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Changes in language learning beliefs while abroad

by

Alyssa Jeter

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Abstract

Investigating the connections between changes in language learning beliefs and their connections with student interactions while abroad, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with five alumni and one professor who attended a college situated in Switzerland. The researcher analyzed the interview data in-depth with a case study approach in order to find connections between the changes in belief and potential changes in behavior.

Overall the data suggests that all alumni interviewed experienced some change in their language learning beliefs. Those that exhibited the most change in their interactions also experienced the greatest changes in their beliefs. Many of the reported belief changes centered around pivotal language learning experiences that took place at various points during each alumna's or alumnus's time abroad rather than gradually over the time abroad itself. The data suggests that institutions should focus more on helping students embrace and learn from their linguistic struggles to attain greater self-efficacy.

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Introduction

The university language students' dream of immersing themselves abroad to perfect their language skills becomes a reality for many every semester and the number of participants grows each year. According to the International Institute of Education, the number of students studying abroad globally has increased by 60% since the year 2000 (International Institution of Education as cited in Number of students studying abroad on rise globally, 2009). Contrary to the popular belief, however, merely staying in the country where the target language is spoken does not automatically lead to measurable language gain. Several scholars have begun to reveal how much language gain and language use abroad depends on the interplay of student personality traits, personal beliefs and the surrounding environment during their time abroad (Ginsberg & Miller, 2000; Isabelli- Garcìa, 2006; Jackson, 2008; Magnan & Back, 2007; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005; Polanyi, 1995).

Although students must take classes abroad during their sojourn, sometimes even in the target language, what students choose to do independently outside of the classroom walls can lead to the creation of more expansive social networks that permit more natural exposure to the target language (Freed & Segalowitz, 2004; Isabelli-Garcìa, 2006; Magnan & Back, 2007). This time outside of the classroom also provides the students a chance to connect more directly with the target language and culture on their own terms. Many students, however, often report regrets about not having taken enough advantage of this time to make contact with native speakers and practice their language skills (Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005; Mendelson, 2004).

In investigating the impact of learning experiences both at home and abroad, some researchers hypothesize that a student's psychological and emotional reaction to these interactive situations could be shaped by the beliefs that they hold about language learning (Horwitz, 1988;

Miller & Ginsberg, 1995; Mori, 1999; Yang, 1999). Given more time, students have more

opportunities to process their cultural and linguistic experiences; experiences which may lead to

a greater shift in attitude and offer more potential for language use (Amuzie &Winke, 2009;

Yang, 2011).The following study was conceived to investigate more deeply how these

perceptions and language learning beliefs of study abroad students shift over time and whether or

not these changes affect interactional behavior. In addition to illuminating more about how

student epistemological beliefs fit into the study abroad context, this study aims to contribute to

the continued dialogue between student experiences while trying to learn a language abroad and

the program developers who offer the experience.

Chapter 1

Review of the Literature

Study Abroad

As previously mentioned, study abroad programs in universities are on the rise and a few universities have even believed them important enough to consider requiring students to participate in such a program to earn a bachelor's degree (Royall, 2005). Currently, the term "study abroad" can cover any amount of time that a student spends studying at a school located in a country other than their country of origin. This term may apply to any age of student and any time duration from a few weeks to several years if the student enrolls at a university abroad. More recently, the majority of students who study abroad do not major in a language and most opt to stay for a semester or less (Dwyer, 2004; Magnan & Back, 2007; Norris, 2008; Ogden, 2007). Due to the range of time spent abroad and the variety of backgrounds and student majors, each exploration of a study abroad experience is truly anchored to its time, place and circumstances.

The majority of study abroad research in the field of applied linguistics has investigated the potential for language gain in a study abroad situation (Freed, 1995; Freed & Segalowitz, 2004; Hernandez, 2010; Isabellì-Garcia, 2006; Kinginger, 2009; Lord, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007; Mendelson, 2004; Miller & Ginsberg, 1995; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005). Factors related to language gain studied have been out of class contact (Isabellì-Garcia, 2006; Magnan & Back, 2007; Mendelson, 2004), motivation (Hernandez, 2010; Isabellì-Garcia, 2006), identity (Block, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2009; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005), listening comprehension (Mendelson, 2004), fluency and accuracy (Lord, 2009), gender (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Polanyi, 1995) and communicative competence (Miller & Ginsberg, 1995). All of these

studies have produced results with a large amount of variation among the proficiency scores of participants. Researchers hypothesize that increasing proficiency while abroad depends on a mixture of factors such as: learner perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, strategies, previous coursework, and time spent on task. Given this variation, the idea of a "study abroad advantage" has even been challenged.

Some researchers have sought to challenge the advantage by comparing study abroad language gains with home classroom gains (DeKeyser, 1991; Freed & Segalowitz, 2004). Freed's and Segalowitz's (2004) study comparing student performance in classrooms, study abroad, and intense domestic immersion programs suggest that the study abroad context may not be the most conducive to linguistic engagement and improvement. In this study, the researchers set out to explore the differences in fluency outcomes as related to the time spent on task in each of the three different contexts. The researchers examined 41 total native English speaking students learning French in all three learning environments by testing their linguistic competence through oral proficiency interviews both pre and post semester. In addition to this, students were required to create a language contact profile to account for their French contact with other French speakers or with various forms of French media outside of the classroom setting. The researchers found that each context allowed for different amount of time spent on task and each yielded different levels of fluency improvement that correlated to the time spent in contact with the target language. The results showed that students in the immersion context, not the study abroad context, exhibited the most dramatic improvement in fluency and spent the most time on task. This study implies that more time spent on task can help improve language proficiency and proposes the idea that study abroad students are not always in the most advantageous context to spend more time immersed or speaking the target language.

Studies by Ginsberg and Miller (2000) and Isabelli-Garcìa (2006) have tried to account for the learner variation by showing that input and time on task alone cannot account for language gain in a study abroad situation. Ginsberg and Miller (2000) explored the interaction between language use and language gain in their study of American study abroad students in Russia. In this study the researchers drew upon a corpus of detailed accounts of student activities and observational field work during the students' year abroad. They hypothesized that more time spent speaking Russian would lead to language gain, but instead found that their data showed no significant differences in language gain for those of the group who reported speaking the most Russian. Surprised by the results, the researchers suggested the possibility of other affective factors or ways of processing linguistic and cultural experiences that may have an overall effect on language improvement.

In another study, Isabelli- García (2006) looked at social networks and proficiency levels in conjunction with attitudes and motivation in American students studying abroad in Argentina. Her data recorded the linguistic achievements of a student named Stan who, according to ACTFL standards and the researcher's assessment in simulated oral proficiency interviews, elevated his language skills during his stay. Isabelli-Garcìa attributed this gain to a combination of his positive attitudes towards the target culture and people and abilities in creating a wide social network of Argentinian friends. By comparison, another student named Jennifer did not show a marked improvement. Her experience in Argentina was colored by her move from host family to host family as well as her discomfort in being cat-called and hearing Argentine men comment on her weight. These negative experiences impeded Jennifer from expanding her social network and from seeking more interaction with Argentinians. The stress of the above-mentioned factors also affected her attitudes about the target language and culture and, by

extension, concludes Isabelli-Garcìa (2006), her linguistic gain. Both of these studies indicate that more research is needed to explore the factors surrounding what motivates student out-of-class interaction and the behavior that guides it.

As these studies illustrate, many factors contribute to a student's experience abroad and a student's own perceptions can significantly impact the linguistic outcomes of their study abroad experience (Ginsberg & Miller, 2000; Isabelli-Garcìa, 2006;). One way that researchers have tried to investigate these perceptions and their impact on behavior and strategy is through the study of beliefs about language learning.

