants as well. Phinney and Rotheram point out that children raised in a pluralistic society, such as Canada, may become “bicultural,” that is, acquire the norms, attitudes, and behaviour patterns of their own ethnic group as well as the ethnic group of the host country. For Phinney and Rotheram, bicultural identity can mean bicultural competence or the ability to function in two different cultures by switching between the languages and two sets of values. Bicultural identity can also describe individuals who are between two cultures (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987, p. 24). Taking this further, as other researchers have noted (Asher & Case, 2008; Singhal, 2004; Carhill et al., 2008), the 1.5 generation often feel that they can relate to both cultures, speak both languages (though often not fully proficient in either language), and interact with peers from different

cultural backgrounds. In other words, 1.5 generation youth function between two cultures, therefore, in a pluralistic, Canadian society, generation 1.5ers may have a bicultural identity because they were born into one ethnic group and raised in another.

According to Heller (1987), ethnicity is subject to change over time and across social situations, particularly in situations of contact where ethnicity is important. In fact, Heller argues that in isolation ethnicity means nothing. In other words, in as much as ethnicity is important, it means nothing to be a Canadian in isolation but only in situations of contact. In fact, James (2006) claims that ethnicity “gives individuals a sense of identity and belonging based, not only on their perception of being different, but also on the knowledge that they are recognized by other as being different” (p.48). Moreover, James asserts that although individuals with several ethnic identities are free to identify with all of them, “individuals often identify most strongly with the one that forms the basis of their socialization at home or with their peers, the one that seems most acceptable by the dominant group in society or the one by which others identify them” (p.48). James (2006) explains that ethnic identity and the degree to which individuals identify with their ethnic group, culture, and national background depends on many factors such as place of birth, social class, education, involvement with members of the same cultural heritage, and willingness to adapt to the norms of the dominant culture. In addition to the factors that may play a role in ethnic identity perceptions, it is important to keep in mind, as Mahtani (2006) states, that it may be difficult to claim Canadian identity for individuals who are visibly different from a typical white Canadian. Mahtani (2006) emphasizes that it is “impossible to position oneself as solely Canadian without announcing one’s exoticized ethnic identity” (p.168). Thus, as Mahtani (2006) explains, “... the notion of hyphen [is] employed to articulate the marriage of ethnic and national identity... witnessed through identifications such as ‘Japanese-

Canadian' or 'Somalian-Canadian'..." (p.164). Following this further then, a claim to solely Canadian identity by immigrant youth can be complicated by such non-concealable factors as one's race, accent and/or English proficiency. Consequently, the hyphen can serve as a useful tool for self-identification without having to choose only one ethnic or national identity.

### **2.11 Investment in Language and Identity**

Norton Peirce has written extensively on language and identity (2000; 2006; 2007), and in her influential work (Norton Pierce, 1995) she introduced the notion of investment in language and identity. Prior to the notion of investment, Gardner and Lambert's (1972) notions of instrumental and integrative motivation, derived from the field of social psychology, were used to explain learners' desire to learn a new language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) refer to instrumental motivation as the desire to learn a language for utilitarian purposes and they refer to integrative motivation as the desire to learn a language in order to integrate with the target community. Norton (2000), however, argues that the concept of investment rather than the concept of motivation better explains the relationship of language learners to the target language because the construct of investment "conceives of the language learner as having a complex history and multiple desires" (p.10). According to Norton (2000), language learners are not unitary with fixed desires to access resources from target language speakers, as implied by the concept of instrumental motivation; rather, as language learners speak, they are "constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (p.11). Fairclough (1992) concurs, "in any discourse, knowledge, social relations and social identities are simultaneously being constituted and reconstituted" (p.8). Norton (1997) believes that instead of asking "is the learner motivated to learn the target language," the question should be framed as follows: "what is the learner's investment in the target language?" Norton (2000) further states that "it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and

across different sites at different points in time,” (p.13) and language learners invest when they learn a target language and expect to have a return on their investment. Moreover, an investment in the language is also an investment in a learner’s social identity (Norton, 1995).

Byrd Clark (2010) expands the conceptualization of investment by arguing that it is much more symbolic and complex because it shifts and allows for the possibility of social transformation. Byrd Clark (2010) argues that “language learning is not so much an investment in the target language as it is an investment (and awareness of the investment) in ideologies and representations of such a target language and culture” (p.384). Byrd Clark’s (2009) conceptualization of investment is more complicated and also more inclusive of “ideological processes, discourses, and representations of language, culture, and identities” (p.9), allowing for a deeper engagement with language learning. Byrd Clark has gone further to state that investing in language learning is not limited to acquiring material and cultural capital. Similarly, Byrd Clark (2009) does not agree with Norton’s (1997) question: “what is the learner’s investment in the target language,” because she argues that:

the focus of investment must be more multidimensional, taking into account the varied degrees to which an individual invests in and engages with social categories, ideologies, discourses, and representation of languages, cultures, and language learning in relation to certain ways of being at different moments through different interactions. (p.9)

Although Norton’s notion of investment was influential in addressing language learners’ desire to acquire the target language and its associated material and cultural resources, this notion is limited as it needs to include a more complex and multilayered conceptualization of investment in ideologies, representations, and strategies individuals use when making symbolic investments and constructing identities, including those of the researcher (Byrd Clark, 2009).

## **2.12 Summary**

In this chapter I sought to provide a literature review related to the 1.5 generation. As such, I have cited literature that defines the 1.5 immigrant generation as well as literature that explores the experiences growing up as the 1.5 generation. In addition, I have provided an overview of research on, more generally, immigrants' identity negotiations and investment in languages. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods used in the study.



## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Overview Discussion of the Study**

As stated in the introduction of this paper, the research questions guiding this study were: first, how and whether identity perceptions of the 1.5 generation have changed since the arrival in Canada, and, second, in what ways the engagement in English and in the first language impact identity perceptions of being Canadian. In sections following, I will provide details of research context, participants' recruitment, and participants' profile information. I will then discuss the rationale of approach, the researcher's background and concerns. Finally, I will explain the data analysis process as well as provide a description of the data collection and organization process.

#### **3.2 Research Context**

The study took place in a medium-sized city in Southwestern Ontario. The demographics of the city are quite diverse with a total immigrant population in 2006 of almost 76 000. Moreover, the University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College are two educational institutions that draw a large number of students to the city. Approximately 25 000 students are enrolled at the University of Western Ontario and approximately 15 000 students are enrolled at Fanshawe College every year. It was my hope that among this student population, there would be students belonging to or self-identifying as the 1.5 generation, willing to share their experiences for the purpose of my study.

#### **3.3 Research Conceptual Framework**

This study was guided by poststructuralist theories, content analysis, and the perspectives of language and identity, which, as Kim (1999) argues, emphasize the examination of both micro and macro contextual factors of the language learning experiences. Norton has long been a frontrunner in research on identity for second language learners, and as she argues, language is

“constitutive of and constituted by a language learner’s identity” (2000, p.5.). Norton (1997) uses the term investment to refer to the complex relationship of learners to the target language. For Norton (1997), an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s identity. Norton (2000) has employed case study research to examine contextual factors that influence language learning experiences, and it has given an insight into learners’ personal and power struggles, resistance, and identities. Hamers’ and Blanc’s (2000) identity theory connects language to ethnic identity. They argue that language serves as a hallmark of identity, in particular in multicultural societies, such as Canada. The idea of language and identity is central to this study; thus, the language and identity framework is employed in this study to examine language learning experiences and identity negotiations of 1.5 generation youth.

### **3.4 Rationale of Approach**

I have decided to use the case study as a research method because it makes it possible to observe and analyze phenomena as a single but also as an integrated whole (Gagnon, 2010). Thomas (2011) states that case studies focus on a particular phenomenon in detail without attempting to generalise from it. As Gagnon (2010) argues, “the main advantages of case study research are that it can produce an in-depth analysis of phenomena in context, support the development of historical perspectives and guarantee high internal validity which is to say that the observed phenomena are authentic representations of reality” (p.2).

VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007) propose that case study research is a transparadigmatic and transdisciplinary heuristic that involves delineation of the phenomena for which evidence is being collected. By transparadigmatic, VanWynsberghe and Khan mean case study’s relevance regardless of one’s research paradigm, whereas by transdisciplinary, the authors mean that case study has no particular orientation in terms of a research discipline as it can be used in science as well as in social science. Moreover, VanWynsberghe and Khan (2007) suggest that heuristics are

involved in case study research and that “heuristics serve continually to focus one’s attention on locating or constructing the unit of analysis (the phenomenon for which evidence is collected)” (p.2).

My reasoning for selecting interviews as a method of data collection for this case study is, as Cohen (2007) rightfully claims, a high response rate, since respondents usually become quite involved in the questioning process. Moreover, Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest that semi-structured interviews allow for three kinds of questions: main questions, clarification, and follow-up questions. Following this further, interviews allow the researcher to gain valuable information about the participants’ experiences, probe for in-depth information as well as follow up on questions and responses in a way that could not be necessarily achieved using another research method. Of course, throughout the interviews specific questions often arose, and, given the semi-structured format of the interview, I was able to ask my participants for further information on some of their experiences.

#### **3.4.1 Why individual interviews and why focus group?**

The individual interviewees were older than focus group participants, and they were able to reflect on their experiences of being a young immigrant in Canada and having to learn the English language. Individually interviewed participants were able to articulate their experiences of adjusting to the new life in Canada. Looking back, the participants reconsidered what it was like not only learning English but also studying academic subjects in the English language, attending ESL classes, and simply their experiences of becoming Canadian citizens. After having spent years in Canada, the individual interviewees were able to elaborate on their perplexing national identity perceptions as well as on their newly evolved difficulties with their first language skills.

The focus group interview was in fact a combination of a focus and a group interview. At times, I took a lead role and was in control of the discussion while at other times, I was the facilitator of the discussion between the participants. The goal of the focus/group interview was to examine the current experiences of the high school 1.5ers with academic English learning. Although it was not my expectation for these high school students to perceive themselves as Canadians yet or to have any difficulty with their first language, I was interested in hearing about the participants' current national identity perceptions and experiences with maintaining their first language in Canada. I wanted to see the similarities and differences between the two age groups of 1.5ers.

### **3.5 Participants**

#### **3.5.1 Recruitment.**

Upon receiving the Ethics Approval from the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, I began looking for potential research participants. The recruitment process involved sending an email to various faculties/departments at the university as well as to affiliated colleges and asking administrative staff to forward the study invitation poster to their students. In addition, I posted an invitation for the study notice across the university campus and in several London Public Library locations (see Appendix 4). Also, I posted an ad on Kijiji Local Classifieds looking for participants for the study. The study invitation posting contained general information about my research including a definition of the 1.5 generation and a brief rationale for the study. The posting also contained the criteria for participant qualification for the study. The criteria for participant recruitment included: 1) individuals who hold a permanent resident status or are Canadian citizens; 2) individuals who immigrated to Canada as dependents between the ages of 12 and 18; 3) individuals are no older than 25 years of age at the time of the study; 4)

first language is other than English; and 5) individuals have to be competent in articulating their experiences in English. Those individuals who were interested in participating in the study contacted me via email. I answered any questions or concerns potential participants had via email. The meeting time and the location were arranged with mutual agreement between the participants who volunteered their time for the study and myself. Five participants were an exception to the study recruitment process. A representative from the LUSO Community Services contacted me and explained that she had seen my recruitment ad and that some youths are interested in participating in my study. At the time of the study, the youths were high school students and some were younger than 18 years of age, thus I had to submit an amendment to the Office of Research Ethics. I decided to conduct a focus group interview with the group of high school students to make them more comfortable discussing their experiences. The focus group interview took place at a local London Public Library location, the other six interviews were conducted on university grounds, and one was conducted at a local Chapters bookstore.

### **3.5.2 Profile of Participants.**

There were 12 participants in total that participated in this qualitative case study. The focus group consisted of five interviewees: three females and two males. The focus group participants were all high school students, and their ages varied between 16 and 21. Three of the participants were from Iran; 1 from Somalia; and 1 from Uganda. Table 1 provides an overview of the focus group participants' profile.

In addition, four females and three males were interviewed individually for the study. Six participants were UWO students and one was a Fanshawe College student. Research participants came from various disciplines and were in different years of their studies. All of the participants who were individually interviewed immigrated to Canada with their parents and

attended school in Canada (five attended elementary and secondary school; two attended only secondary school in Canada). The participants came from different countries: 1 from China; 2 from India; 1 from Yemen; 1 from Russia; 1 from Gaza; 1 from Egypt. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants' profile. To protect the participants' identities, I selected a pseudonym for each of the participants.

Table 1.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Age at time of immigration</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Years spent in Canada</b>	<b>Home Language</b>
Mike	M	17	16	Syria/Iran	1	Arabic
Austin	M	16	10	Iran	6	Farsi
Rosa	F	17	14	Uganda	3	Acholi
Laura	F	18	17	Somalia/Kenya	Less than 1	Somali/Swahili
Wendy	F	21	20	Iran	1	Farsi

Table 2.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Age at time of immigration</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Years spent in Canada</b>	<b>Home Language</b>
Jack	M	20	10	China	10	Chinese
Waldon	M	21	13	Yemen	8	Arabic
Anthony	M	22	15	Russia	7	Russian
Dina	F	23	13	Gaza	10	Arabic
Vicky	F	20	11	India	9	Hindi
Andrea	F	21	14	India	7	Hindi
Tonya	F	17	13	Egypt	4	Arabic

## **3.6 Procedures and Instrumentation**

### **3.6.1 Procedures.**

Prior to the beginning of each interview, I asked the participants to read through the letter of information which outlined the purpose of the study as well as the steps to be taken to ensure the participants' anonymity (please see Appendix 1). The letter also explained that the participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time and that they can refuse to answer any of the questions. In addition, the participants were asked to sign a consent form which confirmed that they understood the nature of the study (please see Appendix 2).

### **3.6.2 Interviews.**

A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data (please see Appendix 3). The interview schedule was the same for all participants; however, follow-up questions or clarification questions were asked when deemed necessary to understand the experiences that were significant to the participants. The qualitative interview has allowed a better understanding of the complex perceptions of and unique experiences to the 1.5 generation. All of the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed.

## **3.7 Bias, Transferability, and Trustworthiness**

Researcher bias, which Cohen et al. (2007) think could be at times a disadvantage of interviews, can actually be an advantage in my research study. Although I made every effort to keep the study objective, some subjectivity was unavoidable. Carcary (2009) confirms that in the interpretivist paradigm the researcher cannot be entirely objective but, rather, the researcher is part of the research process. Since I belong to 1.5 generation myself, I cannot help but bring my own experiences and interpretations into the study. I can relate to identity issues and to the struggle of balancing English learning and first language maintenance, thus I feel that I can

address and probe the identity perception areas in a very relevant and meaningful way to 1.5 generation students. As Carcary (2009) points out, there is potential for researcher bias in interpretivist research, however, I was able to make “critical assessments of informants’ statements” and produce explanations for the claims made, thus demonstrating the trustworthiness of my qualitative research findings (p.13). As Walsham (2006) explains, “the researcher’s best tool for analysis is his or her own mind, supplemented by the minds of others when work and ideas are exposed to them” (p.325). Being an insider in this qualitative case study, I was able to bring attention to the intricate experiences of the 1.5 generation Canadians. Research on the 1.5 generation is still limited, in particularly in the Canadian context; therefore, because I can relate to the challenging experiences of being a young immigrant, with the help of the interview as a research instrument, I could, in a small way, make it possible for these missing voices in the literature to be heard.

Although in case study research it is almost impossible to achieve generalizing, the results of a case study can be transferable. According to Lauer and Asher (1988), researchers can present the results of a case study as further directions or questions. Moreover, the results of a case study are transferable in a sense that researchers can suggest further questions, hypotheses, and implication (Lauer & Asher, 1988). It is important to note, however, that for qualitative research to be transferable it needs to provide “sufficient thick description” of the phenomenon to allow readers to have a firm understanding and thus be able to “compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research paper with those that they have seen emerge in their situations” (Shenton, 2004, p.70).

### **3.8 Researcher’s Background and Concerns**

Belonging to the 1.5 generation myself, I went through similar experiences as the participants in my study. One major difference, however, between the participants and myself is



that I came to Canada at 16 years of age, whereas the participants who were interviewed individually for the study came to Canada anywhere between the ages of 10 and 15. Learning English and struggling academically because of the language barrier are some of my early experiences in Canada that were also shared by my interviewees. Yet, the paradox of becoming more comfortable in English than in my native language and leaning toward Canadian identity are also the perceptions that were shared by the study participants. Clearly then, I can relate to the experience of evolving from a newly landed young immigrant who has little understanding of the new country to somebody who eventually succeeds in Canada as a young adult and continues studies at the post-secondary level with huge aspirations for the future.