Language Beliefs

In the beginning of the book, *Beliefs about SLA: New Research Approaches*, Barcelos (2003) reviews many of the trends in language belief research since its beginnings in the 1980s. She explains that those who study language beliefs usually belong to one of three camps: those who take on a normative approach, a metacognitive approach, or a contextual approach. The normative approach includes most of the earlier literature based on questionnaire research that attempted todefine and collect the beliefs of students to determine whether or not certain beliefs correlate to any language gains or strategy use (Barcelos, 2003; Chavez, 1995; Ghobadi & Khodadady, 2011; Horwitz, 1988, 1999; Yang, 1999). Within this approach, language beliefs are viewed as static, measurable and connected with linguistic competences and performance. Researchers and educators even judged some beliefs as erroneous or restrictive in relation to student learning and aimed to encourage educators to address such beliefs in the classroom.

The metacognitive approach mostly focuses on what students can explicitly explain about their metacognitive knowledge in regards to learning languages. Put more simply, with this approach, participants show the researchers what topics regarding their language learning they

are capable of discussing. Researchers gather this type of data through the use of semi-structured interviews and learner narratives written about the learning experience (Hosenfeld, 2003; Wenden, 1986). Since a statement of metacognitive beliefs implies a certain level of learner awareness, researchers often are able to draw more concrete ties between learning beliefs and learning behaviors since this connection implies that the behaviors are more deliberate and connected to reflection on the part of the learner (Barcelos, 2003).

Wenden (1986) helped define this approach with one study investigating what learners can discuss about language learning beyond their strategies. She conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 adults enrolled in ESL classes and found that the participants were most able to talk about: the features of the language itself, his or her proficiency in the language, the results of his or her language learning strategies and attempts, his or her personal role in their language learning process and different approaches they have utilized in the pursuit of learning (p. 188). These discoveries allow future researchers to examine the topic of language learner beliefs from the perspective of the students rather than through the questionnaires created by teachers and researchers (Barcelos, 2003).

Many of the most recent studies regarding learner beliefs have adopted this idea of anchoring the investigation of learner beliefs in the perspective of the learner, giving rise to the contextual approach. This approach aims to gain a better understanding of beliefs in context rather than just general beliefs about SLA. Researchers using this approach often investigate many different sources of data to understand more completely the perspective of the learner. These sources include observations, diaries, narratives and various forms of discourse analysis (Barcelos, 2003). This approach tends to view beliefs as "changeable" and dependent on the individual learner and the context in which they find themselves (Barcelos, 2003). Through the

use of more indirect techniques such as metaphor analysis (Ellis, 2008; Miller & Ginsberg, 1995), researchers also hope to unearth more about learners' unconsciously held beliefs about learning languages. No matter what approach a researcher chooses to use, however, the assumption that all language students carry with them some ideas about learning a language is universal, whether students are aware of them or not.

The debut of a research path toward language learning beliefs began with Joan Rubin's (1975) article exploring previous work on what attributes a "good language learner" possesses. With her research she hoped to uncover certain traits and strategies that successful students used in language courses. Rubin also sought to encourage language teachers to teach all students strategies to even out classroom variation in performance. This spawned a line of research into learner beliefs as a general assessment of explicit student beliefs providing teachers with a better understanding of the beliefs of their students. These researchers also sought to determine how these ideas are sometimes translated into the use of certain strategies in the classroom (Horwitz, 1985, 1988).

The early research into learner beliefs studies mostly adopt a normative approach toward language learning beliefs by making use of questionnaires posing statements about language learning that students choose to agree or disagree with on a Likert scale (Barcelos, 2003). The most frequently-used instrument to investigate language learning beliefs is the BALLI, created by Horwitz (1985). The BALLI consists of five different sections: the difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations (Horwitz, 1985, 1988). In these studies, researchers most often try to test correlations between certain beliefs (Chavez, 1995; Ghobadi Mohebi & Khodadady, 2011; Horwitz 1988, 1999), certain strategies and beliefs (Ghobadi Mohebi &

Khodadady, 2011; Horwitz 1988, 1999), or different groups of students (Horwitz, 1999). Within these studies only correlations can be statistically shown, not causality. This leaves some guesswork to the researchers and the teachers who read their research about whether or not the connections proposed between strategy and belief were based on real student experiences.

The relationship between beliefs and strategy is multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory. Yang (1999) investigated this notion through the connections between language learning and strategy use. Yang (1999) administered the BALLI and the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) to 505 university students in Taiwan. The results yielded many instances of logical correlations between belief and strategy such as the connection between a lack of effort put forth in the course and the belief that learning English is difficult. In addition to these beliefs, Yang also uncovered beliefs that contradicted behaviors, such as the tendency to state a belief in the importance of memorization in language learning without reporting any strategies involving memorization. These contradictions corroborate Ellis's (2008) assertion that "the fact that learners hold a particular belief is no guarantee they will act on it" (p. 13).

Amuzie and Winke (2009) explored the cross sections of language learning beliefs and study abroad situations in their study investigating the effects of the study abroad program duration on language beliefs. In order to find out more about SA students' beliefs, the researchers administered a questionnaire to 70 international students at universities in the northern United States. The questionnaires posed questions regarding students' language beliefs and expectations before their stay abroad and those they held at the time they filled out the questionnaire. Amuzie and Winke (2009) also conducted 14 interviews in order to gain further insight into student responses on the questionnaire. The participants were grouped according to their length of stay to compare the differences in language beliefs between the groups of varying

levels of time spent abroad. She found that the students that had stayed longer exhibited greater degrees of learner autonomy and that students were sometimes inclined to change their goals and beliefs according to their reactions to certain experiences and challenges. For example, one undergraduate student stated:

> I don't think learning English in the US is the best way to improve English anymore. What is important is to be proactive about creating learning opportunities myself. I realized that there is no such thing as automatic improvement in language learning. Study abroad can be a good opportunity if one makes a lot of efforts to take advantage of the context. Without my own efforts, the environment makes little impact (Amuzie &Winke, 2009, p.374).

The quote is representative of the data that Amuzie and Winke (2009) found in the results of their questionnaires. The researchers report that the most dramatic belief change among many of their participants was their shift into believing more in the impact of their own learner autonomy. Instead of relying on a teacher, these students gained more valuable metacognitive knowledge regarding their own learning preferences. These results suggest that, given time abroad, students' beliefs can change and, potentially, affect their subsequent behavior and language use.

Similar to Amuzie and Winke's (2009) study, Yang and Kim (2011) study also operate under the idea that beliefs, especially within the context of study abroad, are changeable. Yang and Kim's (2011) study investigated the experiences of two Korean ESL learners through journal entries, interviews and stimulated recall tasks. The study tracks the correlations between changes in a participant's language goals and changes in their interactional habits. The first participant, for example, opted to study abroad in order to improve his fluency in English with the goal of finding a job. He aimed to do this by communicating with native speakers as often as possible.

Over the course of the program the participant became skeptical that increased interaction would truly lead to language gain since he felt that he did not get the feedback he needed from other speakers. As these beliefs shifted, his goal also shifted from increasing fluency to earning a better score on his English proficiency exam. As this change took place, the participant also altered his behavior patterns by opting to stop sharing a room with his English speaking roommate and spending an increasing amount of time with other Koreans studying abroad. The experience of this Korean study abroad student suggests connections between changes in language learning beliefs and study abroad goals and behavior that require further investigation. The beliefs and behaviors of these participants are all connected within a web and can shift according to the experiences and individual reactions of the learner making these connections important for study abroad program developers to understand.

Between Amuzie and Winke's (2009) and Yang and Kim's (2011) studies, one of the main changes recorded in relation to study abroad students' perspectives is greater learner autonomy. For many students, the role and responsibilities of the teacher and the student changes as students very quickly discover that learning more about a language while abroad requires more effort on their part than they had previously anticipated (Kinginger, 2009). The experience of studying abroad prompts students to become more aware of their own habits in their efforts to profit the most from their time abroad. This leads to the possibility of student language learning beliefs coloring their experience abroad and possibly shaping some of their interactive choices. If a student fully expects to make quick progress in the target language due to a belief that learning a language abroad will allow them to "soak it in", for example, they may become disappointed easily and may no longer see the use in initiating communication with native speakers.

Both Amuzie and Winke's (2009) and Yang and Kim's (2011) study strive to show the different ways that individuals process their learning while abroad. While both studies offered new data and explanations about the connections between beliefs changes and behaviors, this area requires more work in order to understand the web and depth of connections between learner beliefs and behaviors and how they shape the learning experience. Building off of this previous research into the cross sections of language learning beliefs and study abroad, the investigation that follows explores the possibility that language learning beliefs can affect a student's choices to participate in interactions outside of the classroom. This research aims to gain more insight into the nature of changes in language learner beliefs and student reactions to their experiences while abroad. Such an exploratory study of this topic would offer teachers more insight into the lives of their students living on foreign soil and into student perceptions about their language learning. It can also inform future programming decisions by institutions that have study abroad programs with a language learning component.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Participants

The participants for this study came from alumni and a professor from a small American liberal arts college in Switzerland. During the 2011-2012 school year 436 students attended the university (Facts at a glance, 2011). 58.9% of these students are North American in origin (American, Mexican, Canadian) and the rest come from a wide variety of countries spanning several continents making the total count of countries represented in the school 64 (Facts at a glance, 2011). The school is an independent entity and does not have any formal ties with other universities in the United States.

The language programs at the college offer instructional classes through the advanced level in French, Italian, German and Spanish and offer higher-level content classes in all of these languages except Spanish. Students that choose to major in a language are highly encouraged to go on an academic travel to a country where that language is spoken and French studies majors can earn credit toward their major when they study abroad in France for a semester. Many students from all language groups have opted to study abroad from Switzerland in other countries where their target language is spoken as well. At the time the participants attended the college the administration required students to take a foreign language through the advanced level. Students can either take six semesters of the language starting at the beginning level, or they could take a placement test and begin language courses at a higher level to complete the requirement earlier. Most students choose to take Italian since it is the spoken language of the region of Switzerland where the college is located.

The researcher drew from this population for several reasons. Although some students only choose to stay for one year and others count as study abroad students from other universities

in the United States, the school offers the possibility of a longer-term study abroad experience than most for students that enroll for the four years that it takes to earn a bachelor's degree. With a longer stay, students have more time to understand the local culture and to develop connections with the area and with the language, even within the context of an English-speaking American university in Switzerland. Travel also comprises a part of the required school curriculum and students have extended experience in learning how to bridge cultural gaps that may extend to a more local level. Even though the university campus comprises an Anglophone zone, students must come into contact with the target language and the target culture during their extended stay abroad.

The context of being within an American college in a foreign land mimics the context of many groups of student cohorts that study abroad together from the same university because the students at the college share the same institutional identity and come together in a foreign place. The college offers a unique perspective of an "in-between" place of language study where students can speak English with their peers while still finding themselves surrounded by Italian for an extended period of time. Students at the college are enrolled in a college on foreign soil like students at any other foreign university, but their "immersion" into the community is not total like it might be for a student who enrolled at a university that exclusively uses the target language. This situation also mimics the typical study abroad situation for a university student going abroad with a cohort of others from the same university. In this scenario students are often forced to find their own avenues of local connection and communication with native Italian speakers.

The researcher recruited participants from among their list of personal contacts who attended the college. These participants were chosen based on the length of their stay (at least

two years) and amount of Italian classes taken (at least through the intermediate level) in order to gain more perspective study abroad situations and shifts in language learning beliefs or behavior over time. These alumni graduated between the years of 2008- and 2011 and were contacted via e-mail or social networking sites after responding to a general call for voluntary participation through social networking sites.

In addition to alumni of the college, the researcher sent out a general call via the e-mail addresses found on the institution's website to the Italian professors of the college requesting participation in the project. The interview with a professor was conceived to gain an outside perspective of observation with the students and their habits outside of the classroom. The researcher also wanted to investigate whether or not certain student learning beliefs were manifest in classroom attitudes. One professor answered positively to this call to participate in the project.

Of the alumni who consented to an interview, three were female and two were male. None of the participants decided to take a major in Italian. The fact that the students did not major in the language is more representative of the average study abroad student of today that does not study abroad for any linguistic purpose (Kinginger, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007). All five earned their bachelor's degree from the college and studied Italian for at least two years. Of these five interviewees, one is Bahraini, and four are American. Below is a breakdown of each participant's background. It includes the country of origin of each alumnus, what languages they speak (MT indicating the mother tongue) how long, respectively, they have spoken them, and their own brief assessment of their abilities in each language. It also includes a brief quote from each about why they decided to take Italian classes at the college. The researcher assigned

pseudonyms for each participant, in line with the rights of the participants granted in the consent

forms.

Participant	Country of Origin	Languages spoken or studied	How long they have been spoken	Reason for learning Italian
Amanda	United States	English (MT), Spanish (low), French (intermediate), Italian (intermediate)	For 3 years in high school 9 years 5 years	"I took the Italian courses because I wanted to be able to function in my city, my canton."
Ben	United States	English (MT), Gujarati (MT), Italian (advanced)	5-6 years	"it would benefit me in my new surroundings"
Catherine	United States	English (MT) , French (intermediate), Italian (advanced)	4 years in high school (French), every semester in college (for both languages)	"I was living in an Italian-speaking city, so it helped me get around and participate more in the city life"
Daliyah	Bahrain	Arabic (MT), English (near native), French (low), Italian (advanced) Japanese (beginner)	From childhood, in high school, 4 years, A few months	"Italian I picked because we were in Lugano, and I wanted the opportunity to speak to some locals (plus it sounded really pretty)"
Eric	United States	English (MT), Chinese (intermediate), French (low/ intermediate), Italian (advanced)	3 years in high school, 3 months in France, 3 years in university	"I wanted to learn it as soon as possible so that I could interact with people in Lugano."
Professor	United States/ Italy	Italian (MT), English (MT), Spanish, French	studied at university, studied in high school	"my parents are Italian so I've been speaking Italian since birth"

Figure 1.   MT = mother tongue

Amanda is an American who studied both Spanish and French in high school. She had

some previous experience interacting with foreign cultures and practicing her Spanish during her

trips to Mexico and Canada. She also mentioned an experience spending a layover in Paris and

attempting to apply her French knowledge in a restaurant setting. She did not choose to attend the college to study Italian, but she chose to study Italian in order to be able to have more access to the city where she lived and to find her way around more easily. She spent the full four years at the college for her bachelors and took French classes in addition to the Italian classes during her time there.

Ben is an American with parents of Indian descent and grew up speaking both Gujarati and English within his family. He had spent time travelling in Europe while living on a military base in Germany before his family came to the United States. He stayed at the college for four years and he decided to stay in the same city after he earned his bachelor's to earn his master's degree at the local university. He originally opted to take Italian classes in order to help facilitate life in his new location.

Catherine is an American with experience in French and Italian. She took French all throughout her time in high school and adopted Italian when she arrived in Switzerland. She chose to take Italian in order to engage more with the community that she found herself in. She earned her bachelor's degree from the college.

Daliyah is a Bahraini female who grew up speaking Arabic, but studying both English and French at school. When she arrived in Switzerland with the choice of studying either Italian or French, she opted to study Italian in order to interact more with local people. In addition to wanting to start fresh with a new target language, she also liked the sound and rhythm of Italian. She stayed the full four years.