Despite having a great empathy and understanding of the experiences my participants have gone through, there were some occasions in which I did not feel comfortable probing for some of the information. I realize that personal stories are very confidential, and, although people often enjoy sharing what they have gone through, usually people like to leave some of the information out because it is too personal (or even difficult) to share. Therefore, I tried to keep my questions “neutral” to the extent that I did not want to make my participants feel uncomfortable either answering my questions or having to politely decline answering them. Another concern that arose during the process of data collection has to do with the participants’ identity perception. For some, it was the first time that they really thought about their national identity/ies. Some participants have never questioned themselves as to where they think they really belong. Thus, occasionally, some participants provided somewhat contradictory responses. Also, there were times when the participants’ initial responses were somewhat different from their later responses; consequently, when that happened, I assumed that the latter responses were more accurate because my participants had more time to really think about their perceptions.

To avoid any bias, I did not communicate to my study participants that I, myself, belong to the 1.5 immigrant generation. If any of the participants asked, I did tell a little bit about myself at the end of the interview. However, I chose not to share such information from the beginning because I was worried that my participants would focus on finding any similarities or differences between their own and my experiences. During the interview, I wanted to keep an objective researcher's attitude since I was confident that if my participants learned that I am one of the 1.5ers, they would, to some extent, seek my approval of their perceptions because of the similarities in our experiences. Some bias in this research is, however, unavoidable, because the questions I chose to pose, to a degree, emerged from my own lived experiences.

As far as building rapport, I treated each participant's responses with respect. Although on some occasions I may have not agreed or may have questioned certain things in my mind, I never showed my true feelings. I tried to be objective in posing questions and not showing any emotion other than nodding and smiling when I was provided with a response. I listened carefully while jotting certain things on paper. It has been my experience that my participants felt comfortable in the overall atmosphere of the interview and volunteered their responses freely.

### **3.9 Data Collection**

Between January 2012 and May 2012, I conducted interviews with participants for my study. A one-time meeting was arranged for an interview with each participant, which typically lasted about 35-50 minutes. The focus group interview lasted about an hour. The interview questions were grouped into four broad categories: 1) background information 2) language learning and schooling experiences 3) personal views of linguistic proficiency and competence 4) travel experiences. The interviews were semi-structured and basic questions were the same for all the participants; however, additional questions were asked when it was necessary for the participants to clarify or to elaborate on some of their responses. The interview with a group of

high school students was a mix of a focus group and a group interview since the interview process was a combination of my taking the lead role and posing questions and, at other times, simply facilitating the discussion between the participants. The data collection took place at public places, such as the university, a public library branch, and a local Chapter's bookstore. Because of the limited time allowed for this research study to be completed, I was not able to follow up with the research participants at a later date.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

With the permission of the study participants, all interviews were digitally audio recorded. Since I have personally transcribed all the recordings, coded manually the data, and read the interview transcripts numerous times, I became versed with my data. When transcribing the data, I saw patterns and, thus, I decided to organize my data findings according to recurring themes, using a content analysis. In presenting my findings and delineating the experiences of 1.5 generation youth, I examine the themes that were common to the participants, such as language use and code switching in social contexts as well as first language loss. I also expose the participants' initial and current feelings about their move to Canada. Equally important, I analyse the participants' national identity perceptions. Based on my coding as well as my own lived experiences as someone who self-identifies as a 1.5 Generation, I selected particular data that I felt best represents what it means to be a 1.5 generation Canadian.

### **3.11 Data Organization**

Much of the data that has been collected during the interviews has been incorporated into the data findings chapters. The data is organized slightly different for each case depending on the type of information that has been shared by the participants, but typically the themes are categorized into the following subsections: 1) background information; 2) English language learning and schooling experiences; 3) the experience of coming to Canada 4) first language

skills; 5) national identity perceptions; and 6) conclusions and plans for the future. The themes discussed have been obtained from the participants' responses and are organized to reflect the participants' experiences. In addition, the themes' organization follows the same guidelines for each case analyzed, which allows for the comparison of the participants' experiences. The data has been analyzed to reflect the complexity of the participants' national identity perceptions, language learning involvement/engagement, and the experiences of becoming a young adult in Canada.

### **3.12 Summary**

In the methodology chapter, I have provided an overview of the rationale for this qualitative case study. I have also discussed the instruments, data collection, participants, and data organization. The next two chapters will contain my data findings from the focus group and individual interviews, respectively.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DATA FINDINGS: FOCUS GROUP**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present a small investigation based on a focus group interview held with five youths. Although one of the female participants, Wendy, does not quite belong to the 1.5 generation since she came to Canada with her family when she was 19 years of age, I decided to include her in my study because she is attending high school in Canada and, in many ways, she goes through the same difficulties with English learning as her younger immigrant school mates. The experiences of all the focus group participants are very similar: they are still in the process of mastering English, and, with the exception of Rosa, they have not experienced first language loss, and they do not claim Canadian identity. The purpose of the focus group interview was to delineate the current experiences and national identity perceptions of the recent 1.5 generation immigrants. In the next section, I provide a brief background of the focus group participants and a summary of their accounts with regard to their experiences in Canada.

#### **4.2 Focus Group: the Accounts of 1.5 Generation High School Students**

##### **4.2.1 Background.**

Two of the focus group participants (Austin and Rosa) have been in Canada for a longer period of time than then the rest of the participants (6 and 4 years, respectively). Austin is currently 16 years of age and he came to Canada when he was 10, and Rosa is currently 17 but she was 13 years of age when she came to Canada. The other three participants are fairly recent newcomers. Wendy has been in Canada for just about two years, and she is currently 21 years of age. Mike has been in Canada for a year, and he is currently 17 years of age. Laura has been in Canada for only eight months, and she is 18 years of age. The English language skills of all of the interviewees appeared somewhat weak (to me). While Rosa and Austin can communicate

their experiences and thoughts more easily than Mike, Wendy, and Laura, a native speaker could easily tell that their English is not yet fluent.

Mike was born in Syria but moved to Iran when he was very young. Similarly, Laura was born in Somalia but moved to Kenya when she was just one year old. Austin and Wendy are from Iran. Rosa came from Uganda.

#### **4.2.2 Language Use at Home and with Peers.**

Unsurprisingly, three participants, Wendy, Laura, and Mike, who are recent immigrants, speak their native language at home. They also speak their native language with their friends who know Arabic, but they have no choice but to use English with their classmates and peers who do not speak any Arabic. Rosa and Austin, on the other hand, use mostly English during a typical day. Rosa uses English with her siblings but mostly her mother tongue, Acholi, with her parents. Similarly, Austin uses English with his siblings but Farsi with his mother who does not speak English well.

#### **4.2.3 National Identity.**

None of the five participants claimed a Canadian identity. Wendy, and even Austin, who have been in Canada the longest in the group, perceive themselves as Afghan. Being in Canada for less than a year, one cannot even expect that Laura will perceive herself as Canadian; Laura is Somali even though she was raised in Kenya. Mike perceives himself as Syrian even though he spent his schooling years in Iran. However, when Mike is around Canadian friends, he does feel like he is one of them, but he still perceives himself as Syrian because that is where he was born. Being around Canadian peers, makes Mike feel like he has two personalities, "like when you go back home, you speak your language. In Canada, you speak another language." Rosa is the only one who really entertained the thought of having a Canadian identity. Rosa replied that she is not "full Canadian," which indicates to me that she does perceive herself as at least

"somewhat" Canadian. The reason Rosa does not rightfully claim a Canadian identity is because, as she explains, she does not have Canadian citizenship yet.

For Rosa, being Canadian means having the opportunity to "go all over the place wherever you want" and also "to vote if you are eighteen years older or up." Mike takes an even more simplistic approach to being Canadian. For him, being Canadian means feeling happy because of having another citizenship. Austin chimed in by adding that one can travel easily to other countries, such as the United States. For Laura, who has been in Canada for only eight months, being in Canada for two years seems like a lengthy period of time, and thus she suggested that a Canadian is someone who has lived "here for a long time or someone born in Canada." When I asked Laura what "a long time" means, she replied "maybe two years, maybe 10, whatever." For Laura, the time spent in Canada seems to be the determining factor for being considered Canadian.

#### **4.2.4 The Experiences of Coming to Canada.**

Austin's initial feelings about Canada were "awesome." Austin claims that he was "close to being happy" until he went back to his home country for a visit and realized how much he missed his old friends. Mike also claimed that he missed his friends, and he actually did not want to leave his country. Most importantly, Mike missed and still misses his mother who stayed behind. Having no mother's support in a new country was difficult for Mike, and he describes it as "a scary experience." Consequently, at the beginning, not unreasonably, Mike felt like he did not belong here. Mike describes his current feelings: "If my mom just came here, I would be happy because she would be with me. I don't want anyone else except her. So, she is still not with me, so I am not happy." Mike's feelings are totally understandable. Nonetheless, Mike has started getting used to living in Canada, and now he says: "we'll see what is going to happen in the future." Similarly, Rosa was not excited about coming to Canada because she did not want to

leave her friends and her cousins. Shortly after, however, Rosa saw the positive side of Canada: "high schools are free, high school and college you have to pay in my country from, like, grade one all the way to grade 12. In college, you have to pay more, a lot of money." Rosa felt good that in Canada she would get "education, good future." Later on in life, Rosa considers going back to Uganda and do a little boasting, such as "the school was all good, the people are really nice, and all those things." Wendy was not any less negative about coming to Canada. To Wendy, everything seemed different from her home country. Wendy explains that she often gets confused at school. Because Wendy is the oldest in the group, for her it is probably most difficult to adjust to Canadian ways. Moreover, Wendy finds it difficult to make Canadian friends, and when she does find a friend, she is happy and surprised. Laura was the only one who was happy to come to Canada. Laura believes that Canada is "better than where [she] came from. It's better for everything: education, the people. It's better life in here."

#### **4.2.5 Learning English.**

When Austin came to Canada, all he could say is "hi, how are you?" Similarly, Mike had little knowledge of English. The little bit that Mike did know, he learned mostly from watching English movies. Wendy could speak some English when she came, but she claims that her vocabulary and pronunciation "was really bad." Wendy gives an example of her misunderstanding of the verb "miss." In essence, Wendy was confused with the context in which the verb was used because she was only familiar with verb's usage in context of regretting some sort of a loss. Thus, Wendy was confused when she heard her classmates using the verb to describe an absence of something, such as missing a sheet or missing a class. Wendy graduated from high school in her native country, and although at the time of the study she was 21 years of age, she had to go back to school in Canada to improve her limited English skills before she can go on to a post-secondary institution or find a decent job. Rosa and Laura were the only ones



who claimed to having had sufficient English skills for a successful start at school. Rosa learned English with an "African accent," so for her it was not difficult to speak English in Canada. Laura also did not have too much trouble with English when she came to Canada because she not only learned it in school but English was also the language doctors used in Somalian hospitals. Laura argues: "if come here without speaking English, it's very hard to get friends. You can't go and speak because you have nothing, right. If you know a little bit, you gonna gain, become normal."

Mike is a very positive individual and he feels "awesome and little bit no" about his English learning experiences in Canada. Mike does note that he sometimes gets nervous about pronouncing certain words he is not sure about in front of people, and he would rather not do it, "you just leave it." Mike adds, "when I am in a group, I am not able to speak. I am afraid they really gonna laugh at me or something. But when I get to know them, I continue." Wendy can relate to Mike's fear of talking in front of a group of people.

All of the focus group participants attend ESL classes at school. Wendy, however, prefers being in a class with Canadian students. Wendy explains:

I think Canadian is better because you can talk with Canadian friends and after that you can know how to pronounce, how to speak. I have been studying hard and I still have not learned a lot of English because I don't have any friend Canadian.

Mike points out the same thing, "it would be more to learn the language, because in ESL nobody can speak English good. So, you have to pay attention to the teacher exactly what she is saying to learn. But with Canadians you learn by talking." Laura agrees with Mike, "with Canadians you can get, like, correct." Austin and Rosa, on the other hand, do not support the idea of learning with the rest of the Canadian students in the same class because they believe that, as an ESL student, one "won't be able to catch up with work...If you go to English class, you won't be able to understand what they are talking about and you will fall behind." Austin elaborates: "That's

why I fell behind. That's why I am still in ESL. I couldn't understand what they would say and I wouldn't learn it because I didn't have any English, and ESL was like twice-three times a week."

Austin is also well aware that teachers may not have enough time to provide extra support with English language learners. Rosa continues Austin's line of reasoning by offering her opinion:

In regular English class, if the teacher is talking, she or he talk so fast and the regular students, they, know what the teacher means, and you the one who come now, you feel like 'ok, what is she talking about.' So, it's hard for them to understand but for regular students, it's easy for them to understand cause they been here long time. For Canadians, it is easier to understand everything. I think ESL is good because you can learn more from there. If you don't understand something, the teacher will explain to you, like, between the line and then sort of you get to understand what the questions mean.

When I asked my focus group what is motivating them to learn English, Austin replied: "friends." He later added, "daily life." Rosa answered: "friends as well as teachers." Laura is motivated because she wants to be part of a community. Mike is motivated by movies, "like when I watch a movie, I see them, talking. I like the way they speak, so I want to learn this language." In addition to movies, Mike's family motivates him to learn English because he may have to take them to the doctor, and Mike is the only one who knows English.

As far as doing things to help with fluency in English, most of my focus group participants do little outside of school to improve their English skills. Austin and Rosa, for example, listen to music. In addition to that, Rosa sometimes reads books because, as she argues, "if you read book, your brain will get more idea. You will learn a lot of stuff." Mike laughs off the idea of reading in spare time to help him with his English: "my problem is if there is no picture in the book, I don't like to read it. I want to see the picture and read the line to understand the story. Like, without picture, I don't understand the story." Although unlikely to improve his English, Mike plays games and watches YouTube videos, whereas Austin jokes that he uses Facebook to improve his English. Interestingly, TV was not mentioned in their responses. Listening to music, watching videos online, and using social networks (e.g. Facebook) can

improve English skills; however, the focus group participants were involved in such activities for enjoyment rather than for an academic purpose.

#### **4.2.6 Using English in Daily Life.**

Although all of my focus group participants are ESL students whose English skills, to say little, are not very advanced, their self-evaluation of their knowledge of English is fairly high. Out of ten, with ten being the highest ranking, Mike ranks his spoken English skills at nine points. Mike explains that he just says whatever he wants and that he is not afraid to say it wrong, which is a contradiction to his previous claim that he will not attempt to say a word he is not sure how to pronounce. Likewise, Rosa assigns nine points to her English skills:

even though I have an accent, I can speak, I can say whatever I want. I can write too. If I am writing it, I can write it straight but even when I speak, I have an accent. I am fine with it, though.

Austin and Wendy are hesitant to state how they feel in terms of their English skills. Whereas Austin just claims that his English is ok, Wendy provides more detail regarding her comfort level with spoken English: "Sometimes I speak, like, sometimes, I can't tell my feeling. Like, when I am speaking, my friends don't know what I am feeling. They think I have nothing. That's why sometimes I can't tell my feeling. They misunderstand." Mike was quick to jump in and clarify what Wendy was trying to explain: "the word that you want to say, she doesn't say it, pronounce it right and her friends think she is saying another word." Austin was quick to agree with Wendy, he states that, although not as often any more, it happens that he cannot find the right words to express his thoughts. Overall, Wendy feels "so-so" about her level of English. Wendy adds that she feels more relaxed speaking English when she is with somebody she knows well. Laura feels the same. Not unreasonably, she feels more comfortable speaking English with a friend than with a total stranger, "I talk but not too much. I get scared, a little shy."

#### 4.2.7 First Language Skills.

Mike considers “Syrian-Arabic” his first language, but because Mike moved to Iran when he was very young, he cannot read or write in his mother tongue. Mike, however, is a fluent speaker of Arabic because he uses it on a daily basis at home. Mike is, nonetheless, starting to lose his second language, Farsi, because he no longer uses it regularly. Austin believes his first language skills got worse. While Austin can still communicate comfortably in his native language, his academic skills have been deteriorating with the time he has spent in Canada. In fact, Austin states that he went to summer school for his own language. Laura argues, “just confused me. When I want to say in English, I just think in my language. And then still like confused with the language when sometimes I wanna say something in English, I just say it in my first language.” Wendy thinks that her first language skills have changed in the last couple of years, “right now when I am writing in my language, sometimes I am thinking what word. I think I forgot some things.” Rosa elaborates on her mother tongue skills:

Me, I am comfortable in English because at home and in our school, we, like, speak English. So, I think I am forgetting my own language. Sometimes it's hard to say some of the stuff cause my mind is in English. Even my little brothers, they started forgetting my language. And my parents always said that, you guys, cannot do that, you guys have to know your first language. And then they [parents] always say it's hard for them [Rosa's younger siblings], like, they can understand it but they are starting to forget most of them. Sometimes my parents are talking to them, like, telling them something, and they answer it in English, like all the time. I am forgetting my first language but it is not good, though.