Eric is an American male who studied Chinese and travelled to China to practice during his high school years. He opted to study Italian while in Switzerland to interact with the local Swiss population. He decided to learn French later while travelling in France with his wife who

speaks French. He earned his bachelor's degree from the college, but spent a semester studying abroad in the United States during his second to last semester at the college.

The professor is an Italian-American who grew up speaking both Italian and English. In college he studied both Spanish and French. He also had some experience learning languages abroad as a student discussing time spent in Paris and in Latin America. At the college he teaches several levels of Italian in addition to teaching culture studies courses. He has travelled to many Francophone, Italophone, and Hispanophone countries and even leads groups of students on an academic travel to Paris offered by the college.

Procedure

This study aims to investigate the following questions:

1) How do language learning beliefs change over the course of studying abroad?

2) What kinds of student experiences may contribute to such changes?

3) Can changes in student language learning beliefs also provoke changes in students' out-of-class language contact?

In order to investigate these questions, the researcher interviewed all of the participants about their language learning beliefs and experiences of interaction while abroad. After the initial contact was made with the participants, all read and signed consent forms and were reminded of their rights as a participant before the interviews were conducted. Participants were told that they could refuse to answer any question that the interviewer posed and could opt out of the project at any time. They were also told that the interview would only take two hours maximum. All participants were made aware of the purpose of the study in their consent forms. To ensure that participant identities are protected, the researcher used pseudonyms in the study for the

interviewees. The interviews took place over Skype messenger between November 2012 and January 2013. The alumni used the Skype chat system to type their responses to the written interview questions in a live chat session. The interview with the professor, however, was conducted over a Skype call and was later transcribed word for word by the researcher.

Each interview with alumni opened with an oral questionnaire about the linguistic and travel background of the participants and was followed by a semi-structured interview regarding their time spent abroad and language learning beliefs (for guiding interview questions, see Appendix A). The format of a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to explore pertinent topics with the possibility of probing deeper into promising areas connected with the participant responses. The researcher posed questions regarding motivations for using the target language outside of the classroom, the situations in which it was used, and the changes in perspective that may have occurred within the participant as they continued their stay in Switzerland. These interviews are largely exploratory to recommend further trajectories of research and study that would benefit other universities in a similar situation and to better understand the perceptions of students who spend time learning a language abroad. This information could also help with the organization of any study abroad program by making sure that students are properly prepared for the challenges and can profit more from their time overseas.

The interview with the professor involved an oral questionnaire regarding teaching background as well as background about his linguistic training. Questions asked in the interview with the professor mostly focused on how much the surrounding culture is discussed in class, the perceived language beliefs of the students and whether or not the professor has observed certain habits and attitudes within his students. The interview with the professor focused more on how

language learning beliefs were dealt with in classrooms as well as other programs the school may offer to try and facilitate interaction outside of the class. By asking the professor, the researcher aimed to gain an outside perspective about student habits as well as the point of view of someone who has had years of experience working with study abroad students within such a context.

The interview questions (see Appendix A.) pertaining to linguistic belief systems were adapted from Horwitz's (1985) BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory). The BALLI, developed by Elaine Horwitz, consists of a 34 item questionnaire that employs a Likert scale. Those who take the questionnaire choose whether or not they agree or disagree with each statement to varying degrees. The BALLI consists of five sections: difficulty of language learning, foreign language aptitude, the nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations (Horwitz, 1988). The researcher adapted questions representative of all of these sections from the statements listed on the questionnaire to structure the interview.

The interviewees were asked to discuss more about the history of each belief by thinking back to how they felt about this idea before living abroad in addition to stating their current attitudes. They were also asked whether or not they discussed these ideas with others and about specific experiences they had that stuck out and how their perception of strategies changed. At the end of the interview the alumni participants described what advice they would give to others and to their own selves before a stay abroad in order to get the most out of it given what they know now.

Once the data was collected, the researcher sifted through to pinpoint certain common themes and threads shared by the participants and categorized responses under each theme in a word document. Afterward, each individual interview was treated as a separate case study and

the data was searched for belief changes and descriptions of any linguistic activities on an individual basis.

Case studies are intended as in-depth analysis of a certain case as they pertain to the circumstances of an individual. As Creswell (2013) explains, "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system… through detailed in-depth data collection (p. 97)." The researcher adopted a case study approach for this study in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of each individual circumstance of language learning belief changes and uncover more about the reactions and processes involved in such changes. As the intention of this study is mostly exploratory, the researcher aims to show the web of connections that exist between learner beliefs and learner behaviors in more detail than one could discover through the use of a questionnaire.

The following presentation of data allows each participant to describe their beliefs and experiences in their own words, elaborating on the changes in belief and behavior that took place over their time spent abroad. Some of the data required alterations of spelling or grammatical errors. The quotes that follow were copied and pasted as is with these minor changes made for increased readability. Each case study begins with a brief background on each participant and is followed by an account of their belief system, their interactive habits, how their beliefs continue to influence their learning and other pertinent details.

Chapter 3

Case Study #1: Amanda- Questions of Identity and Interaction

"Language immersion isn't easy, but it's the most intellectually engaging lifestyle

you will ever experience. I miss that challenge...it gets awfully boring in a world

where you understand everything happening around you."

Background

Amanda enrolled at the college to see more of the world and even though she majored in

environmental science, her language learning experiences still had a significant influence on her

time spent abroad. The quote from above is from the perspective of someone looking back on

their experiences. It expresses a wistful regret about not continuing to lead a linguistically

immersive lifestyle and implies a satisfaction from having had the experience in the first place.

When discussing whether or not she explicitly sought the goal of language learning when

deciding to study at the college Amanda stated:

> All I knew was that I wanted to travel. I also got it in my head that I wanted to be an
>
> ambassador and what better way to learn politics than to study in a politically 'neutral'
>
> country. While it wasn't about the language, I did expect that by the end of my time there
>
> I would be completely fluent.

Amanda envisioned her time in Switzerland as a full educational and cultural experience; the

language would be a secondary focus, but would also be easily absorbed by dealing with daily

tasks. She envisioned an ideal self that would leave the country more worldly and fully bilingual

just by having spent the time there. Amanda admits that she did not reach the fluency that she

had hoped to in Italian, but she did change some perspectives about language learning after her stay in Switzerland.

Before her stay in Switzerland, Amanda had only minimal intercultural contact and some linguistic training. She began learning French, starting in the 8th grade and she studied Spanish, throughout high school. She lived near enough to the Canadian border to have entered a few times where she practiced her French comprehension on street signs. She mentioned spending some time in Mexico with her family where she had the opportunity to practice the conversational Spanish that she had learned in high school. She "remember[s] feeling [her] Spanish speaking abilities increase much quicker in that one and a half weeks than it had the entire semester." Lastly, Amanda describes a short amount of time spent in Paris where she "ordered everyone crepe at a café" and related an experience where "the bus driver was yelling something about money and [she] just couldn't seem to understand what he was saying."

These experiences, though brief, still gave Amanda a sense of how to use a foreign language to interact with her immediate surroundings. She also included hints about her perceived abilities as they were put to the test in these situations in her descriptions. In Paris, her travel companions relied on her to order the crêpes for everyone in French, showing that her companions trusted her with this linguistic task. Later, however, she describes a scene of confusion and misunderstanding with a bus driver, putting her own abilities into question. All of these recounted experiences show that, even before her arrival in Switzerland, she already lived instances that either denied or confirmed her linguistic abilities and gave her certain ideas about language learning that set a pre-requisite for her expectations for learning Italian in Switzerland.

Difficulty and Aptitude

This subject of immersion emerges immediately in relation to her learning of Italian in Switzerland when asked about what kinds of advantages she thought that her situation in Switzerland might bring to her language learning:

> I remember quite clearly thinking...hmmm, well this isn't exactly a useful language for extensive world travel...That said, I love Italian and I love the Swiss, and I loved the challenge of really trying to get good at blending in, becoming Swiss. If I could go back and do it again, I would have tried much harder to immerse myself better.

Here, Amanda addresses not only linguistic immersion, but total cultural immersion to a point where one could mistake her as Swiss. This implies a desire to acquire a certain identity, not merely a language or cultural savoir faire. Instead of entering into a dialogue of cultural negotiations, she expresses her goal of becoming a fully-fledged member of that community, hinting at a simultaneous rejection of her American identity in favor of a life as a world traveler. This desire fueled her language learning and grounded her motivations for continuing to push forward in her learning of Italian.

Amanda began the study of her third romance language thusly upon arrival in Switzerland. When asked about whether or not she thought language learning was difficult before her time spent abroad, Amanda states,

> once you've learned how to learn your first language, the subsequent languages are easier. It's like computer programming. It takes a shift in how you think about it. Once you realize how to learn it, it makes it much easier…Learning languages in the same language family is much easier.

Walking into her first Italian language classroom with such a thought already sets her up for being a more reflective student into the ways of knowing how she personally learns a language.

This also implies that she will try her best to apply what she learned about learning languages in high school to her new learning context. Her previous experiences establish a certain amount of expectations of the effort and techniques required to approach the difficulty of the language learning task.

Later, when describing her time spent in a six hour crash course in Hebrew after her time in Switzerland, she remembers that she was "kind of singled out by the rabbi as being a particularly quick study." She states that this was most likely "because [she] had more practice in learning a language." Here, even though Hebrew is not a romance language, she acknowledges the difference that "practice" makes in the quickness with which one can learn a language and the obstacles that one may meet doing so. Despite this connection between the relative hardship of learning and a learner's background in languages, she humbles herself by saying, "it was a kind thought, but I know people who are much more adept than I."

This latter statement reflects her beliefs regarding language aptitude. Even though Amanda believes that she gained valuable extra "practice" abroad, she still did not believe that she possessed aptitude after her stay in Switzerland. Even though her abilities were praised by the rabbi during the Hebrew session, she described her conception of linguistic aptitude by saying, "I think it's like having a stronger artistic or scientific aptitude. Mostly, I've met a bunch of those people where it just seems to come easy to them, and I know it's not that easy for me." She compares her perceived linguistic performance unfavorably to others and implies that she will never be able to attain a certain level of proficiency without maximum effort. Even though she previously stated that languages become easier to learn as one learns how to learn, those without any "linguistic aptitude" will still have to toil harder to achieve any level of proficiency.

Grammar, Vocabulary and Accuracy

The biggest changes that Amanda noted between her beliefs before and after her time spent abroad learning Italian were those related to the importance of grammar and vocabulary.

Before…: The importance of grammar learning got in the way of conversations and language practice. Grammar is a lot like music theory, it's a framework. I think that if you forgo learning grammar you do yourself a great disservice. Not only did it help me move from one language to the next with more ease, it helped me understand my first language (English) better.

Even though getting around town required more of a focus on communication, the importance of grammar when learning a language increased in Amanda's eyes. Even though her focus was on communication, perhaps her desire merely to get a point across clashes with her goal of total linguistic and cultural immersion. Without a "proper" grammatical way of speaking, she would not have as much of a chance of speaking like a local. It is also possible that her high school teachers did not present grammar in a way that she saw as useful. Perhaps she found it more helpful at the end of her time in Switzerland to focus more on the grammar to help her language along because of her struggles in applying correct grammar to her conversations with local native speakers. However she arrived at the conclusion, Amanda began to see grammar as an integral part of learning and understanding the workings of language, including her own mother tongue.

Like grammar, vocabulary seemed to take on a more useful and serious role after her time abroad:

Before: Vocabulary was the fun, usually seasonally themed stuff.

After: With more language learning and a more mature and intellectual look at language, vocabulary feels like a personal collection. You collect words that reflect your interests,

your day to day life. It has some value, the more words you have in your collection, the

more advanced you sound and more local. It's what goes on top of grammar.

By calling her vocabulary learning "a personal collection," Amanda shows how she came

to a greater understanding about learning and using a second language to express herself.

It no longer remained the abstract object of her study, but rather a tool that she could use

to create her new Swiss identity during her local interactions, depending on what she took

the time to add to her collection. Putting vocabulary learning in the context of daily life

while abroad seemed to change her conception of its importance by grounding it in these

daily tasks and by lending more significance to which words she acquired and how she

could use them to express herself.

This drive to emulate native speakers, especially those in the context of southern

Switzerland, appears to influence even more of her language learning beliefs. When asked about

the importance of having a good accent when speaking, she stated, "The more I sounded Swiss,

the better I was getting around Switzerland...and for me, it's a real point of pride to be able to say

something as it was meant to be said." For her, accent was a point on which her beliefs did not

change and were only further corroborated by her desire, and implied success, of passing for a

Swiss person. Her statement here also attributes the quality of her accent to her ease in travel and

links it unequivocally to context. If she learned Italian in Italy there would most likely exist a

different way to "say something as it was meant to be said." She learned to use the outside world

as a source of learning by starting to pay attention to how things were "meant to be said."

Unlike accent, she welcomes grammatical errors more openly by stating, "when it comes

to language learning, you're not going to learn anything if you don't make some mistakes. I

personally think it's better to dive in and fail than to not say anything at all." While her time

abroad may have led her to caring more about her grammar, she also expresses an inclination to let go of her errors in favor of her ultimate goal of language learning. This statement, however, does not prove universal when mentioning her French classes: "well I was terribly intimidated in French to make an error. They are very particular about the way their language is spoken. I have never been in a setting where grammar is pushed more heavily than in French." She never particularly addresses this differentiation, but as someone making efforts toward cultural-sensitivity with a goal of blending into her local surroundings, it makes sense that she would take into account her perception about how each culture handles linguistic errors when considering her amount of comfort in committing them. This particular case highlights one student's individualized reaction to a perceived cultural belief and how it can affect language learning in multiple contexts.

At the end of her time abroad, Amanda still absolutely believed that those who learn a language as a child learn languages better than those who learn as adults.

I heard that if kids get language instruction before 8th grade it's more likely to become that imbedded intuitive process. As I started language in 8th grade, I always felt somewhat ticked at the idiocy of the school system… I met many multi-lingual classmates that sort of solidified my thoughts on early childhood language learning. I could have learned French, but instead I will forever have pop music lyrics from the 90's stuck in my head… timing is everything.

Amanda's belief about learning languages as a child seems to be informed by what she has heard from others and was later confirmed by those she perceived to be functioning polyglots. Although she has expressed frustration at her declared lack of linguistic aptitude, here she blames the school system for what she deems a missed opportunity. Since this belief held

strongly throughout her time abroad, it may have also had an effect on what level of proficiency she thought is possible to attain. This, in turn, may have have affected her interactions and the effort she put forth in learning.

Before her stay in Switzerland, Amanda mentioned that she thought that she could attain fluency in Italian in one year. Afterward, she said:

> It takes as long as you want or as little as you want and it all depends upon the environment you put yourself in and the amount of work you're willing to give it. I remember a guy told me he learned English in 4 months.