As for the circumstances in which Mike feels more comfortable speaking Arabic versus English, Mike explains:

if I am with my cousin, they born here, so I have to speak with them my first language to make them learn the first language too because their pronouncing is not good. But when I am around other people, I just speak English, I don't speak my first language.

Austin complains that he gets confused if he has to use his first language outside of home:

in school, I feel like I want to speak English. There are places where I can't speak my first language because I haven't done it. In school, I can speak in English. If someone comes and speaks Farsi, I get confused, I don't know why. Farsi prefer just at home.

#### **4.2.8 Plans for the Future.**

All of my interviewees, except Laura, would like to go back to their home land for a visit sometime soon. Rosa wants to go back to see the old house she used to live in, to see if the place is still the same as she left it. Austin has travelled to Iran just last year, and he recalls: "it felt awesome, and when I saw my old house is destroyed, so I have a lot of feelings for it. Emotions. I was four years old when I left, so I am not sure how it looked like before." Austin adds: "if it gets better [in Iran], I am gonna go live in the village, small village. So, I want to make it better there. There is no police, nothing there. There are no rules there right now." Mike, on the other hand, has no interest in going to his native country even for a visit. Mike points out: "it's better here, and there is problem back home, there is fight. So, it's not safe to go back now." Wendy, however, would like to visit her brother and her friends maybe for a month or two.

As far as educational and professional goals, Austin and Wendy are undecided. Whereas Austin is still young and has time to think about his future profession, Wendy is under a little bit more pressure to make a decision because she already has a high school diploma from her country, and she would like to go on to post-secondary education, yet she cannot do so because her English "isn't perfect." Rosa wants to become a flight attendant or a personal support worker. Laura is planning to become a nurse. Mike also would like to continue his studies in the area of health sciences, though he also plans to have a second career, "first I want to be a dentist. After I get my dentist diploma, I am going to be a singer."

#### **4.3 Summary**

In this chapter I provided a description of my focus group findings which show that recent 1.5 generation immigrants have little loss of first language skills and do not perceive

themselves as Canadian because, for one reason, they have not received their Canadian citizen status yet. On the other hand, 1.5 generation high school students struggle with their English skills and some believe that spending more time with native speakers in class will help them improve their English faster. In the next chapter, I will provide a description of the reflections 1.5 generation post-secondary students make about their language learning experiences and their current identity perceptions.

## Chapter 5

### DATA FINDINGS: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to shed light on the English language learning experiences, first language regression, and national identity perceptions of young adults belonging to 1.5 generation. I have interviewed a total of seven young adults who came to Canada at a young age: three males (Jack, Waldon, Anthony) and four females (Dina, Vicky, Andrea, and Tonya). Jack was the youngest among the participants when he came to Canada from China. He shared with me probably the most interesting perspective on his national identity. Waldon is from Yemen, and, as it appears, he struggles the most with English. His experience is unique because he spent several years during his childhood in Germany where he quickly picked up the German language at a cost of losing his Arabic. He then returned back to Yemen for some years and as he was just returning to his comfort zone in Arabic, his family decided to move to Canada where his language learning struggles have begun once again. Anthony was the oldest among the participants when he came to Canada; he started his new life in Canada at age 15. As far as the female participants, Tonya was the most memorable (for me), because she believes that Canada, as a whole, is overrated in its claims to being one of the best countries to live in. Moreover, Tonya is planning to go back to her native Egypt. Vicky and Andrea are both from India. Vicky, however, came to Canada at 11 years of age, whereas Andrea came at 14 years of age. Both girls are proud of their Indian background; nevertheless they have slightly different experiences with English and Hindi. Dina is from the Gaza Strip, and she came to Canada when she was 14. She invented the term “middler” to identify herself because she cannot decide between the land where she was born and the land where she has been living for the past nine years. In the next seven sections, one at a time, I will examine the experiences of the three males who took part in

my study, and then I will address the experiences of the female participants. There is an exception, however, to the way the data findings are presented for the last two cases, that is, Andrea's and Vicky's experiences are presented together because both girls are from the same country, India, and thus it was my goal to show the similarities and differences of their experiences in Canada.

## **5.2 Becoming a Canadian Citizen, Learning English, and Maintaining First Language: Male Perspective.**

### **5.2.1 Jack's Story.**

#### ***Jack's background.***

Jack comes from a small city in China. Jack has no siblings, but he says that his mom often teases him with her theory that he is too spoiled, and that he should have a sibling, so, that way, he would have to compete for attention. Jack's parents worked at a factory and held supervisors' positions, thus his family was a bit wealthier than most families in China. His mother decided to go to the U.S. but was rejected and, consequently, decided to settle for Canada. His mother came to Canada first and did her undergraduate degree in accounting at York University. As she was about to finish her degree, she brought her husband and son to Canada. According to Jack, his mother picked the worst area in Toronto one can live in. So, for the first four years in Canada, Jack and his family lived in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood in Toronto which is often depicted in the media as having one of the largest concentrations of criminal gangs in Canada. His mother, however, not being familiar with the city, thought that she had picked a suitable location near York University. Jack describes his four years in the neighbourhood, for a lack of better description, as "interesting four years of his life." Jack remembers that, apart from everybody wanting to kill each other for lunch money in middle



school, people would get shot all the time. While living in Toronto, most of Jack's friends were Black because that is the community he was living in. He also had a lot of Chinese friends, but looking back at it, Jack realizes that they were "screwing him over." He is not sure why that was the case, but he suspects it is because they had been bullied themselves when they first got here, and, thus, in a way, it was a rite of passage for new Chinese kids. In China, nobody stole from each other, one could leave stuff anywhere and nobody would take it, but in Canada Jack's Chinese friends would steal his stuff and he couldn't understand it. When Jack found one of his friends with something Jack had just lost, his friend gave an absurd explanation, such as he had just found it in the forest. Jack remembers that he actually believed those explanations. Thinking back, Jack admits that it was silly of him to believe in such foolish stories. Jack remembers his first few years in Canada as "tough times." Jack attended middle school in Toronto till grade 7. Four years later, Jack and his family moved to London, Ontario. Jack recalls his experience of coming to London and, to his pleasant surprise, nobody wanting to fight and not having to defend himself. Jack thinks that in London there is much less bullying which makes a big difference for kids, especially for children of immigrants. Jack finished high school in London and now attends the University of Western Ontario studying psychology and hoping to study law in the future.

### ***Friendships in Canada.***

When I asked Jack if he has a lot of Chinese friends, Jack replied that the problem he found with most Chinese people or most immigrants is that "they lie on either side of the scale". What Jack means is that, most immigrants are either very Asian / very foreign and disconnected with the culture here or try too hard to be "White." The reason that Jack does not have a lot of Asian friends is because they lie on either side of the scale, and Jack does not like either side of

it. Jack does not think it is right to completely ignore Canadian culture, but Jack also does not think it is a good idea to try too hard to be “White” because it is just a pretense. Jack claims to be in the perfect middle of the scale because he sees value in “Canadian ways” but at the same time he is careful not to tip the scale. In a perfect case scenario, Jack would like to have friends who came to Canada from China the same age as he did, developed their identity in Canada, and are comfortable socially and academically. Jack, however, is realistic in that it is rare to find somebody who would fit within those standards. Jack expresses some sadness that his Canadian-born friends, who never emigrated and who lived their whole life in Canada, just don’t understand certain things, such as the experience of moving from China to Canada and having to start life all over again. Jack jokes that it would be nice to talk to a guy who has experience from China and whom he could ask: ‘hey, like, when you got here, how were your first two years, how bad did you get beaten up?’”

### ***Learning English.***

Jack learned some English in China because his parents had placed him in a special program, but Jack believes the program was completely useless. When Jack first came to Canada, he couldn’t understand anything. He spent about two and a half years in ESL classes at his school. After some years of being an ESL student, Jack just started speaking in English and eventually mastered the new language. Jack’s education in China was so far ahead that he didn’t really need to attend any classes other than English. Jack knew math particularly well, and he did not learn any new mathematical skills in Canada until grade 11, though he started in grade five when he came to Canada. Jack was very satisfied with that. Jack would go to his math class and finish the assignments before anyone else by far, and then he would go to his ESL class and spend much of his time there. With regard to self-esteem, Jack’s superior math skills served as a

substitute for his lack of English skills. Jack's "super ability in math" protected his self-identity because it made him realize "look, I am not stupid." Jack remembers that he spent much of his grade 5 and grade 6 days in a little ESL room where they teach the basic stuff and play language games. When I asked Jack what motivated him to learn English, Jack simply replied that he likes to talk. Jack would talk a lot even though he did not make sense and people would pick on him for that. Nevertheless, it did not hurt Jack's feelings or his self-esteem because, as Jack explains, he did not understand what was supposed to hurt his feelings or what was supposed to be bad for one's image. Jack didn't understand the culture either, and Canadian norms didn't always make sense. However, the more Jack learned English and the more he learned about the culture, the more he fitted in. Jack was never ashamed of using his "bad language" skills. In fact, Jack explains: "if I sounded absolutely stupid, like, I still have no shame of saying things in class." For Jack, there was no significant transition period between "somehow I am not really good at English...somehow magically become fluent..." It was no magic that Jack suddenly becoming a proficient speaker. Instead, it was effort that helped Jack gradually become much more comfortable in using English over the first few years of being in Canada. By the end of grade 6 or in about two years after his arrival in Canada, Jack started feeling good about his English. Jack, however, cautions that it is something due to his personality, because he might be confident even in something he is not good at. Jack explains, to succeed in a completely new environment, "you really have to be able to put yourself out there and try." Unlike some of Jack's friends, who went back to China for a year after coming to Canada because they couldn't take it anymore, Jack was able to accept failures and still strive forward; as Jack says, one just has to deal with the realities of life.

Jack does not do anything at this point to improve his English, nor does he think that he needs to improve it “in any sort of way.” Jack thinks that his English is as good as it will ever get. Jack admits that his grammar is weak and that his friends pointed it out to him as well. Nevertheless, Jack does not think that grammar makes a significant difference in his essay writing. Jack says that he usually loses about two per cent for grammar and another two per cent for APA formatting. Other than that, Jack thinks his essays are pretty good, and he does not care enough to improve his grammar. In Jack’s view, his problems with grammar have nothing to do with English not being his first language. Jack explains that his “grammar in Chinese sucked to begin with. I think it is just something with the structure of my language brain.” Whether Jack’s grammar issues are due to his defective “language brain structure” or due to starting to learn English only at age ten remains a mystery one can only ponder about.

#### ***At home and with peers: Chinese or English?***

Jack admits that his Chinese, although his first language, is very poor. When I asked Jack how many languages he speaks, he answered “let’s just put it 1.5.” Jack is a fluent English language speaker but he feels that his spoken Chinese is not very good. He cannot read or write in Chinese other than his name. Thus, unlike Jack’s ‘1’ point English skills, his Chinese skills are closer to ‘0.5.’ Jack says that whatever he says in Chinese to his parents is really straightforward, such as “I’ll be home at this time,” “I am hungry,” or “I need a ride.” Jack admits that is pretty much all the conversation he has with his family. Jack confided that he often cannot tell his parents what he is thinking because it takes “too much of a process,” so he would rather not tell them anything. In fact, for some time, Jack actually thought that communication between parents and kids was not something that happens a lot. Jack realized otherwise when he went to a friend’s house and his friend would tell his parents about school or a new girlfriend. Jack recalls

his reaction was: “wait, parents and kids actually communicate?” Jack warned me that it is not a joke, and that he actually did not think it was possible. Jack thought “you go your way and they [parents] go theirs.” Jack thought that was a normal teenager’s life. Jack believes that language is definitely some sort of a barrier and that it is really tough for the 1.5 generation. Jack, however, does not find it “weird,” just frustrating sometimes that he cannot communicate some things. Jack does not use any English at home. His parents talk and understand English but, according to Jack, they speak it so badly that it hurts his ears to listen to them. Jack admits that it is egoistic of him to say that, but it is difficult for him when it takes him "half an hour to get a simple idea across,” and by that time he gets so frustrated that he eventually abandons the idea he wanted to get across to his parents. Jack explains that it is such a norm in the family that it does not bother him any longer. Jack believes that it is easier to say “you are right, let’s just go with that” rather than disagreeing or defending his argument in Chinese.

While Jack uses exclusively Chinese at home, even though limited Chinese, he rarely speaks Chinese with his friends. Jack may speak Chinese occasionally with some of his friends who come down from Toronto, but other than that, he speaks English with his peers. Even when Jack lived in Toronto where there are a lot of Chinese people, Jack used predominantly English. Moreover, the more English Jack spoke, the more difficult it was becoming for him to convey his ideas in Chinese. Jack says that it is painful for him to speak in Chinese, and since English comes easier for him, he uses the easier route to communicate. Jack does not care about maintaining his first language skills even though his parents really want him to keep his first language skills as well as his Chinese identity. In fact, Jack’s parents often tell him to go to a Chinese club, find Chinese friends, or even marry a Chinese girl. Jack says it is sometimes difficult to go against your parents’ will, particularly against Chinese parents’ will who stubbornly “tell you everyday

‘you should become a doctor, you should become a lawyer, you should become a doctor, you should become a doctor,’ it’s repeating process”. Interestingly, even though Jack claims to rebel against his parents a lot, he is planning to go to law school. In addition, Jack claims that he does not support his parents’ views on life which stem from Chinese culture and beliefs. For example, Jack thinks that some of the Chinese parables that his mom takes as a fact of life are “stupidly wrong.” Jack has no ties to Chinese culture and no interest in maintaining his cultural roots. For Jack, “Canadian culture was a catalyst for change,” and Jack doubts that he will ever have a “magical relapse” of wanting to go back to China. Jack, however, admits that his philosophy of life changes very quickly.

***Identity: Canadian, Chinese pride, or none?***

When I asked Jack how he self-identifies, he was quick to point out that his parents have “this Chinese pride thing,” and that they often point out to Jack that he should identify himself as Chinese because he was born in China. Jack, however, is not sure whether it is really the Chinese pride thing with his parents or whether they “just got brainwashed with all the communist propaganda.” On the other hand, Jack does not see the “Canadian pride thing” either. Jack does not see himself attached to any country. It appears that Jack has what Rumbaut and Rumbaut (1976) call an “uncommitted heart.” In fact, Jack believes that he has a unique answer to the whole national identity perception – a universal or international identity. Jack pointed out to me: “you are Russian, I am Chinese. We are the same.” To Jack, it does not matter where one comes from, and that is his view of the world. Jack added that he is not sure whether his views would have been the same if he had stayed in China, or if it was the openness of Canada that allowed him to take on such views. When Jack was growing up in China, there were no options and there was no choice, there was one way of education. Moreover, according to Jack, one does not

realize these things when one is indoctrinated into Maoism, the communist propaganda. One does not know anything different because one has never been presented with a second option. The belief that the Cultural Revolution was the best thing that could have happened to China, according to Jack, is a delusion. Now that he is in Canada, he realizes that it was not such a great thing to happen because millions of people were killed. However, Jack believes that with the Westernization, things have improved in China in the last 10 years. Nevertheless, it is only in Canada that Jack learned that there is something other than what is presented in China, that there are options available, and other thinking patterns are possible. Although Jack's parents have a strong association with China and believe that "Chinese people are better," Jack resists his parents' conviction that he should join Chinese Clubs and find Chinese friends. For Jack, it makes no difference where one comes from because we are all equal. Jack does not see himself as a Canadian citizen or as a Chinese citizen. Jack just simply sees himself as a guy who goes to Western. If someone would ask Jack about his nationality, Jack would explain that he was born in China and then came to Canada, but then Jack would add "you know what, we are not so different." On a second thought, however, Jack decided that would be too philosophical for the first conversation, so he would give them a straightforward answer instead. After further probing as to what the "straightforward answer" would be, Jack made a clear distinction between being Chinese and being from China. Jack is not Chinese but he is from China. Jack realizes that China will be part of his history forever, but he is not sure whether China is a predominant part of his identity. Jack makes it clear that he does not have the "whole Chinese pride behind [him]. I really don't. I just want to see that I am pretty much just a person." Jack likes to have the "international identity" and be an "international citizen" of the world rather than just to take one national identity over the other.