Here, Amanda's exhibits a more versatile conception of fluency and what it takes to attain it. She sees it as a matter of effort rather than as dependent on living in a place where locals speak it. Judging by Amanda's assessment of her Italian skills at the end of her time in Switzerland as "low/intermediate," she feels as if she did not put forth enough effort to learn the language. This idea of fluency appears to conflict with some beliefs stated previously in the interview. Amanda conceptualizes fluency as a choice of environment and where one places language learning on one's list of priorities rather than to any natural linguistic aptitude. Her belief in the veracity of the story about the man who attained fluency English in four months, however, conflicts with her belief that one learns languages more efficiently before the 8th grade. Even if her ideas remain somewhat out of alignment, her thoughts regarding fluency show how her beliefs shifted after having encountered a conflicting reality with her idea of being able to attain it in one year.

Contact Outside of Class

When asked about the reality and frequency of her interactions with locals, Amanda cited the grocery store as one of the main loci of local contact. This bears a resemblance to many of the students studied by previous researchers (Kinginger, 2009; Pellegrino- Aveni, 2005).

It may sound a bit ridiculous, but the grocery store was such a good place to learn. Outside of learning the name for foods, there was the occasional opportunity to ask where something was, one could read the instructions on the packages about how to prepare things. You may hear other people talking. And then there was the 5 minute conversation with the checkout clerk. "Com'e stai? Hai una carta Migros[1]?"

The grocery store provided a place where students were forced to speak and, even though the conversations only lasted five minutes, they also provided a regular form of linguistic contact with the locals. Amanda later recounts one of her most memorable linguistic experiences as happening in a grocery store. In her first semester abroad she arrived at the grocery store searching for black beans (fagioli neri). When she could not locate them, she politely asked a worker about the "fragole nere" (black strawberries). She knew that she had mixed up either a word or a pronunciation after she saw the confused expression on the clerk's face and she decided to renew her search alone. Amanda stated that, though amusing, this situation convinced her to be "more careful" about her language in the future inspiring her to be more precise with grammar and vocabulary. This setting seems to provide an interesting space of cultural and linguistic transition as well as everyday linguistic practice. Those names for everyday foods that one mistakes may take on a more memorable form as a participant in an incident of linguistic trial and error.

Amanda labeled this incident a "stereotypical example of amusing language failure." She points out that "in conversations with other language learners, I felt like that sort of blunder was a common. Maybe it is a milestone, like dreaming in a foreign language." Even though the lesson she stated to have taken from this incident was increased attention paid to her language skills, her attitude here also adopts a more positive spin towards different errors. Instead of

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[1] Migros is one of the main supermarket chains in Switzerland.

seeing the "fragole nere" blunder as any kind of a setback, she saw it as a badge of honor to pin on her language learning sash. Having it appeared to strengthen her camaraderie with other students with similar experiences, strengthening these bonds rather than those with the local community. Her idea of passing language milestones suggests that it is possible to harbor a certain degree of awareness about different stages of the language learning process and consciousness of having taken a step closer towards that ever-elusive idea of "fluency."

Apart from the grocery store, some of Amanda's experiences outside of the classroom demanded more linguistic effort. She described attending meditation and lecture sessions at a local Buddhist temple:

Those sessions were full day immersion. It was a 2 hour talk about Buddhism in Italian, sometimes even being translated from Tibetan. Then there was lunch, and then there was another talk and meditation… I remember days after the Buddhist temple when my head would be tired from all the thinking that went into translating...and then still I would incidentally read things or communicate.

With these sessions, Amanda once again brings up the idea of immersion and its importance for language learning and making the shift to thinking in the target language from translating to English. The mental exhaustion she describes in her dealings with the Buddhist temple represents a harsher reality of language learning and emphasize the importance of learning the language on-site. Although Amanda made the choice to attend these meditation sessions, she also gleaned what she could from what she organically encountered in her immediate environment. Even with her tired brain she still remained aware of the language that surrounded her.

In addition to direct local interactions, Amanda also describes some more second-hand linguistic contact through media.

For French for example, I will pick up short novels, listen to Swiss French radio stations or music, I will occasionally click through 'Le Monde' and play the French games. For a while I was connected to a site called italki that matched language learners for skype chats. They also have this cool feature where you can post a writing sample and native speakers will correct it for errors.

This section shows a personal drive to learn a language, but it also serves as a good example of the continual paradox of attitudes towards errors often exhibited by language learners (Horwitz, 1999). She speaks of these interactions with enthusiasm, but later in the interview she still expresses regret and a lack of understanding at the time of the benefits such extra effort might bring:

I recall professors promoting all the ways you could get immersed in your language learning (books, movies, music), but it just sounded like extra credit without the points at the time. I think, given some reasons why this would help, outside of, you will learn better/faster...maybe something scientific to support immersion...would have helped inspire me.

Even though Amanda kept her objective of transforming herself into a real Swiss local, this statement suggests that she did not know how to successfully integrate these extra measures into her language learning routine to work toward the attainment of her goal. She believes that the responsibility lie in the hands of the teachers to provide proof and encouragement to students that these ideas work. Amanda feels strongly that, given her state of mind, she would have required scientific proof of the benefits of these practices, even though she had the idea that she would be immersed in the language prior to her departure. Although Amanda reports having used the internet extensively as a resource for her French learning, her perception stands that these efforts

were not sufficient to reach a higher level of proficiency. This statement is Amanda's lament about not taking advantage of the opportunity before her to make her experience in Switzerland more immersive.

Despite her own frustrations about her lack of interaction with the local community, Amanda retains the belief she held before her Swiss experience that learning a language in the country where it is spoken can be extremely beneficial: "It's not 5 hours a week in the morning, it's whenever you decide to go buy food or take the bus or communicate with someone else…It's truly not language learning by choice, it's language learning by necessity." Even though she did not reach the level of language that she had aimed for, Amanda recognizes the linguistic reality of navigating her way around the city and its people. Her perspective here takes a more serious turn regarding language learning. Instead of language learning being a fun privilege or an organic product of living in another country, it can sometimes prove a stressful reality. Intriguingly enough, however, her stated belief here does not match up with her experience in Switzerland. Although she chose to learn the language to engage more with the local community, she still had to make the choice to leave the college campus in order to do so, thus removing the true "necessity" of learning.

Overall Amanda's case presents conflicting, but intriguing data into the possible connections between the shifts of certain language learning beliefs and the negotiation of identity while abroad. The data suggests that Amanda has entered into a process of negotiating selective shifts in her belief system by trying to reconcile her previous beliefs with certain language learning realities that she encountered while in Switzerland.

Over the course of her time abroad Amanda changed her ideas about grammar, vocabulary, and accuracy. She increased her awareness of the language she heard and saw

around her, placing more importance on grammar. She relaxed her ideas slightly regarding accent and accuracy, but these two aspects of learning still retained their importance to Amanda in her quest to adopt a more Swiss identity. Amanda's desire to be mistaken for a local still gave her an ideal to strive towards in her language learning. Even if she would rather make mistakes to learn from, her ultimate goal was to speak fluently without an American accent in order to blend into the Swiss environment.

Amanda's most immersive experience included the time she spent listening to lectures at the local Buddhist center. Her other interactive experiences included regular visits downtown and interactions with locals at the grocery store. During her stay abroad her interactions did not change in depth or frequency. Although Amanda's beliefs did exhibit changes over time, her interactions did not. Amanda's interview data does not demonstrate any correlations between her belief changes and her interactive habits. Most likely, Amanda met with other more influential factors than her belief changes that kept her interactions the same. The professor touches on some of these potential factors in his later interview.

Case Study #2: Ben- Natural Surroundings

"Get rid of the dormitory system and require all students to live with a Swiss family. Get them out of their comfort zone and 'force' them to learn the ways and customs of their surroundings."

Background

Ben's experiences travelling began early in his life, spending time in many European countries during his childhood when his family lived on a military base in Germany. Growing up Ben used both English and Gujarati with his family. After his family relocated to the United

States he would still visit family members on trips to the United Kingdom and Sweden keeping a steady stream of international travel in his life.

Ben enrolled at the college to continue his travels and to learn more about the world without any particular intentions of studying a language upon his arrival. He wanted to learn Italian in order to connect with the local community but he entertained more humble goals of fluency, shooting for an intermediate level of communication with an emphasis on conversational Italian. He thought that it would take him until the end of his time at the college to attain this level. He only felt as if he attained this level during his time attending a graduate school located in the same area of Switzerland.

According to Ben, he felt that learning Italian in such a setting provided the opportunity to do the following:

> to connect with Lugano and the Swiss as a Luganese rather than an American student studying in Lugano. It also provided more opportunities to learn facets of the language that one normally wouldn't be able to in the classroom (colloquialisms, slang, business conversations, etc.).

Like all of the other participants, Ben sees the greatest advantage to learning Italian during his time at the college as a way to connect more with the local Swiss community. Unlike the others, however, he has a more specific idea of how exactly living in an Italian-speaking environment will help him learn the language. Instead of just throwing out the term of "immersion" he appears to have specific linguistic targets of colloquialisms and specific types of vocabulary. Ben feels that professors do not introduce these aspects of a language in a classroom and must be directly learned from the spontaneous speech of the local community.

Difficulty and Aptitude

When discussing his language learning beliefs during the interview Ben did not trace his beliefs back to how he felt before his time abroad, so some of the trajectories of his beliefs remain unknown. During the interview the researcher made attempts at prompting these thoughts, but did not receive the information. The following, therefore, represents Ben's statements of his current beliefs paired with his habits of interaction more than it does the possible changes in his belief system.

Although Ben's opportunities for extensive travel as a child put him into contact with many different languages during his childhood, he did not mention any language learning in classrooms prior to his experience in Switzerland. Ben most likely had some experience learning languages during his travels, but it is possible that he cannot remember his mindset regarding languages before enrolling the college. He admits later in the interview to never having considered his views about language learning until his time at the college, so he may not have been conscious enough of these early beliefs at work to articulate them.

When addressing the issues of language difficulty, Ben believes that "learning the mechanics of a language can be made simple or less difficult if one is willing to take the time and study it." He states, however, that certain other factors can come into play when learning to speak another language: "[learning] can vary depending upon the person learning - do they have an accent? Are they not able to hear the nuances in the way it is spoken? Can they physically make the sounds required to speak it?" In his commentary, Ben implies a strong sway toward a highly individualized notion of language learning. Each person has different capabilities and puts in different amounts of effort and time put into learning thereby yielding differing results. Like Catherine later stated in her interview, Ben sees hard work as a major factor in language learning. According to Ben, those who meet the most success also put forth the most effort.

Ben applies his highly individualized notion of language learning beliefs to his stated beliefs regarding linguistic aptitude:

> If [a language] has to be learned out of pure necessity, then my opinion states that there's less of an aptitude involved and more of a survival instinct kicking in. However, if the person is learning it in a classroom/textbook setting, then I do believe that others are more adept at learning the basics of a language and able to manipulate them easier so that they reach a proficient level faster. I do not have the ability to learn a new language, but I have been told by my friends and colleagues that I can mimic accents, phrases, and sound convincingly.

Like most of the other participants, Ben does not count himself among those who possess what they conceive as linguistic aptitude. Interestingly, Ben separates the ability to learn a language in a classroom from the ability to learn and speak outside of the classroom, seeing success in one setting the result of aptitude and success in the other as more of a "survival instinct." Since Ben previously professed his own lack of interest in classroom language learning, he sees that setting as being conducive to learning only for the few with the aptitude for it. To Ben, whether or not a student succeeds in the classroom language setting requires a different set of skills and talents than finding success in speaking in situations that require a "survival instinct."

When considering his performance in more natural linguistic settings Ben slightly changes his ideas about whether or not he has language learning aptitude: "I do believe that I have a language aptitude, but… it would be a mix of the aptitude/survival aspect coming together." He finds himself the most at ease in his learning when learning in a more communicative and conversational context. He believes that when learners do not have a choice but to learn, anyone can do it no matter what their natural talents and leanings.

Like the other participants Ben adopts the idea that children can learn languages more

efficiently than adults. He even believes that when children learn multiple languages at once they

can speed up the language learning process for all of the languages they learn simultaneously.

When considering adults who want to learn a language, he states

> learning a language later on in life is not impossible, but it does require a lot more work
>
> as one would have to be able to mentally put aside what they know (or think they know)
>
> and use a fresh mental slate to properly learn all aspects of the said language.

Unlike the other participants, Ben does admit that learning a language as an adult is possible, but

the task is considerably more difficult. He attributes this difficulty at least in part to the

preconceived notions each person brings to their learning experiences. He implies that, in order

to learn another language, an adult must keep an open flexible mind to the details of the target

language that differ from the native tongue. An adult learner must find methods of reconciling

their first language with the one they are in the process of learning. Even though children are

generally thought to "pick up" languages more easily, adults have the advantage of acquiring

such metacognitive knowledge to aid them in their acquisition process. Even though Ben and

several of the other participants discuss the acquisition of a language learning "framework" as

one learns more than one foreign language, they do not consider that children are often not

capable of producing such knowledge and adapting it to their language learning.

Grammar and Accuracy

Like Eric in a later interview, Ben sees grammar and vocabulary as a basis mostly for

later more immersive experiences:

> Grammar and vocabulary provide a basic foundation in learning a language. It would be
>
> quite difficult to speak a language and not know any of the words and how they are

placed. But again, I feel it only provides a foundation for learning as immersing yourself would be more beneficial as you can hear the language and understand how it's used by native speakers.

Ben continues to emphasize his comfort and ease with more natural situations with his assertion that engaging in the process of noticing the features of the speech of native speakers is highly useful to acquisition. Even though he sees the value in learning grammar and vocabulary more explicitly, he still chooses to take most of his cues from the native speakers. He wants to profit the most from his environment by learning more idioms, colloquialisms and vocabulary as he previously described he expected to do.

Ben's more individualistic view about language learning beliefs also applies to the unique nature of each language itself. When asked about the importance of accent and accuracy, like Amanda, he believes that it varies from language to language and from culture to culture:

Some languages are tonal, meaning that a simple inflection of voice can change the meaning of a word or phrase (while I forget the Mandarin word, a change in tone can make it become either 'cow' or 'mother'). Grammatical accuracy is important in the German language due to the gender cases within the language (der, die, das).

Here it appears as if Ben chooses to focus on errors depending on the constraints and importance within the language itself. With his examples from differing languages, Ben appears to place more importance on grammatical accuracy and appreciating each language as its own entity. He does not want to spend time comparing the types of errors that could be committed in one to errors possible in another. This aligns well with Ben's ideas about learning in more naturalistic environments and learning more directly from how a native speaker utters a certain phrase.

Changes

Even though Ben does not go into detail about the changes in his own specific beliefs, he does mention that his time abroad definitely contributed to belief changes:

Before moving to Switzerland, I didn't really have a big opinion on learning new languages. I spoke English everyday both at home and at school and didn't think twice about it. After living abroad for five years, I believe I am now more confident in conversation (despite whatever language it is) and am able to pick up on different tones and accents a lot more easily than I would be able to during my high school years. Overall, I believed I've developed a stronger ear for languages and being able to imitate languages.

When Ben talks about his beliefs and ideas about his experience abroad, he blends in his own thoughts about his own level of proficiency and improved efficiency of learning. In the end Ben's time abroad did help him gain more self-efficacy as a learner but he does not really discuss specifically how his ideas about learning a language have changed. Given the more individualistic focus of his responses, the data suggests that Ben might have different language learning beliefs depending on the individual learner and the individual language and context involved in the learning process. Unlike some of the other participants, perhaps Ben has never had to express his own opinions about his beliefs before and some of his beliefs have not been particularly solidified.