***Being Canadian: does it mean anything?***

Jack argues that ever since the end of the Cold War, the whole national identity pride has been severely impaired for the citizens of this world. Because of the fairly recent phenomenon of Globalization, according to Jack, the national identity perceptions are no longer as strong. Jack notes, however, that this supposition may exist strictly from an immigrant's point of view. Jack, for example, does not think that most U.S. citizens identify as Americans as strongly as they did in the pre-Cold War time because during that time period there was a strong separation of Communism versus Democracy. Jack's viewpoint is that the dominant ideology of the world is no longer political but rather "corporation dominant" because nowadays it is all about business. In essence, Jack believes that national pride has lost its strength in the recent decades. Jack does not think that being Canadian means anything. In the international scene, people think of Canada as a peace keeping nation – Jack is confident that is the reputation Canadians have been given ever since Lester Pearson came into power. Jack believes that Canadians have been stuck with "peace keeping, hurt nobody, love everyone, giving a lot of charity, perfect country" identity. Moreover, according to Jack, Canadians always take an extra effort to contrast themselves with Americans. In reality, however, as Jack argues, "we are not so different in what so ever sense." Interestingly, even though Jack does not claim Canadian identity, he uses the pronoun "we" to refer to Canadians, which, to me, indicates that, at least to some extent, Jack does identify with Canada.

***Initial and current feelings about moving to Canada.***

Jack was glad to come to Canada. Being just 10 years old when he came, he was very happy that school ended around 2 o'clock. In China, Jack used to wake up at 7am and come home at 7pm. On his first school day in Canada, Jack's reaction was "2:30, is this lunch break? Wait, what, I am done?" Jack wasn't accustomed to school finishing so early, and summer with



no homework was unheard of in China. Overall, Jack was excited to have a whole new set of things that he could do. Nevertheless, Jack remembers that there were tough times at the beginning, especially because he did not speak the language. People would take an advantage of the weakest. On the positive side, Jack's favourite part was snow. Living in China, Jack had seen snow only twice; in Canada, that was the greatest thing for Jack.

When I asked Jack if he misses China or his Chinese friends, he readily replied that he misses a girl "he had a crush on" in second grade. Besides that, he slightly misses the difference in culture because Canada is so much more individualistic. Jack thought that our interview conversation is a perfect example of the individualistic nature of Canada. Jack pointed out that after this talk is over "we are not going to see each other or whatever. Maybe we see each other and say 'Hi, how are you' and still be friends." While this kind of an acquaintence may be perfectly acceptable in Canada, it is not the norm in China. In China, you get to know people around you and you develop deeper friendships. According to Jack, in China, one cannot say "hi" one day and completely forget about the person the next day just because the professional relationship is over. Jack, however, suspects that because of Westernization, things have changed quite a bit in China in the last ten years.

### ***Planning to go to China.***

Jack has never been back to China since he came to Canada, though Jack and his parents have agreed to go back to China for a visit once Jack graduates from the university. Jack, however, is not looking forward to the trip. Jack sees it as a bit of a problem because he will only go back for a brief time and then he has to leave again. Jack predicts that there will be a lot of emotions, a lot of crying, a lot of memories, and a lot of stories to tell as to what he was doing in the past ten years. Jack does not see much point in temporary visits because they just provoke a

lot of emotions. The only reason Jack is interested in going back is to find the girl he had a crush on in grade two.

### ***Conclusions.***

Looking back at the last ten years, Jack is confident that he couldn't have done quite as well in China as he has done in Canada. Jack realizes that Canada has given him a lot of opportunities to try different things. In China, Jack could have been the smartest kid in his classes, but Jack is not sure what that would be good for. Jack argues that in China there were no leadership opportunities. In China, "it's just academics, academics, and more academics." Jack ponders, if one excels in academics, what it means for the future. Jack does not think it means much. China does not allow personal growth and does not provide opportunities to explore things. Jack insists that in China there is only one right way to do things. Jack, however, admits that it is sometimes frustrating when a professor says "I don't know." Nevertheless, Jack believes that the openness in Canada allows one to think. Canada also gives room to input one's own opinion, which Jack does not think is possible in China. Jack concludes "there is no way I go back. My parents try to make me go back, but there is no way I go back."

### **5.2.2 Waldon's Story.**

#### ***Waldon's background.***

Waldon was born in Yemen and raised there for a few years before moving with his family to Germany. Waldon lived there for about five years, and after that he and his family returned to Yemen. At age 13, Waldon and his family moved once again, this time it was a permanent move to Canada. Waldon has an older brother and a younger sister. Waldon's dad works as a social worker in Canada, and his mom, although an accountant by profession, is currently unemployed but volunteers her time to help others. Both of Waldon's parents are university graduates, and they provided the support necessary to help Waldon overcome the

language barrier and to succeed in high school and university. Without their encouragement, Waldon thinks he would not have made it through high school. Waldon is now a 3<sup>rd</sup> year university student majoring in psychology and hoping to become a researcher in the future.

Most of Waldon's friends are immigrants or were born to immigrant parents in Canada. Waldon also has Canadian friends but not as many. For Waldon, the cultural background of his friends is not important. It is the similarity of experiences that create a bond of friendship. Waldon often has difficulty expressing himself because of the language difficulties, and that could be the reason why Waldon is more comfortable with people who went through the same experiences, and who can understand what it is like to be a newcomer to Canada.

### ***Language learning and regression.***

When Waldon moved to Germany at a very young age, he quickly learned the German language. However, Waldon's knowledge of German came at the expense of losing his Arabic. When Waldon returned to Yemen after some years of living in Germany, he had to relearn Arabic all over again. Soon thereafter, however, Waldon had to start learning English. Waldon explains: "I had to go learn German and then I forget [Arabic], and then I had to learn Arabic, and I had to forget about that. And barely when I made it just to understand it [Arabic], they [parents] are like 'no, now you have to learn English.'" Waldon's story is unique because he has lost his Arabic skills twice. The first loss of Arabic occurred when he moved to Germany; the second loss occurred when Waldon moved to Canada. Waldon did improve his Arabic skills when he returned from Germany to Yemen because he got immersed in the environment where Arabic is spoken, but now that Waldon is in Canada and has no plans of permanently returning to Yemen, it is unlikely that Waldon will improve his Arabic skills once again. Waldon explains that at one point in his life he just started losing everything:

I didn't know how to write Arabic well or write English well or speak it. I know how to speak Arabic well but not to speak English well. So, it was like being lost because you lost your original language and you can't even learn the language. So, you felt like, basically, a sense of hopelessness.

Currently, Waldon describes his Arabic skills as "not good." Nevertheless, Waldon does use mostly Arabic to communicate with his parents and "slightly English" to communicate with his siblings. Although the English language is not used a lot at home, Waldon uses only English to communicate with his friends. Waldon does have friends who speak Arabic but even with them he speaks English. Waldon explains that he is more comfortable using English.

Waldon's motivation to learn English was simply "to speak as others." Waldon would be made fun of because of his accent or because he wouldn't know how to speak the language properly in certain situations. Waldon did not want to be the guy to be picked on because of his accent. Thus, Waldon's peers have motivated him to improve his spoken English. As far as academic English is concerned, Waldon explains: "I would speak it well but then I wouldn't be able to write or read as good as it should be." There was a big gap between how Waldon was improving in spoken English and academic English. Waldon was driven by his desire to succeed in school and to continue his studies at the university.

### ***Maintaining Arabic.***

Waldon is concerned with his poor Arabic skills, so he tries to do at least little things, such as "reading daily a small part in Arabic" to maintain his Arabic skills and maybe even improve. Waldon also speaks Arabic with his parents and asks them to correct him when he makes grammatical mistakes. Waldon's parents do want him to be fluent in Arabic as well as be able to read and write in Arabic. When Waldon was in high school, his parents even put him into the Arabic Saturday School Program, which Waldon did not enjoy at all because, unsurprisingly, he did not enjoy getting up early in the morning and having to spend his Saturday afternoon at

school. To compensate for his loss of sleep, Waldon just slept in class and thus did not get much out of the program. Now that Waldon is in university, his parents are less concerned about his lack of fluency in Arabic and more concerned about his academic achievements. The reason that Waldon has now decided to improve his Arabic, is to have another language in addition to English, since it is often an advantage when looking for a job.

Having spent eight years in Canada, Waldon thoughts proceed only in English. Now he has to make an effort to think in his native language. Waldon finds it difficult but, nevertheless, he tries to make himself think in Arabic when he communicates with his parents. Sometimes when Waldon is not able to find the right words to express his thoughts or to describe something in Arabic, he switches to English. Waldon's father is fluent in English, but because Waldon's mother is not, she used to mind Waldon using English words in conversation with her. She used to insist for him to use Arabic because she was worried that Waldon would forget his Arabic as he did when they moved to Germany. Unfortunately, Waldon's mother's fear of her son losing his Arabic skills has become a reality once again. Now he uses only English with his brother, and when I asked Waldon if it feels strange talking with such a close family member in their non-native language, he replied: "it feels strange when we talk Arabic, actually." Waldon's parents have insisted that they use Arabic, but Waldon thinks it is impossible sometimes to share one's emotions in Arabic, for example, "when you are excited, you don't like 'oh, wait, I gotta speak Arabic.'" English comes more naturally for Waldon, and that is the language he uses and, most importantly, prefers to use in his daily life.

***Initial and current feelings about moving to Canada.***

Waldon remembers that he had mixed emotions about coming to Canada. It was exciting to go to a new country but at the same time it was terrifying for Waldon because he was leaving his extended family and everything he had that was dear to him to go to a totally different part of

the world once again. When Waldon actually arrived in Canada, he recalls being in complete shock. In Yemen, children wear uniforms to go school, they stand up when a teacher walks into the classroom, and show great respect when a teacher talks. Because Waldon and his family thought that the similar rules apply in Canada, he came to school dressed in a uniform and a tie. The first day at school and many months after that, Waldon and his siblings felt like outsiders. Waldon explains that they felt “like, basically, aliens in the whole class, and everybody looks at you and you don’t know how to speak...nothing of that.” First experiences in Canada were shocking for Waldon because everything was so different and new. When I asked Waldon if there were other children who were recent immigrants in his class, he replied that there were children in the class from different cultural backgrounds but they were born and raised in Canada, so they were native speakers of English. Thus, Waldon did not have anybody in his class who was going through the same experience.

Waldon’s current feelings about Canada are quite positive. He realizes that he is getting a good education in Canada. Waldon is also happy with the Canadian health care system, safety and security in the country, and “very respectful people.” Waldon says he always appreciates “the good people offer.” Nonetheless, Waldon makes a point that he does not neglect his native country and he does not forget where he came from.

***Learning English, making one's way through academia, and adjusting to the new country.***

Waldon had no prior knowledge of the English language before coming to Canada, though some English was taught at schools in Yemen. As a child, Waldon just didn’t pay enough attention in English classes, because, at the time, he had no clue that one day he would be living in an English-speaking country. So, young Waldon thought to himself that he did not need to learn English, which he now regrets. When Waldon just started school in Canada, he just remembers hearing noises because he did not understand anything that was going on around him

at the time. Waldon remembers people always pointing at things to get their message across but he still would not understand anything they were trying to say. Waldon would sit at the back of the classroom facing the other way and drawing. He is not sure why he did it but he thinks it was because he did not understand anything that was going on in the classroom. Waldon says his teacher was comfortable with that for awhile, but toward the end of the year, she became much stricter and finally made it clear to Waldon that it was time to learn. Although Waldon didn't understand much English, he did very well in math. Waldon explains: "As long as she gave me numbers, I could have solved it. But when it came to language, I didn't...I can't recall how I did learn [English]." Waldon did receive ESL help at school, but he argues that he learned more English in a regular class where he couldn't even understand anything than being in an ESL class. Waldon didn't learn much in ESL classes because of the time they spent playing games, such as bingo, which was fun but not productive. Although Waldon went through all the ESL levels that were available, he still did not feel comfortable in Canadian classrooms in terms of academics. Waldon describes his experiences trying to achieve academic success in high school:

I took grade 10 university [course] and I failed it, and I took it again. And then I took grade 11 English and I failed it and took grade 11 again. I took grade 12, I failed it and I took grade 12 again. It was a very difficult experience because...at a point, maybe it was grade 11, that I just felt like there wasn't hope that I can reach that boundary between me and other students.

Nonetheless, Waldon's persistence has paid off as he is now a 3<sup>rd</sup> year university student. Waldon is proud of his achievement because many of his high school friends also faced language obstacles and never got a high school diploma.

Waldon does struggle academically at the university but he regularly seeks support at the Student Development Centre. Even if an essay is only worth five per cent of the final grade, Waldon would get his essay looked at at least once. If an essay is worth 20 or 30 per cent, Waldon would book an appointment and then book another appointment right away because he

will need the writing counsellor to look at the essay again after the changes are made. Waldon, however, finds it tough at times looking for writing support because counsellors think that Waldon just wants them to write the essays for him. Waldon gets frustrated with such attitudes because he truly needs help with grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. Waldon believes he has “the lack of basics” and that “the basics he didn’t learn are haunting” him.

Waldon explains that his spoken English is excellent when it comes to communicating with peers, but “not good” when it comes to communicating in a class or in a public setting. Waldon cautions that it is “not bad” but it is not “good” either. In class, when Waldon raises his hand to say something, he finds that he gets “weird” looks from other students, the professor or the TA. Waldon explains that a TA would typically elaborate on a student’s response, but in his case a TA probably cannot make sense out of what Waldon is saying and thus goes to the next student instead. Such experiences are really frustrating for Waldon, and it makes him feel: “like what did I say...? like I said a bunch of gibberish and they just go to the next to continue.” Waldon claims that he does not have the vocabulary necessary to excel at school. He recalls an incident during a test when he was in the second year at the university when he put up his hand to ask his professor what the word “acquire” means because the question just didn’t make sense to him. Waldon remembers getting a strange look from the professor who was confused if Waldon was really asking just for the meaning of the word. From that time, Waldon hardly ever puts up his hand in class because he thinks his questions may sound so silly. Waldon would rather get the question wrong than go through such an embarrassment again. Some professors are shocked and wonder, according to Waldon, “what this guy is doing here if he can’t even know the language.” Waldon claims that some professors just shut the door and don’t even accept him.



Waldon, however, admits that there are some professors who are more understanding and willing to help.

One of Waldon's major problems with English is reading out loud. A few times when Waldon had to read a passage to the rest of the class, people laughed. Waldon has no problem reading and understanding what he has read, but he fears reading to a larger audience. In fact, Waldon would rather fail a class than read in front of the whole class. Waldon is not sure whether it is simple nervousness, but he feels "handicapped" when it comes to reading to an audience. Waldon, however, has no difficulty making a presentation to a class, but that is as long as he does not need to read anything out loud. Interestingly, Waldon does not have as much of a problem reading to a group of people in Arabic. Because Waldon is not expected to be fluent in Arabic, he feels that is an excuse for his poor reading skills. On the other hand, because Waldon has been in Canada for almost nine years, he is expected to have strong English language skills. Waldon feels that he has no excuse for his weak reading skills, and thus reading to an audience is a nightmare for him. Waldon claims that he will try to avoid reading to a group of people "by any means necessary."

To improve his English, Waldon says he tries to get as much feedback as possible on his work. Waldon learns from the feedback he gets and tries to take all the suggestions into account for his next piece of writing. Looking back at his essays from previous years, Waldon believes that his writing style has really improved. He used to ask three different people to edit his assignment at different times, whereas, now, Waldon has one person to look at his assignment only twice. Waldon concludes that his academic English has improved in the recent years; nonetheless, he realizes that he still has a lot of work to do to become a researcher one day because he still sees himself as a "3<sup>rd</sup> year student with a massive struggle."

### *Identity perceptions.*

At the beginning of the interview, Waldon told me that he identifies himself as “more Canadian” than Yemenite. Waldon, however, noticed that people find it funny: “If you ask where I am from, I’d say Canadian and they, like, laugh. Then I would say: from Yemen. It seems like a joke.” Although Waldon is fluent in English, his non-native English skills give him away to those who believe that “true Canadians” do not have an accent. When I asked Waldon what it means to be a Canadian citizen, he replied that he had put some thought into it in the past. For Waldon, a Canadian is someone who “obeys the law of Canada...speaks the language, lives and contributes to society.” Waldon added, as a Canadian, one should “take the good...from Canadian culture and also maintain the good from heritage culture.” Waldon thinks that one should blend in with Canadian culture in certain respects, such as clothing, but one should maintain one’s heritage language. Interestingly, when I followed up my previous question on how Waldon self-identifies and asked Waldon if he perceives himself as Canadian, Waldon readily replied: “yes. 100 per cent.” Waldon even joked that he eats the famous Canadian maple leaf syrup. I suppose that although Waldon had previously thought about what it means to be Canadian, he had never put any deep thoughts into his own national identity perception prior to the interview, which could explain the discrepancy in his first answer “more Canadian” and his second answer “100 per cent” Canadian.

Waldon’s identity perceptions are somewhat contradictory. When he is asked by other people about his nationality, he replies that he is Canadian. Occasionally he gets a smirk from people for that answer, and then Waldon would politely elaborate on his national background. Waldon confided to me: “I feel I shouldn’t answer it. I am Canadian, that’s the answer you were asking for.” Waldon’s frustration is certainly understandable. Of course, nobody likes to be

questioned whether one really is a Canadian. At the same time, however, Waldon does see himself as Yemenite, thus people's questioning is not altogether unreasonable. Waldon explains:

I feel like I am an English-Arabic speaker. I am Canadian-Yemen citizen. So, in-between. But if I would lean more, I would be English-Canadian, so there is a balance between two, but I would lean more to Canadian and English than Arabic and Yemeni culture.

Waldon is quite familiar with the feeling of not belonging to either country. Waldon has a lot of mixed feeling as to his national identity: "You feel like, you know, I don't belong here and I don't belong here, and you are stuck in-between." Waldon, however, found a rational way to deal with such confusion:

So, what I do now is, I take what I am more likely to be. So, language, I would be Canadian, culture and education more Canadian, living in Canada. Food, I would go with Yemen. I don't know if it is culture or not, but, like, how to associate with people, more to Yemeni side. So, but where I did stay the longest, longest I've ever been is Canada. So, more than I spent in Yemen, because I lived 3-5 years in Germany.

Germany has played an important role in Waldon's life. It was difficult for Waldon to come back to his native country as a child not being able to speak Arabic. Waldon recalls that he would go to a store in Yemen and speak German and the store clerk would tell him to get out. Yemeni people thought that Waldon was just playing around. Waldon, however, believed that he was communicating with a person and for awhile he could not understand what the problem was. Waldon found it tough not being fluent in Arabic whereas his peers would communicate easily. It seems that throughout his life, language has been a great barrier for Waldon. Nonetheless, Germany has been a great experience for Waldon and it has provided him with "different perspectives, different language, different lifestyle" which makes Waldon sometimes question whether he is "slightly German" as well.

### ***Plans for the future.***

Having experienced three different cultures in his life so far, Waldon plans to travel to different parts of the world and get to know other lifestyles. Waldon seems to have gotten the

taste for different cultural experiences. Waldon explains, “I enjoy that rush being nowhere, you can’t speak, completely different world, and just try to learn, this is why I want to go to South America or Australia.”

### **5.2.3 Anthony’s story.**

#### ***Background.***

Anthony was born and raised in Russia in the city of Rostov. His parents divorced when he was very young, and his mom married for a second time. Anthony has a younger half sister. Anthony had finished grade 10 in Russia before coming to Canada where he started grade 11. Anthony is currently a fourth year university student majoring in psychology with a minor in mathematics.

#### ***Russian or English.***

While Anthony uses Russian at home, he uses English with his friends. When I asked Anthony which language he feels more comfortable using, he responded that it depends on how you measure it. Anthony then followed-up with a delusive remark: “if everyone in Canada had to learn Russian, I would be happy with that.” Anthony thinks that, on some level, because Russian is his first language, he may be more comfortable with Russian. When Anthony came back to Canada from Russia after visiting his family, for the first few days, he had a tough time speaking English. Anthony recalls that he could understand what was said to him but he would sound “unintelligible” when he would try to communicate. According to Anthony, because of the drastic differences in the language structures and phonemes, he has a difficult time readjusting from one language to another when he travels to Russia and then returns to Canada.

Anthony had a difficult time answering my question as to which language he would use given a choice. In the end, Anthony replied: “well, probably English, probably English.” Anthony’s parents often “hang out with the Russian community,” thus Anthony also has a

chance to spend some time with people who can speak both English and Russian. What Anthony found, is that “Russian-Canadians” code-switch, so they do not speak “pure Russian, they speak one word of Russian and two words of English.” Pursuing this further, because “it’s not pure Russian anyway” and because Anthony is so used to speaking English with his peers, Anthony would say that he is more comfortable using English at this point in time. Although this may be true, Anthony believes that his Russian is still “quite a bit better” than his English. Anthony’s thoughts are usually in English, “If I have been watching a Russian movie or something like that or talking in Russian extensively the night before, then sometimes I think in Russian.” Anthony does not think that he is forgetting Russian. Anthony argues that it has been established in research that the window of opportunity for acquiring native-like proficiency in a second language closes around the age of 12, and, since he came to Canada at age 15, Anthony believes that his Russian skills will remain quite stable, whereas it may take him much longer to achieve native-like proficiency in English, if ever.

### ***Russian-Canadian.***

When I asked Anthony if he considers himself more Russian or Canadian, he replied: “a little bit of both,” followed by a more objective answer: “I got my citizenship in 2009. So, I think I can legally call myself Canadian.” Because Anthony’s answer was not really clear, I asked Anthony what he feels his identity is rather than what it is written in his documents. Anthony’s answer to my follow-up question was not any clearer, “it depends...it depends,” he replied. Anthony claims that he no longer associates himself with Russia or Russian people. When Anthony just came to Canada, he used to call, email, and text his friends in Russia frequently. A lot of things have changed since, and now Anthony and his old friends, who stayed behind in Russia, have different lifestyles and have little in common except for their memories of having been good friends at school. Anthony says he can count on the fingers of one hand the number of

friends that he still occasionally talks to, which he does not do as often any longer. Anthony's mom, however, still keeps in touch with her parents, sister, and extended family. Anthony, nevertheless, no longer takes as much interest in what is happening back home. Anthony explains: "the fact that we speak Russian at home sort of reminds me of my background, but I would say that I feel more Canadian than Russian at this point."

I asked Anthony what he thinks it means to be a Canadian citizen, and he joked that is the question they ask when you take Canadian citizenship test. Anthony then replied that there is nothing special about being a Canadian citizen versus a citizen of any other country. Anthony believes that in any country it is pretty much the same, "just live by the law as well as treasure and respect values of the culture."

### ***The experience of immigrating to Canada.***

Anthony took the move to Canada very lightly. Whereas Anthony's parents were hesitant and anxious about the move to Canada, Anthony did not have any particular expectations of Canada and was quite relaxed about the whole process. Anthony remembers that his parents took the attitude: "If we survive here, we'll probably survive there as well." Thinking back, Anthony claims that he did not realize that he was in a new place and new culture until he started school in Canada. Anthony explains that when they came, he and his family settled in an apartment building, and for Anthony it did not feel much different from back home except that he did not know anybody in Canada. So, most of his time, Anthony would spend on the computer emailing his old friends.

Anthony has no regrets of coming to Canada. He is happy that he is in Canada, and that he can visit his family in Russia any time. Anthony thinks that it is particularly nice for his younger sister to go back to Russia to see her aunt and grandma because she has hardly any memories of her native land.

### ***Learning English.***

Anthony studied English in Russia since grade one in a private school. Anthony recalls that his teacher was strict about pronunciation and grammar. However, when in grade six Anthony started attending public school, he did not have as much of an opportunity to practice his English skills, though he did learn a lot of vocabulary. In addition, Anthony had a private tutor to help him with his English skills. Nevertheless, as it turned out, Anthony's English was still not up to par with the native speakers of English. Before being admitted to school in Canada, Anthony and his mom went to a local school where they suggested ESL classes for him. Anthony, however, refused to attend ESL classes because he thought it was below his level, since he started learning English as early as six years of age. Anthony remembers that he had an arrogant attitude at the time. Later, however, Anthony regretted that he refused to attend ESL classes because he could have improved his grammar skills there as well as learn about Canadian culture. Also, Anthony believes that the transition would have been much easier if he had attended ESL classes.

The first two years in high school were "quite depressing" for Anthony. Anthony found it difficult to adjust to the new lifestyle and different expectations. All of Anthony's confidence in his English skills had disappeared once he started school and realized that his pronunciation and English skills were not that good after all. Anthony remembers that he was shy about using English. It was only at the end of his second year in high school that Anthony could "more or less" explain things.

I asked Anthony why he had such a difficult time at school if he had learned English since grade one. Anthony replied that he had wondered about it in past. Anthony suspects that, to some degree, it was "the adjustment, like the psychological things, maybe." Anthony remembers that he felt like some sort of an alien in class, and he was not comfortable speaking and was

generally disoriented. Anthony's mom supported him through high school and always reminded him that he just came here, and that he is doing OK for someone who has been in Canada for only a short time.

***English skills after seven years in Canada.***

Anthony was motivated to learn English simply "to get around." Anthony compares learning English in Canada to his theory of the Brazilian system of learning to swim: "you are thrown into the pool with alligators, and you either learn or you are in trouble." Anthony believes that the best way to learn is to be immersed in the environment and basically fight for one's life. Anthony's English has gotten better over the years, and Anthony describes it as "reasonably good." Anthony thinks that his vocabulary is still somewhat limited because he does not like to read books where he could learn new words. Anthony has also noticed that he may learn what a word means but soon thereafter he will forget it. Words that sound alike are particularly difficult for Anthony to remember because he "throws words that sound alike into one pile." Anthony claims that he does not have a "natural ability to learn languages."

As far as Anthony's academic English is concerned, Anthony summarized: "it's alright, it's alright." Anthony jokes that when he writes essays he is trying to sound "more intelligent" than he really is. Thus, Anthony sometimes goes to the Student Development Centre to have his work looked over. Anthony notes that writing counsellors often point out to him that his "sentences are too long, too convoluted." Anthony defends using "big words" because he wants to meet university level writing requirements. Although Anthony has not taken a lot of essay courses at the university, he believes that his writing has generally improved since he did reasonably well in his courses and also because "obviously, it wouldn't get worse." Anthony then makes a quirky remark that he, nonetheless, does fine with emails and instant messaging.



Anthony does not do much to improve his English at this point. Anthony claims that he tries to read more, but because, in his own words, he is lazy, it is a challenge for him. Anthony believes that having conversations in English, watching movies, and listening to audio books also helps to improve spoken English. Anthony feels “more or less comfortable with the conversational part;” nevertheless, he still occasionally encounters unfamiliar words, which Anthony sometimes considers looking up but he rarely does.

### ***Conclusion.***

One could say that Anthony is undecided in terms of his national identity. Anthony would first say that he is leaning towards Canadian identity but, soon thereafter, he would explain that he is more Russian because he lived there for the first fifteen years of his life, whereas he has been in Canada for only seven years. Anthony does not spend much time with Russian people, and, consequently, he prefers to use English with his friends; nonetheless, Anthony thinks that his Russian skills are better than his English skills. Anthony claims that his identity perceptions have changed in the last seven years, but he is not sure whether he will ever perceive himself as a “full Canadian” because he believes that the first few years of life are most important in shaping one’s identity.

## **5.3 Becoming a Canadian Citizen, Learning English, and Maintaining First Language:**

### **Female Perspective.**

#### **5.3.1 Dina's story.**

##### ***Background.***

Dina was born and raised in the Gaza Strip. She came to Canada with her family when she was 13 years old. Dina is the youngest of the girls in the family, she has two older sisters and a younger brother. Dina's parents are divorced, and her father has remarried in his native country but he does come to Canada occasionally to visit his son and daughters. When Dina's father

comes for a visit, she and her siblings try to maintain their cultural traditions out of respect; other than that, Dina argues, "we are an open minded family minus my dad. So, when my dad is around, yes [we maintain cultural traditions]. So, it means not without [him]." Canada has changed Dina's lifestyle as well as her views of the world; thus, although proud of her heritage, Dina has accepted Canadian cultural ideas. Currently, Dina is enrolled in a college program but she is taking a year off to work.

***English or Arabic: when and why.***

Dina explains that at first her family only used Arabic to communicate among themselves, but after years of being in Canada, they now use "half and half Arabic and English." Dina elaborates: "because we speak English outside of the house so much that when we come home, sometimes it's weird to [speak Arabic]." Thus Dina and her family mix two languages when they communicate with each other. As to communicating with her friends, Dina uses English. Hardly ever does Dina use Arabic in a conversation even with her Arab friends.

When I asked Dina in which language she feels most comfortable communicating, she gave me an interesting and a somewhat confusing answer : "Oh, I don't know. Now they are both so-so. Like, now my Arabic is not perfect. I have a hard time actually with Arabic a lot. And my English is not perfect, so..." I had insisted on a more straightforward answer with my follow-up question, such as if she had a choice, which language would she prefer to use. Dina decided that given a choice, she would use English because she is more used to it now and thus feels more comfortable using it. Moreover, Dina is under no pressure to maintain her Arabic skills. Dina has tried to start reading in Arabic again, but she finds it too difficult, and because, as she says, there is nothing pushing her to do it right now, she does "not very much" to improve her Arabic. Although Dina's mom is upset that her daughter is losing her first language skills, she got used to the fact that Dina now uses half English and half Arabic. Nonetheless, Dina does use Arabic

on rare occasions with friends who are recent immigrants or are not fluent in English. Dina may also use a bit of Arabic with an Arab boyfriend to connect with him on the same cultural level. Dina admits that when she does use Arabic with her friends they find it "broken" and some would even make fun of it.

Dina finds that she is forgetting her native language. When I asked Dina if she ever finds it difficult to find the right words to express herself, she replied that it happens in both languages which sometimes interferes with her daily life: "sometimes I'll try to find something in English but I know it in Arabic, and I won't be able to find the word with exact meaning and vice versa." When that happens, Dina will usually pause and try to find the word that fits best within her train of thought. Dina told me that she usually thinks in Arabic, but she later corrected herself and said that she thinks "half and half, about the same" in Arabic and English.

As far as Dina's accent is concerned, she explained:

sometimes it bothers me. Sometimes I like it because it is very unique, different to have, not considering that it is a horrible accent which I don't think mine is, but sometimes it is uncomfortable because it's usually like you are different than other people. But most of the time, I am used to it.

Having an accent was particularly difficult for Dina in high school. Her accent prevented her from participating in class discussions. Moreover, Dina notes, "even sometimes now, if I don't know how to pronounce certain words and I think it might sound funny, I won't say it." Thus, even though Dina is quite comfortable using English after having spent ten years in Canada, there are times when she is not confident in her skills.

### ***Canadian or Palestinian?***

Dina has somewhat mixed identity perceptions. Dina cannot pick one national identity over the other. She says that both nations are important to her, and she sees herself belonging to both and to neither at the same time. When I asked Dina how she perceives herself in terms of

nationality, she did not give a straightforward answer but instead explained that it depends on who is asking:

I say I am Palestinian. But I am also Canadian. So, it depends on who is asking me. If an Arab person is asking me, I am Palestinian. Also a Canadian, somewhat. If a Canadian is asking me, I am Palestinian. But, like, if someone from overseas is asking me where you live, like, where is your other citizenship, then I'll say I am Canadian as well.

Dina further explains that if anyone asks, she always tells them she is Palestinian, but she does elaborate to some Arabs that she is Canadian if they see that her English is good and that she is from overseas. Dina perceives herself as both Palestinian and Canadian, but from Dina's answer, it is clear that she is leaning toward Palestinian identity. Dina further elaborated: "I am Palestinian first because that's where I was raised, my heritage. But I am also Canadian because that's where I grew up and where I am living my life." Dina argues that she is both but first she is Palestinian. Dina admits that her identity is complicated. Dina realizes that there may be a contradiction in her claim of being Palestinian but not planning on ever going back to live in her native land. To Dina, roots are most important. Nevertheless, Dina insists that both countries are her home:

This is my home [referring to Canada], like this is all I've known for a long time, and I grew up here, and I have so many more memories here. And, I care about home. I've done a lot more for myself here than I did or ever could have back home. And I love this country, but at the same time, my roots are my roots.

Dina argues that her identity perceptions will never change but then right after, Dina also remarked: "but you never know."

Pursuing this further, Dina claims that she does not like a lot of things from "either side," that is, Canada and the Gaza Strip. Consequently, Dina often feels that she is caught in the middle because, as she explains, "I am not Western. I am not too Western, and I am not too Eastern." In addition, Dina points out that she does not get along very well with those who are "too-too Eastern" or with those who are "too-too Western." Dina argues that she is always

somewhere in the middle. In fact, Dina keeps an online journal where she calls herself the "middler." Dina adds that her friends are caught in the same situation, and Dina explains: "we always feel like that, we are always in the middle. We don't know which way to go, and sometimes we feel we are misunderstood. Everything, language, ideas, everything." Dina, however, tries not to think about her place in this world too much because she believes she will have an even a harder time fully belonging somewhere, which she thinks may turn into an identity crisis. Moreover, Dina thinks that "society does not want you in the middle. They think either / or." Therefore, Dina believes that generation 1.5ers should not look into their identity too much. Instead, they should just accept the fact that they have dual national identity just like many have dual citizenship.

#### ***The experience of coming to Canada.***

Dina was excited and equally terrified about coming to Canada. Dina was homesick when she first got here, but she got over it fairly quickly. Dina was only 13 when she came to the new country, and she did not realize many things about Canada at that time. Now, Dina realizes that Canada offers a lot of opportunities that are not necessarily offered elsewhere. Overall, Dina is confident that Canada, like any other country, has a lot of "good things to offer but it is not perfect." Dina does like it here because of the safety that Canada offers and also because of the friendly and respectful people. Nonetheless, Canadian cold winters are not Dina's favourite. Dina also wasn't too keen on having to learn a new language, but it is something that she had to master to live in this country.

#### ***Learning English.***

Dina did study English as a second language in her native country; nonetheless, all she could say in English when she came to Canada was: "Hi, my name is Dina, and I just got here." Dina compares studying English in her home country to studying French here - that is,

everybody learns it at some point in time at school but not too many can actually speak it. So, it was tough for Dina when she came here because her English skills were "not good at all." Dina thinks that she was really lucky to have come to Canada at a young age because, as Dina says, "when you are younger, you pick up things quicker." To learn English, Dina kept on reading books, first kids' book and then young adults' books. Dina would not understand everything she was reading, but she would read anyway and try to make sense using the information she was able to understand. Dina explains that she "worked to learn it [English]: "I would read and I would read and then eventually things started to [make sense]. In class too, I listened, I wouldn't understand anything that people were saying but eventually you pick up things." Dina notes there was also a lot of pressure from her parents "not just to learn English but to study no matter what."

In addition to her effort to learn the language in her spare time, ESL classes have helped Dina to learn English. Dina remembers that her teacher used to read some of the books with her. Dina would also highlight some of the words in the books she was reading and then talk to the teacher and ask to explain certain things to her. Dina believes that using simple approaches and good language programs, her grade eight ESL teacher has helped her a lot with learning the language. Because Dina needed an ESL program when she was starting high school, she had to go to a different school than her elementary school friends went to. All the young people Dina got to know in Canada went to a school nearby, whereas Dina had to go to a school in a different area where ESL classes were offered. Apart from the terrifying feeling of starting high school, Dina had limited English skills and no people she knew at school. Thus, Dina had to make new friends once again while still improving her English language skills. Dina argues that she was motivated to learn English to know what was going on around her: "I had no choice. I wanted to

learn. I wanted to know what people are saying. I wanted to know what was written everywhere. And I knew I had to study in the language once I am older."

When I asked Dina how she feels about her spoken English at this point, she replied: "good but could be better. It could always be better." Dina is even less confident about her academic English. It takes Dina a lot longer than native speakers of English to complete assignments. Dina has to spend a lot of time on writing and editing her essays, for example. She may also have to reread a sentence or a page in a textbook a couple of times to really get the meaning from the text. That being said, effort does pay off, as Dina gets mostly straight "A's" for her work.

### ***Plans for the future.***

Because of her financial situation, Dina has not gone back for a visit to her native country since she came to Canada. Nonetheless, Dina is excited that this coming summer will be the first time that she can go back to her native land. Dina hopes that when she goes back to her country and immerses in the environment for a lengthy period of time, her Arabic skills will improve. Moreover, when Dina retires, she plans to live somewhere tropical, and, if things get better in her native country, she might go back to live there.

### **5.3.2 Tonya's story.**

#### ***Background.***

Tonya was born in Egypt. She used to travel a lot when she was younger because her father had to travel for work to different parts of the world. Tonya explained that her father was trying to get a perfect job, and that the longest he stayed in any country was two years. When Tonya was little, she lived for some time in the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, France, and Scotland. Nevertheless, the first time Tonya had to learn to speak English was when she came to Canada. Tonya's father settled down in the province of Alberta where he currently works as a

professor at the university. Tonya's mother is also a professor but she was not as lucky to find a job in Canada; she was told that she is overqualified for many of the positions she was interested in. Tonya's mother was very unsatisfied with Canada as a result, and she decided to return to Egypt with Tonya's younger brother and sister. Tonya is also planning to go back to Egypt once she finishes her university degree in Canada. In fact, Tonya is studying in Canada only because she was not accepted to university in Egypt because of her weak academic skills in the Arabic language.

***Language at home and with friends.***

When Tonya's family came to Canada, they spoke only Arabic among themselves. During their first year in Canada, Tonya and her siblings would not speak English in front of each other. Tonya is not sure why that was the case but she thinks they may have been ashamed to use the new language among themselves. Thus, Tonya used English only at school. After some time in Canada, however, Tonya and her siblings started speaking English and no Arabic whatsoever. Tonya's mom would speak in Arabic and Tonya would reply in English. Tonya's parents wanted their children to learn English and, therefore, did not mind them using English at home. When speaking with her parents, Tonya would sometimes mix Arabic and English by borrowing verbs from Arabic and nouns from English. Tonya explains that her parents are not the type of people who insist that their children use only their first language at home. When with friends, Tonya uses English. Even with some Arab friends who are not as comfortable with English, Tonya would not speak to them in Arabic. Sometimes, however, when talking about certain things and only in certain contexts, Tonya and her friends may switch to Arabic.

Following this further, Tonya's thoughts are now in English, and thus she feels most comfortable using English. At this point, it is difficult for Tonya to communicate her thoughts in Arabic, "it is kind of hard translating that [thoughts] into Arabic, and when I do it's almost



weird." In fact, Tonya started forgetting Arabic soon after she came to Canada. Tonya notes that as she improves her Arabic skills, she loses her English skills, and vice versa. Tonya explains:

so, if I pick up English, I am losing my Arabic, and I went to Egypt last year, when my family spoke to me, I had a really hard time speaking back to them. It goes back and forth. If I want one, the other drops...I stayed there [in Egypt] for a year. After a couple months, I was just fluent in Arabic and my English started getting worse.

At this point, Tonya does not do anything to maintain her Arabic skills, though she believes she should: "I should start probably, like, putting myself in Arabic school or something or Sunday school." Tonya hopes that she will devote more time to improving her Arabic skills in the future. After finishing her university degree, however, if or when Tonya decides to go back to Egypt, she is concerned that while she will improve her Arabic, she may lose her English skills. Tonya is well aware that knowing English is a bonus when looking for a job in Egypt.

### ***Learning English.***

Tonya had no knowledge of English when she came to Canada. Tonya explained that they do teach English in Egypt but it is primarily vocabulary and simple grammar. Thus, Tonya's first real experiences with English took place in Canada at a private girls' school which Tonya "didn't exactly like." Tonya believes that at the school, "they went at a level where I don't think beginners should, like it's too hard for beginners. They are really advanced." Tonya had a "rough" time getting used to speaking in English. At the beginning, Tonya actually thought that she would not be able to become successful at school. After a while, however, Tonya argues that because her English classes were at an advanced level, and because she is a good learner, she "just started getting used to it and started to speak like they were speaking."

Tonya's ESL class was very small, and because students got to know each other too quickly and were able to relate to each other, they did not take the class seriously. Tonya explains that it got too informal to learn anything, so in her mind it was not really a class. Tonya

became motivated to learn English because of the friends she had in grade seven. Tonya's friend told her that she was going to skip grade 7 and go straight to grade 9. Tonya decided that she was just as smart and that if her friend could do it, she could do it.

Although Tonya's English is excellent, and she hardly has an accent, she describes her spoken English skills as "ok." Tonya points out that sometimes she has trouble explaining exactly what is on her mind, but she is, nonetheless, satisfied with her English. Tonya is also doing well in academic English. Both of Tonya's parents are professors of English, and they have been helping her with improving her English skills since she came to Canada. Tonya's parents taught her how to write "professional English," so that she would do well in writing essays for school. In fact, Tonya notes that her English "is not that bad as it should be."

***Canada is overrated.***

Tonya's initial feelings about Canada were as unpleasant as her current feelings about Canada. Tonya recalls: "I hated the place. I could not stand it here. It was probably the worst experience I had." When Tonya's father travelled to different parts of the world for work, Tonya's family had a predetermined period of time set in mind for staying in the country. With Canada it was a quite a different story. Her family decided to stay in Canada until they "get what they want," which was an undefined period of time. Tonya, her siblings, and her mother felt really homesick soon after coming to Canada. They all just wanted to go back. Tonya even decided that she was not going to learn English, because Tonya's plan was that if she does not learn English, her parents would eventually take her back to Egypt. On one occasion, Tonya remembers, her family made a decision to go back to Egypt, that, however, has not happened at that point.

Tonya's feelings about Canada have somewhat improved in the recent year but not enough for her to stay in the country. Tonya feels a bit more positive about some Canadian cities

than others. Tonya's memories of Vancouver, for example, are relatively good: "it's not as bad, but I still don't like it here." Tonya, nevertheless, did enjoy great weather and nice people in Vancouver. Tonya's memories, however, of Toronto and Calgary are less inspiring. Tonya's family stayed in Toronto only for one month, and then they had to move because they did not like it there. Similarly, Tonya memories of Calgary are limited mostly to unfriendly people, though Tonya did enjoy doing community work in Calgary. Although, according to Tonya, Calgary has a lot of opportunities, she found people over there "rough" and they "kind of drove [Tonya's family] out of the city." Tonya is, however, satisfied with London, Ontario. Moving to London was the first time Tonya moved on her own. First Tonya did not like it in London, but she did get to like it after only a short time. Tonya's friends want her to come back, but Tonya says: "I don't want to go back. I want to stay. Not that I like Canada, I just like the place."

Tonya is confident that Canada is "overrated." Tonya explains that when she goes back home and boasts to have a university degree from Canada, people over there will be impressed and will be full of emotions, such as: "oh, it's so cool. Canada is great, Canada is a bless." Tonya, however, argues that Canada is not that great after all. Tonya thinks that, for the most part, people are friendly in Canada; nevertheless, it is not enough to be entitled to a special designation of a "bless." In fact, it bothers Tonya that Canada "has such a high status in people's minds."

### ***Egyptian identity.***

If somebody asks Tonya about her nationality, she always replies that she is Egyptian. Moreover, Tonya claims that she "would never consider herself Canadian." Tonya points out that Egyptians are really nationalistic. Tonya further explains her indifference to Canada:

Because I travelled around, I seen people who hate us [Egyptians] and people who actually like us. So, I developed that kind of, I guess, sincerity to Egypt. And here, in

some places in Canada, I haven't had the best experiences. So, I would not consider myself to be one of them [Canadians].

Tonya argues that people from anywhere in the world know about Egyptian traditions and culture, whereas Canada does not have "a defined identity" and Canadians "don't necessarily have that huge identity." Tonya feels that Canadians are from "all over the place." Moreover, Tonya believes that it does not "take that much work to be a Canadian." For Tonya, a Canadian is someone who has a job here, speaks the language, has a passport, and simply has a desire to become Canadian. Tonya, however, cautions that she would not let Canada define who she is. The only reason Tonya wants Canadian citizenship is to get a passport for easier travelling experiences and also to get a better job somewhere else.

### ***Going back to Egypt?***

I could not help but ask Tonya if she thinks that her perception of Canada may improve over time as she attends the university here. Tonya's response, however, was ever worse than I expected. "No, I think I'd hate it more with time. I really don't like it here. Like I said, they get a lot more credit than they deserve." Tonya's explains that her dislike of the country most likely has to do with her mother's failure in finding a job in Canada. Tonya is more attached to her mother, and when her mother could not succeed, her mother, and, consequently, Tonya started to "hate" the country. Tonya's mother wanted to return to Egypt and start her old job again which influenced Tonya attitude toward Canada. In fact, Tonya suspects that if her mother had succeeded in finding a satisfactory job, Tonya would have probably liked Canada a lot more. Tonya's father, on the other hand, is quite content with Canada. He visits his family in Egypt once in a while, and when he does, Tonya notes that "all he would do is complain about the traffic, pollution, the people." Tonya's father considers himself Egyptian but he, nonetheless, is not planning on moving back. Tonya, however, is confident that she will go back to Egypt. Her

mother and siblings are already there, and the only reason that Tonya is still in Canada is because she was not accepted in university in Egypt. Thus, once Tonya completes her undergraduate degree in three years, she is most certain she will return.

### **5.3.3 Andrea and Vicky's story.**

#### ***Background.***

Both Andrea and Vicky are from India. There is, however, a difference in age as to when the girls came to Canada. Vicky came at a younger age, 11, whereas Andrea came when she was 14. Andrea has been in Canada for a total of two years less than Vicky. Both girls speak two languages: English and Hindi. Moreover, both girls are currently enrolled in the Schulich School of Medicine at UWO.

#### ***English or Hindi.***

When communicating, Andrea is most comfortable mixing Hindi and English because, as she argues, it is a normal thing to do in metropolitan cities in India. Vicky also mixes the two languages when communicating but for a different reason. Vicky explains that with her parents she has to use English sometimes because she has forgotten how to say certain words in Hindi. With her brother, Vicky claims that it is the opposite, she uses mostly English but mixes it with Hindi. With her grandparents, Vicky has to use Hindi because they do not understand any English. Vicky, however, uses only English with her friends. Vicky reasons: "the way I speak Hindi with my friends who know Hindi, like, it sounds awkward when I do it, so I don't. Like, I just stick with English for that reason." Whereas Vicky's thoughts proceed in English, Andrea's are often mixed: "depending on, like, if it's an Indian thing I am thinking about, then it will be more Hindi versus if it is more a school thing, then it will be more English." In addition, when Andrea is under a lot of stress, or if she is trying to recollect an event from her childhood, she thinks more in Hindi. Andrea clarifies that when she is under stress, she reverts back to her first

language: "I revert back to my original self, like when I came, which is like mixing Hindi and English, and it is really hard to communicate." Interestingly, when Andrea is in circumstances that are positive or when she feels happy or excited, her thoughts will be more in English.

Andrea claims that she has difficulty finding the right words for expressing her thoughts in both languages,

If I cannot find a word in Hindi, I will try to do it with an English word, and the same with English. Sometimes I want to say the Hindi word and then like 'no, wait' and then I have to think for the translations and then use that.

Andrea has difficulty finding the right words particularly when she is under a lot of stress: "I am thinking in Hindi but I want to express it in English, and because I am under so much stress, it is hard for me." Andrea also believes that she is losing "advanced level" Hindi skills because she no longer uses it as much as she used to. Vicky, on the other hand, does not have any problem expressing herself in English, though she does have a problem doing so in Hindi. Vicky's conversational Hindi has gotten much worse over the years that she has spent in Canada.

Vicky lost her Hindi accent fairly quickly when she came to Canada. She does remember, however, that when she still had a bit of an accent, some people would have a hard time understanding her. Andrea, unlike Vicky, has not lost her accent yet, which does make her feel different from the rest. Nevertheless, Andrea argues that she has made a lot of progress in improving her English since she came to Canada, and she has little choice but to accept the fact that she has an accent. In addition, Andrea also has a bit of an accent in Hindi. Andrea explains that having an accent makes her feel odd: "when I talk to people here, I have an accent. When I talk to people in India, I sound different too." Undoubtedly, having an accent not just in English but also in your first language can be very frustrating.

### ***Learning English and schooling in Canada.***

Both Andrea and Vicky learned English at school in India. Vicky explained that she "did know English just not to the fluency I have now." Andrea described her English skills as "sufficient to manage here." Andrea remembers that her "high school [in Canada] was not that great" because she had a hard time making friends. Because Andrea was not very successful in making Canadian friends, she decided to focus on studying, her family, and her culture. Andrea, unlike Vicky, was not placed in ESL classes. Andrea found that the educational system in Canada is quite different from that in India. Andrea notes that it is a lot more common for students in Canada to discuss things in a class and to complete creative writing assignments. Andrea had a difficult time getting used to such classroom standards, and thus struggled with English and social science courses and found it "hard to open up." Andrea actively participated only in science and math classes because she had a strong background in those areas, and, therefore, felt more comfortable in those classes. In addition, because some English words and phrases are used in different contexts in India, Andrea had to relearn using words and phrases in new contexts for her. For example, when Andrea asked for a rubber at school, people looked confused. It was only after some time in Canada that Andrea realized that the term Canadians use is actually "an eraser." Vicky, on the other hand, found that she did not have much opportunity to practice communication skills in English. Vicky would be given a lot of grammar exercise and "sentence sheets" where words were jumbled and she had to make a sentence, which Vicky did not find that useful for improving her English.

Whereas Andrea was motivated to learn English when she was still in India because she was living in a "metropolitan city and it is just a thing there, like almost everyone does it," Vicky was motivated because "English is a common language in all parts of the world." In Canada, Andrea was motivated because she wanted to "fit in with kids here," and Vicky wanted to

improve her English because she was well aware that she will need the language to fill out applications for scholarships and simply to "get a message across."

Vicky as well as Andrea feel confident about their spoken English. Andrea, however, claims that she always mispronounces words. As for their academic English is concerned, both girls feel good about writing scientific reports, but they are less comfortable with writing, for example, English essays. Vicky explains that she is "not the best" in articulating her ideas. Vicky, as well as Andrea, struggles with "writing creative English," but they both can write "objective English pretty well." Vicky elaborates on her understanding of English vocabulary:

I try to read subjects that are other than science and I always struggle with getting the main idea just because my understanding of words or ideas is not as someone who, like, read English very well and, like, studies English.

### ***Indian or Canadian?***

Andrea identifies herself as both Indian and Canadian. For her, Canadian citizenship means simply enjoying the cultural diversity because she believes that it is "a big part of being Canadian." Vicky, on the other hand, thinks of herself as Canadian "even though born in India." Vicky reasons that she relates more to people in Canada than she does in India, and, therefore, perceives herself more Canadian than Indian. Vicky does not relate to recent Indian immigrants but at the same time she does not relate to Canadians "who've always lived in Canada all of their life." Vicky feels that she is caught in the middle. Vicky explains that sometimes she feels that she does not belong to either culture:

Even some of my friends, like the ones that are born here, I feel like they haven't gone through the same experiences as me. So, sometimes I feel like I don't really relate to them. But then there are some people who have recently, like some of my friends have recently moved from India and even with them, I don't feel that I relate to them just because I don't have their accent or I don't feel as strongly about our culture and stuff.

For Vicky, being Canadian means having Canadian citizenship first and foremost, which entails voting privileges as well as "just living the lifestyle," which, according to Vicky, is "a lot



different from how it is in India". Vicky believes that both Canada and India define who she is as an individual. It is difficult for Vicky to pick one over the other because she has lived in Canada for almost as long as she did in India. Vicky, however, notes that she relates to Canada "a lot more" because she has lived in Canada "more recently than in India." Vicky has been in Canada for so long that she lost "touch with friends and even some of the relatives" back in India. Vicky points out that her parents often ask her, if she had to choose, whether she would want to live in Canada or in India, and Vicky always replies that would want to live in Canada. Vicky concludes that her life is here rather than in India.

Andrea also believes that both India and Canada define her, but she is leaning towards Canadian identity. Andrea explains that until a few years ago, she considered herself more Indian. Her perceptions have, however, changed since her last trip to India. At one point, Andrea was even thinking of moving back to India, but last summer when Andrea went to India for a visit, her "perceptions completely changed." Andrea remembers that when she went back, she "totally did not fit in." Thus, Andrea has since decided that she fits in "better here." Andrea is not sure if she agrees with the culture in India. In particular, Andrea finds that in India "kids there are really dependent on their parents and they are really ungrateful to their parents for different things." Andrea adds that young adults back in India are "really rude to their parents even though their parents are supporting them." Moreover, Andrea does not feel safe in India when she goes there because "there is a lot of crime there." Here, in Canada, Andrea feels independent. She also feels that she has a life of her own, whereas when Andrea was in India she mostly stayed indoors and went out only when she had company because she was not comfortable going out on her own. As a result of her experience in India during her recent visit, Andrea feels that Canada is her home.

### ***Coming to Canada.***

Vicky was not very happy when she found out from her parents that she would be moving to Canada. Vicky did not want to move because she did not know what to expect of Canada. Additionally, Vicky was satisfied with the life in India, so she was not looking forward towards the big change. Overall, however, Vicky's experience in terms of immigration to Canada was quite positive, though fitting into the new culture and learning the new language was a bit of a struggle for Vicky. Likewise, Andrea did want to move because she was happy with the life she had in India. Besides, Andrea was not sure how things are going to work out for her in Canada. Nevertheless, over time, Andrea started enjoying her new life in Canada.

### ***First language skills.***

Unlike Andrea, who is "pretty good" in Hindi because she uses it on a daily basis, Vicky believes that her Hindi skills are "not very good." When Vicky communicates with her parents in Hindi, because they do not speak any English, she often has to ask them for clarification regarding certain words before she can reply back to them. Vicky also cannot read or write in Hindi anymore. Andrea, on the other hand, has always struggled with academic Hindi, but she can, nonetheless, read and write in Hindi. Vicky explains that she always gets words mixed up in Hindi: "I mean to say something but it comes out, like, as something with similar words but different meaning. Like, I feel that happens a lot with me."

Andrea maintains her first language skills by "conversing with family and girls back home in Hindi." Andrea adds that she also watches Hindi movies, which she believes is a "big factor" in maintaining her native language. Vicky also enjoys watching Indian movies which help her a little bit with Hindi.

### ***Happy in Canada?***

Vicky and Andrea have adjusted well to life in Canada. Vicky, however, finds that after so many years in Canada, her family still faces a lot of struggle in terms of employment and living expenses. Vicky also notes that her parents have to work a lot to support her brother and herself. Nonetheless, Vicky is quite satisfied with the lifestyle she has now and the quality of life in Canada. Vicky has not travelled back to India since she arrived in Canada. Vicky explains that it is really expensive to travel and that she has also been quite busy with school. Also, her parents prefer that they all go together rather than individually, and it has been difficult for Vicky's parents to take time away from work.

Andrea has travelled to India twice in the past, but because of the negative experience on her last trip to India, she is not planning on going back any time soon. In fact, Andrea argues that she is "going to wait as long as possible" before going back to India for another visit. Andrea is quite happy in Canada and she believes that the move to Canada "was a great decision on [her] parents' part."

### **5.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented my study findings. I have introduced cases one a time and examined in detail the experiences of the study participants. In the following and concluding chapter, I will synthesize the findings from all of the cases and identify the major themes that emerged from my findings.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

The goals of this study were to show the complexity of identity perceptions of the 1.5 generation and the difficulties this immigrant generation faces in becoming fluent English speakers and proficient academic writers in the English language. Perceiving oneself as Canadian, as is the case with most of the participants in this study, does not necessarily translate into being a proficient English speaker, and vice versa. Although the participants in this study felt comfortable using conversational English, some expressed concerns about things like pronunciation, creative writing, correct grammar usage, and vocabulary knowledge. In addition, the participants voiced their concerns about their first language skills which varied from poor to proficient with occasional difficulty finding the right words. The purpose of this study was to investigate English language learning experiences and first language skills loss. Moreover, this study attempted to connect national identity perceptions of the 1.5 generation with English and first language experiences in Canada. In the following sections, I will provide a summary of the findings from both the focus group and individual interviews. I will also address the themes that have emerged from the data, discuss the implications, and point out the limitations of this study as well as suggest future directions for research.

#### 6.2 Summary of Findings: Focus Group

##### 6.2.1 Learning English.

All of the focus group participants are still in the process of acquiring conversational as well as academic proficiency in English. Although Rosa and Austin have spent 4 and 6 years, respectively, in Canada, they have not acquired native-like fluency in spoken English yet. They are, however, starting to feel more comfortable in English than in their native language. Wendy,

Laura, and Mike have been in Canada for only a short time, and they attend ESL classes to improve their English. All of the focus group participants expressed a concern about pronouncing certain words because they are not sure whether they are saying as well as using the words in context correctly. In addition, the participants, in particular Wendy, complained that sometimes they are misunderstood because they do not have the appropriate vocabulary to express their feelings and thoughts. Because Rosa and Austin have been in Canada for an extended period of time, they are more or less comfortable using English in most social settings. The rest of the focus group participants, however, are less confident in their English abilities when they have to use it in most social settings. Taking this further, other than attending ESL classes and completing homework assignments, the focus group interviewees do little to improve their academic English. Some believe that listening to music, watching movies, and using Facebook help them to improve their English. It is, however, understandable that after being at school the whole day, doing homework, and additionally attending a homework club, there is little time and interest left for the perceived boring activities intended to improve English.

### **6.2.2 First language skills: any changes?**

Rosa and Austin appear to be the only ones who started feeling less comfortable when using their first language. They are also the ones who have been in Canada the longest among the focus group participants. Rosa uses English with her siblings and a mix of Acholi and English with her parents. Similarly, Austin uses English to communicate with his friends but Farsi when speaking with his mother. Austin admits that it is becoming difficult for him to use Farsi, and he prefers not to use it outside of his home. The rest of the focus group participants have not experienced first language loss, and the reason for that is, being in Canada for only a short period of time and not having yet distanced themselves from their first language community.

### **6.2.3 National identity: no changes.**

Some of the focus group interviewees expressed a feeling of belonging to Canada when they are around Canadian friends; nonetheless, none of the focus group participants claimed to have Canadian identity. Rosa and Austin came the closest to perceiving themselves as Canadian because they have been here for an extended period of time. However, since neither Rosa nor Austin has an official Canadian citizen status yet, they feel they do not have the right to claim Canadian identity. Likewise, none of the other participants claimed to perceive themselves as Canadian, possible explanation being that they had spent only a short period of time in Canada at the time of the study.

## **6.3 Summary of Findings: Individual Interviews**

### **6.3.1 English skills: conversational and academic.**

The findings in this study demonstrate that 1.5 generation students learn conversational English shortly after coming to Canada but continue to have difficulty with academic and creative writing in English. All of the study participants claimed to be fluent in English, however, six out of seven participants, Jack, Waldon, Anthony, Dina, Vicky, and Andrea, expressed having at least some difficulty writing in English for academic purposes. Jack and Waldon readily agreed that their English grammar skills are poor. Anthony claimed that his writing is often too “convoluted” and thus he seeks support at the Student Development Centre. Dina argued that it takes her a longer time than Canadian-born students to complete writing assignments because she spends a lot of time editing her work. Andrea is doing well with writing scientific reports, but she is not comfortable with creative writing. Similarly, Vicky is doing very well with writing scientific reports, but she has always avoided taking English courses at the university level because creative writing in English is not her strength. Tonya, however, claimed that she has no problem with academic writing. Although Tonya has been in Canada for only

four years, the shortest period of time compared to other interviewees, she did not acknowledge having any difficulty with writing in English. The reason, as Tonya explained, is that both of her parents are professors of English who taught her to write professional English when she was younger. Tonya is an exception to this study in terms of her English skills. She has been in Canada for only a short period of time, and, already, one can hardly find any trace of her being a non-native speaker of English.

### **6.3.2 First language regression.**

After having spent years in an English-speaking environment, it hardly comes as a surprise that 1.5ers start losing their first language skills. While some 1.5ers, as is the case with Waldon, Dina, Vicky, Tonya, and Andrea, simply start losing their native language skills because they no longer use it in their daily lives, others, such as Jack, never really had a chance to develop his first language proficiency before having to start learning English. Jack left China when he was only 10 years of age, and as a result of his early departure to Canada, he can only say simple things in his mother tongue. Anthony, on the other hand, was the oldest among my study participants when he came to Canada; hence he has not encountered any problems with his first language skills in Canada, yet. Because Anthony was fifteen when he left his home country, his Russian language skills were at a level of any other adult who is a native speaker of Russian.

Jack, Waldon, Dina, Vicky, and Tonya have difficulty communicating in their first language. They often cannot find the right words to express their thoughts in their native language, thus they will often mix English and their mother tongue when communicating with their parents or other family members. My participants never learned some of the terms in their first language to describe their experiences as adults, and, consequently, they substitute certain native language terms with English words. Because my participants think mostly in English, they have to translate into their native language when they do use it. Thus, their language dominance

has reversed from the native language to English. For the participants in this study, in a way, their first language has become their second language because it is the language they cannot use to express themselves to a desired degree, and thus want to improve it.

### **6.3.3 National identity perceptions.**

Except for Tonya, all of the study participants claim Canadian identity to some degree. None of the participants, however, position themselves as solely Canadian without announcing their primary national identity. While Tonya denies having any national identity ties to Canada because of her mother's negative experience in Canada, other interviewees all perceive themselves as Canadian with a hyphen. Waldon, Andrea, Vicky, Dina, and Anthony could not renounce the identity of the country they were born in. Some participants have spent an almost equal number of years in Canada and in their native country, which makes it difficult for them to choose one national identity over the other. For Dina, Anthony, Andrea, and Vicky, both the land where they were born and the land where they live now are their home. For them, taking solely Canadian identity is impossible because they were brought up in a different country, their cultural values are different, and their first language is other than English. At the same time, Dina, Anthony, Andrea, Vicky as well as Jack cannot not deny the fact that Canada has been part of their life for many years, and that Canada gave them an opportunity to become who they are now – educated, successful young adults with high aspirations; thus, they do perceive themselves as Canadian. Jack has a slightly different take on his national identity. Although he does not deny his Chinese heritage as well as his Canadian citizenship, he envisions having an international identity because he believes that in this globalized world national identity pride is no longer as pronounced. For Jack, being Canadian or Chinese does not mean anything; he has, what Rumbaut and Rumbaut (1976) call, an uncommitted heart.



## 6.4 Emerging Themes

Most of the participants had little knowledge of English when they came to Canada; thus they learned the language by simply being immersed in the environment with additional help that some study participants received in ESL classes. Hence, the first emerging theme is the encounter with the English language and a feeling of alienation when in class with native English speakers. My study participants can be divided into two groups with regard to being immersed in the English speaking environment: those who learned the language just before (Jack and Vicky) or shortly after (Waldon, Andrea, Anthony, Dina, Tonya) the window of opportunity closes for acquiring native-like proficiency in a second language as established in research (Bialystok & Miller, 1999; Bialystok, 1997; Singleton, 2005; Bongaerts, 2005). With the exception of Tonya, the participants who learned English after their window of opportunity for acquiring native-like proficiency in a second language has closed, clearly have an accent and have some trouble with English vocabulary or grammar. Those participants who were lucky enough to come to Canada before their window of opportunity has closed, sound native-like, though, with the exception of Vicky, they also have some difficulty with the English language structure. Having an accent, however, in a country largely made up of immigrants does not appear to negatively affect the young immigrants' self-esteem.

From this study, it appears that 1.5 generation youth invest in learning English primarily for socialization purposes: to fit in with the rest of the Canadians and not stand out like a newcomer, to be able to understand, and to communicate with native-English speakers, but also to succeed in academia and future career. Following this further, when these youth achieve their goal of becoming proficient English speakers, and after having been in Canada for an extended period of time, which varied for my participants, generation 1.5ers begin to lose their native language. In this study, everyone, with the exception of Anthony, claimed to have some loss of

first language skills. Some participants expressed confusion because their English skills are not that strong, and yet their first language skills are no longer as they used to be. Thus, the second theme is subtractive bilingualism which connotes learning a second language at the cost of losing mother tongue. Jack, Waldon, Dina, Vicky, Andrea, and Tonya expressed a concern about their first language skills. Over the years, it has become somewhat more difficult for the participants to communicate their thoughts in their native language. Paradoxically, most of the interviewees have not yet acquired native-like English proficiency but have already lost some of their first language skills. At least several individuals involved in this study can be referred to, as what Singhal (2004) calls, dual none-native speakers because they do not have full proficiency in either language. Language loss can be tied to the participants' sense of belonging or lack thereof, which takes us to the next theme.

Another emerging theme is hybrid national identity or identity with a hyphen. None of the interviewees claim to be solely Canadian. Although most of the participants lean more towards Canadian national identity, they also identify with their country of origin. Thus, even after completing much of their education in Canada and having spent almost as much time in Canada as in the country of birth, 1.5 generation individuals cannot ignore and continue to claim the identity of their native land and of their parents. Some participants expressed a feeling of not belonging to any nation but at the same time being stuck between two; for example, Dina uses the term the "middler" to self-identify because she cannot always relate to either culture. However, the country of origin continues to play a role in identity perceptions, and possibly other aspects of life, for 1.5 generation youth. A possible explanation for a lack of claim to solely Canadian identity by immigrant youth can include such undeniable factors as one's ethnicity or

accent, and, therefore, the hyphen in national self-identification serves the purpose of being able to avoid choosing only one ethnic or national identity.

### **6.5 Responding to Research Questions**

The first research question guiding the study was if and how national identity perceptions of 1.5 generation youth have changed since their arrival in Canada. The findings clearly indicate that national identity perceptions of young immigrants have changed over the years they spent in Canada. Individually interviewed participants, with the exception of Tonya, all claim Canadian identity with a hyphen. Most participants were leaning towards Canadian identity, though they could not renounce the identity of their native country. It was difficult for the study participants to choose one national identity over the other, and, therefore, they used the hyphen in national identity identification in order to avoid making the choice. This finding supports Phinney and Rotheram's (1987) argument that children raised in a pluralistic society become "bicultural," which means that they can relate to the values, behaviour patterns, and attitudes of the host country as well as the country of birth. In essence, as researchers have noted (Asher & Case, 2008; Singhal, 2004; Carhill et al., 2008) and as this study shows, 1.5 generation youth function between two cultures, speak both languages, and balance between two sets of values. Being able to relate to two different cultures makes it difficult for 1.5 generation youth to make a decision as to their national identity. The participants in this study have spent much of their lifetime in Canada, which makes it difficult for them to deny Canadian identity, yet they have been born and raised in a different country which they cannot abandon in their identity perceptions.

This study shows that national identity can, in fact, be influenced by language. As stated above, the research participants with the exception of Tonya, claim Canadian identity. Although Tonya is a proficient speaker of English, her comfort with the English language did not influence her national identity perception. The rest of the individually interviewed participants are more

comfortable using English than their mother tongue and, in addition, they are leaning towards Canadian identity. For the study participants, language and identity are clearly related. The participants expressed that they relate more to Canadian peers than they do to peers from their home land, they relate to Canadian norms and values, and they respect the pluralistic nature of the host country. Being more comfortable in English can mean that 1.5 generation youth adapt to Canadian ways, and thus perceive themselves as Canadian. As researchers note (Liang, 2006; Heller, 1987), identity is constructed by language, and through language a person negotiates a sense of self. As Byrd Clark (2012) argues, the way a person negotiates one's identity through language has relevance for the ways a person represents oneself in the eyes of others - this has been illustrated in this study - English proficiency has influenced the way 1.5 generation youth perceive themselves in terms of their nationality and the way they are seen by others.

## **6.6 Implications**

### **6.6.1 Education.**

As discussed in the beginning of this paper, because of the increasing number of youth immigrating to Canada, we need to better understand the experiences of this immigrant generation in order to take measures to help them succeed in school. It has been established in research (e.g. Cummins, 2000) and also demonstrated in this study that immigrant youth learn conversational skills within the first two to four years, whereas it may take them up to seven years to achieve academic proficiency in a second language. It is clear that academic English is absolutely necessary to achieve full potential in academic subjects, and seven years may be too long of a time period for youth who immigrate when they are already in their final years of secondary school and who hope to continue studies at the post-secondary level. Moreover, after a few years in Canada, 1.5 generation youth, as Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) points out, cannot be considered ESL students. Instead, 1.5 generation youth should be referred to as non-native

speakers, which means that they need special assistance with the English language that is more advanced than what is offered in ESL classes and which places a primary focus on English skills in academia. In addition, it would be beneficial to have language assistance courses for 1.5 generation students in post-secondary institutions. Currently, students who have been enrolled in a secondary school for a period of four years or more are not required to take English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL. Consequently, post-secondary institutions assume that these students are adequately prepared for college or university which may not necessarily be the case. Following this further, universities offer ESL courses for international students but none for students who are non-native speakers, yet who may need extra help with their academic English. With the universities' discretion, immigrant students may be allowed to register for ESL classes meant for international students, but such courses, nonetheless, may not be suitable for students who went through secondary school in Canada. Taken the above-stated arguments into account, schools as well as universities need to think about providing support to students who after some years in Canada can no longer be referred to as English as a second language learners, yet need support with academic English.

### **6.6.2 Social implications.**

Since 1971, Canada recognizes the plurality of cultures and proudly claims to be a multicultural society. Multicultural diversity is something that many new Canadians enjoy because they have the opportunity to maintain their traditions and cultural beliefs. Canada's openness and acceptability of other cultures has proven to be working well over the years; nonetheless, it is to the advantage of the country that new immigrants and, in particularly their children, over the years spent in Canada, will perceive themselves as Canadian and feel proud of the country that is so welcoming to newcomers. If national identity perceptions of 1.5 generation lean towards Canada, it is most likely the case that this generation and the kids of this generation

will make their living in Canada, remain in the country, and contribute to its economic well-being in the long-term. In general, Canada has been most obliging to newcomers, and thus it is important to understand whether this acceptability has served Canada well in return, and, if it has, then Canada has been doing the right thing over the years. If, on the other hand, immigrants, and more specifically 1.5 generation youth, do not see themselves as Canadian, additional measures would have to be taken to help immigrant youth in adjusting to life in Canada. Additional measures can include, as discussed above, education specifically targeting immigrant youth and also other cultural integration involvements.

### **6.7 Limitations and Challenges of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences of 1.5 generation youth in Canada, and while this study employing a case study approach provides a detailed picture of the experiences and perceptions of the 1.5 generation individuals, the findings of this study are not necessarily generalizable to other 1.5 generation individuals because the participants involved in this study are not representative of all 1.5 generation youth in Canada. Second, this study did not focus on a particular age at the time of arrival in Canada, nor social class backgrounds, but was more general by focusing on the ages stretching between 10 and 15 at the time of immigration. Clearly, age and social status can play critical roles in national identity formation as well as in acquiring language proficiency, thus the experiences and consequent identity perceptions of a ten year old child of highly educated immigrants is likely to be quite different from the experiences of a fifteen year old child of immigrant parents from a working class background. Lastly, the individually interviewed participants in this study were all post-secondary students who clearly succeeded in mastering English to a level of a college/university student, hence the accounts of my participants cannot serve as an accurate portrayal of 1.5 generation youth who may have not gone on to post-secondary education or may have not completed high school.

One of the challenges of this study was interpreting the contradictory responses the participants have occasionally provided with regard to their national identity perceptions as well language practices used at home and other social settings. It happened that some of the participants' earlier responses varied from their later responses, which made it difficult for me to interpret their identity perceptions and language learning experiences. National identity perceptions can be very complicated, and, therefore, it is not unreasonable that 1.5 generation youth have an ambiguous sense of belonging to a nation. The contradictory identity perceptions and language learning experiences need to be addressed in future research in order to gain a better understanding of the experiences of 1.5 generation youth.

Another challenge of this study was accessibility to 1.5 generation individuals. It was impossible for me to identify or locate 1.5 generation students because such information is not retained or not provided by the university upon request. Thus, the only way I could recruit research participants was by relying on recruitment posters and hoping that potential participants contact me. Next challenge of this study was time limitation. Because the participant recruitment and data collection took several months, the time allotted for my research did not permit me to follow up on the interviews. In addition to that, research participants had busy schedules and had little time to participate in extra curriculum activities, such as spending additional time participating in the study. Taking some of these limitations and challenges into account, I propose future directions for research.

### **6.8 Directions for Further Research**

In this study, I have explored the current experiences of recent 1.5 generation immigrants as well as the past experiences of young adults belonging to the 1.5 generation. I propose that future research should examine the experiences and perceptions of 1.5 generation individuals belonging to an older age category. The intent of such research would be to learn if older

individuals belonging to the 1.5 generation perceive themselves any more or less Canadian than their younger counterparts, if older generation 1.5ers eventually become proficient English language speakers, and if first language skills deteriorate further with time. A cross-sectional qualitative study stretching over a period of time and following the trajectories and experiences of 1.5 generation individuals belonging to different age groups would describe and compare the experiences of the 1.5 generation individuals of various ages. This kind of study would show if any changes in national identity perceptions take place later on in life with decades being spent in Canada. In addition, one could see how investments in certain representations of language, culture, and identity might further develop and shift over time including where they could appear to be more stuck.

Furthermore, future research could also examine and compare the experiences of 1.5 generation youth of certain ethnicity or nationality. Research could, for example, compare the experiences of 1.5 generation youth from Europe with those from Latin America, Asia, or the Middle East. From the proposed study, we could gain valuable information, such as if and how the culture and the country of origin play a role in national identity formation upon immigration to Canada.

Moreover, future research could attempt to understand the experiences of 1.5 generation youth who have not been successful in secondary schools in Canada. Such a study could identify 1.5 generation students in schools and attempt to understand their struggles with learning and using English for academic purposes. An understanding of the social and academic experiences of 1.5 generation students at school would assist educational institutions in implementing teaching and learning practices that would help 1.5 generation students succeed academically. Considering the increasing number of 1.5 generation individuals in Canada, it is important to



conduct more studies to examine the early experiences of this immigrant generation, in particular, because early experiences in the country shape future attitudes and perceptions which eventually may work against or in favour of Canada.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

There is a lack of research on 1.5 generation youth even though the number of immigrant youth has been increasing in the recent years. This study addressed issues that have not been examined in the past in relation to 1.5 generation youth in Canadian context. This qualitative case study contributes to our understanding of the unique experiences of 1.5 generation youth with English and the mother tongue upon arrival in Canada. Moreover, this research indicates that immigrant youth have special needs that have to be addressed in the field of education. I suggest that educational institutions should offer extra support for immigrant youth with the academic English. Furthermore, this study examines national identity perceptions of 1.5 generation individuals as well as how these perceptions influence and are influenced by English language learning. This study demonstrates that 1.5 generation youth use the hyphen to self-identify in terms of nationality; however, because these youth are more comfortable in English than their first language and feel little connection to their cultural background, their national identity perceptions lean toward Canada. Thus, I suggest that more research needs to focus on the lived experiences of 1.5 generation youth in order to help them integrate into Canadian society and achieve their full potential.

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Appendix 1A  
(Letter of Information for Individual Interviews)

**The experiences of 1.5 Generation youth with First language maintenance and English  
Language Learning**

LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Introduction**

My name is Olena Yuzefova and I am a Master's student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into 1.5 generation identity perceptions and language learning experiences and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

**Purpose of the study**

The aims of this study are to learn about identity perceptions of 1.5 generation and how these perceptions influence and are influenced by English language learning and first language maintenance practices. The study will investigate the possible challenges 1.5 generation faces in having to balance identity perceptions and language learning experiences.

**If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in an interview which will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. The interview will be conducted in a study room at the Weldon Library at the University of Western Ontario. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed into written format. There may be questions that arise from your interview or clarifications needed, and if that is the case, I would contact you by e-mail for this purpose. Depending on your interview data, you may be invited to participate in a focus group discussion. Your participation in the focus group is voluntary. Also, your participation in an interview does not obligate you to participate in a focus group. Details for the focus group will be shared with you once the interviews have been completed.

**Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure participants' anonymity. Data will be stored in locked space and will be accessible by supervisor and myself only. Data obtained during the interview will be destroyed after the research project is over.

**Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your academic status.

Appendix 1B  
(Letter of Information for Focus Group)

**The experiences of 1.5 Generation youth with First language maintenance and English  
Language Learning**

LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Introduction**

My name is Olena Yuzefova and I am a Master's student at the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research into 1.5 generation identity perceptions and language learning experiences and would like to invite your son/daughter to participate in this study.

**Purpose of the study**

The aims of this study are to learn about identity perceptions of 1.5 generation and how these perceptions influence and are influenced by English language learning and first language maintenance practices. The study will investigate the possible challenges 1.5 generation faces in having to balance identity perceptions and language learning experiences.

**If you agree to participate**

Your son/daughter will participate in a focus group interview which will take approximately 45-60 minutes of his/her time. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into written format. The focus group interview will be conducted at London Public Library. A focus group is an interview comprised of a few participants (in this case, four or five youth participants) and the researcher.

**Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your child's name nor information which could identify your child will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to insure participants' anonymity. Data will be stored in locked space and will be accessible by supervisor and myself only. Data obtained during the interview will be destroyed after the research project is over.

**Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your son/daughter to participate. Your son/daughter may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on his/her participation in the LUSO program.

Appendix 2A

(Consent Form for Individual Interviews)

**The experiences of 1.5 Generation youth with First language maintenance and English Language Learning**

*Olena Yuzefova.*

*Faculty of Education. University of Western Ontario.*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:

Appendix 2B

(Consent for Focus Group)

**The experiences of 1.5 Generation youth with First language maintenance and English Language Learning**

*Olena Yuzefova*

*Faculty of Education. University of Western Ontario.*

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree that my son/daughter may participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name participant (please print):

Signature of participant:

Name of Parent/Guardian (please print):

Signature Parent/Guardian:

Date:

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

Date:



## Appendix 3

### Interview Schedule

#### **Background Information**

Your current age: \_\_

Your age at arrival to Canada: \_\_

- Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family (where you were born and raised, where your parents are from, do you have siblings—how old, where do they live, language use, what kinds of work or occupation do you do?)
- How many languages do you speak?
- What language(s) do you use at home? With your spouse? With siblings? Friends?
- How do you identify yourself or self-identify, for example, if someone asks you where're you're from, what do you say?
- What do you think it means to be a Canadian citizen?  
Do you perceive yourself as Canadian?
- Can you describe what your initial feelings were about your move to Canada?
- What are your current feelings about moving to Canada?

#### **Language Learning and Schooling Experiences**

- Can you tell me where you attended elementary and secondary school?
- What is the highest academic level you have achieved in Canada? (High school/university/college/post-secondary)?
- Did you formally study English and/or your first (native) language, if so where?
- How old were you when you began studying English, and for how long did you study it?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your English learning experiences?
- What has motivated you to learn English and/or to maintain your first language?

### **Personal Views of Linguistic Proficiency and Competence(s):**

- How do you feel about your spoken English?
- How do you feel about your academic English?
- In which language do you feel most comfortable communicating?
- What kinds of things do you do to improve your English?
- What do you do or how do you maintain your first language skills?
- Are you fluent in spoken (your first language)? Can you use it in most social situations?
- Do you consider yourself to be academically fluent in your first language?
- In which contexts do you feel more comfortable communicating in English or your native language? In other words, when and where do you use and are more comfortable in using English/native language?
- For example, which language(s) do you use in your home environment? Does it depend on circumstances? Explain.
- Do you ever feel like you are forgetting your first language? Are there times when you cannot find the right words when you communicate with your family, friends?

### **Travel experiences:**

- Do you travel? Have you traveled back to your native country? If so, how often?
- How are you seen when you go back to visit friends or family in your native country, and how do you feel when you're there?

Appendix 4

(Recruitment Poster)

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

Identity and the experiences of 1.5 Generation youth with First language maintenance and English Language Learning

**Individuals who arrived in Canada between the ages 12-18, are permanent Canadian residents/citizens, and who are currently no older than 25 years of age are invited to participate in the study.**

**Participants have to be competent in communicating their experiences in English.**

The objective of this study is to learn about identity perceptions and language learning experiences of the 1.5 generation. The term 1.5 generation refers to those who immigrate early in life, who do not feel that they are either "first generation" referring to immigrants themselves, or "second generation" referring to the first generation of a family born in the new country. This study focuses on generation 1.5 identity perceptions in relation to their motivation to learn English and maintain first language competence. It is important to learn about identity perceptions of generation 1.5 because this generation constitutes a large proportion of newcomers to Canada, thus we have to be aware of the issues this generation faces. This study will investigate what constitutes a national identity, how it is shaped for generation 1.5, and who has the right to claim a "national" identity.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

# Olena Yuzefova

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### EDUCATION

M.Ed.

Curriculum Studies  
Multiliteracies and Multilingualism Focus  
*University of Western Ontario* 2012

B.A Honours

Psychology/Sociology Double Major  
*University of Western Ontario* 2010

M.Ed. Thesis

Title: National Identity Perceptions and the Experiences of 1.5 Generation Youth with English Learning and First Language Loss  
Supervisor: Julie Byrd Clark

### RELEVANT TRAINING

Spring Perspectives on Teaching Conference  
*University of Western Ontario* 2012

Future Professor Workshop Series: Path to Teaching Excellence  
*University of Western Ontario* 2011-2012

The Advanced Teaching Program  
*University of Western Ontario* 2011

TA Training Program  
*University of Western Ontario* 2010

### RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

Community School Program Instructor  
*YMCA of Western Ontario* 2012

International Language Instructor (Supply)  
*Thames Valley District School Board* 2008-Present

Language Interpreter  
*CanTalk Language and Interpreting Services* 2008-Present