The World Outside

When he thinks back to the learning that he experienced in his courses Ben would agree with the later statements of Catherine who felt that, in the end, she learned more about Italian outside of the classroom:

To be frank, I felt I really only learned Italian vocabulary and tenses from my courses. In terms of my ability to speak it and be confident in doing so was through immersion with the city of Lugano and with my grad school colleagues. Essentially, I learned more about the Italian language in terms of speaking it by just being around it long enough rather than having to remember grammar and vocabulary rules in the classroom. I took very little of what I applied from my courses in relation to how I spoke it.

Like Amanda, Ben also searches in the community to find out the way native speakers express themselves and to learn more about what native speakers say and how they say it rather than study explicit rules and their exceptions. He chose to make the local environment his main context for learning.

Unlike some of the other participants, interaction with the local community seemed natural and unavoidable for Ben:

I never actively sought any interaction, but due to the nature of my location and living situations, I was almost required to be interactive with the local Italian speakers. If I were to seek interactions, it would usually take place at restaurants/pubs, or other venues outside of school. The settings for me increased as I spent more time in Switzerland as my network grew larger and appointments increased.

Even though it took time, Ben's interactions increased as time went on and he found that he was able to expand his network as well as take many of the opportunities available to practice his Italian. Unlike some of the other participants, Ben seems to have entered into the local community with ease and chose to engage locals around him in a number of different settings. In this excerpt, he describes such interactions as almost unavoidable while other alumni interviews feel that they must be actively sought. Without more detail about the nature of his belief changes,

however, no conclusions about how his beliefs tie into the increase in his social networks can be drawn.

Even though Ben felt as if he did not interact much with the community in the beginning, he admits that he entered into the college with an advantage that most others did not have:

> I was sort of in a special situation - I got to ride the coat tails of my older sister when I arrived…, so a lot of her friends befriended me upon arrival, and needless to say they were a great bunch of people.

Even though Ben was able to expand his social network in later years, he admits that initially he already had some contacts in the city from his sister who attended the college before him. This way he already felt more eased into the situation and had more access to the local community than most of the students arriving. He expresses gratitude in this quote for having had such an opportunity, but he also freely admits that most of the other students do not find themselves in such a situation.

Strategies and Closing Thoughts

Describing the strategies that he formulated during his time abroad, Ben recounts how he still uses many of them in his language learning and maintenance efforts since graduation:

> Nowadays I use the internet a lot more to learn the key functions of a new language. Watching news videos on YouTube or simple instructional videos gives me a basic foundation. Additionally, I've come across a social networking site called LiveMocha.com which is essentially the Facebook of languages. When I first arrived in Switzerland, my only channels of learning a language were the ones available in the classroom and the occasional trip downtown for grocery shopping.

Ben offers a glimpse of his process for learning and building off his own conceptions of learning and strategy use. In the beginning he found himself in a situation like that that many of the other alumni participants either hint at or describe where students' main contact with the local community is through everyday activities such as grocery shopping. Desiring to take more advantage of the setting, Ben slowly began building on his contacts supplementing it with interactions and learning online. He received his grammatical foundation in the classroom and decided to seek out the other contact on his own both online and downtown in order to learn in a way that felt more natural and comfortable and where he most likely found the most success.

If Ben could go back in time and give himself language learning advice before he went to the college based on what he knows now he would say:

> language learning will boost confidence and open your brain to new thought processes and will help understand the local culture a lot more. Be sure to keep an open mind and get in touch with the locals as much as possible. Don't stay in the… bubble - if you learn a new word, write it down.

Here Ben still chooses to focus on different aspects of his learning and his end gains rather than what he learned about learning. He continues to emphasize his belief in learning from a more naturalistic context by encouraging his past self to interact more in the community as well as giving very specific strategic advice. Even though Ben discusses being able to interact with the local community, he expresses some regret here about not having done so more earlier in his time in Switzerland, echoing the sentiments of some of the other alumni participants.

At the end of the interview, Ben offered some of his own suggestions about how to inspire other students to make more local connections:

I'd laid heavy importance on cultural/linguistic immersion programs. Get rid of English

altogether and go the extreme route (sounds insane I know, but it would be a fun

experiment nonetheless). In terms of the college and Sorengo, I'd say get rid of the

dormitory system and require all students to live with a Swiss family. Get them out of

their comfort zone and 'force' them to learn the ways and customs of their surroundings.

Although Ben has learned strategies abroad that make him a more self-sufficient learner, he still

places the burden of facilitating communication and aiding in creating a more integrative

atmosphere with the community completely on the institution. He wants to get learners into what

he described earlier as a "survival" mode for language learning. In Ben's eyes, as long as the

possibility of surviving at the college by only speaking English exists, students will not be

motivated to seek more local interaction and take advantage of the context.

Overall Ben's interview data does not provide enough information regarding his language

learning beliefs to derive any conclusions. One of the few themes present was Ben's greater

belief that he shares with Catherine, Eric, and the professor in later interviews that the

environment outside of the classroom is the most fruitful for language learning. He did not seem

to place much confidence in classroom learning in general when he stated that he did not apply

much of what he learned to his interactions off campus. He only felt that he reached a suitable

level of proficiency after he graduated from the college and began attending a local university to

earn his master's degree. Ben realizes the general difficulty that students encounter in their

attempts to find more contact off campus and, unlike some of the other participants, strongly

believes that the institution itself should place more extreme policies of integration in place in

order to facilitate an increased interaction.

The data regarding his language learning beliefs and possible belief changes remains rather inconclusive since Ben never specified what kinds of beliefs changed. He does claim, however, in a general sense to have experienced such a shift. This was most likely due to the fact that the contacts that his sister has previously made in the area helped him integrate into the community of both the college and outside more quickly. In addition, Ben had much more experience travelling and living in Europe than the other alumni before going abroad. Even though Ben does not express having had any formal classroom language learning before his experience in Switzerland, no doubt he came across several different languages during his travels and maybe even learned bits and pieces in such a naturalistic context. Even before coming to Switzerland, his own beliefs about the superiority of learning of native speakers may have already been present from these encounters, but he does not provide enough data during the interview to draw such a conclusion.

Case Study #3: Catherine- Early Immersion

"I thought I was pretty average during my first year of Italian classes, but then I jumped to being one of the best in the class after I au paired. Au pairing was definitely a more brutal way of learning, but in the end, it was more effective because it was more dramatic, more vital-to-surviving, more pervasive, etc."

Background

Catherine started her language learning journey earlier than many Americans in 7th grade when she enrolled in French classes. She continued to study French at university and also decided to take Italian upon her arrival in Switzerland. She remained enrolled in an Italian class every semester except for her last. When asked what motivated her to choose the languages she learned Catherine replied,

French was more useful than German and had a better teacher than Spanish, so that's why I studied it in high school. I studied it in college because I still thought it was a useful language. I studied Italian because I was living in an Italian -speaking city, so it helped me get around and participate more in the city life.

Catherine's statement here suggests that she takes on a more pragmatic type of motivation toward language learning, letting what she sees as the most advantageous learning situation guide her choice. Her original linguistic choice also rested partially on her teacher, but this shifted more into what language would be most beneficial to her interaction with her outside environment when she made it to university.

Prior to her stay in Switzerland, Catherine had visited Canada, Ireland, Northern Ireland and Puerto Rico. She did not mention any linguistic connections with these particular trips, but they did inspire her desire to travel, which is what attracted her most to the college. The locations that Catherine visited most likely did not allow her to practice French in a francophone environment, which means her language learning experience was mostly confined to the classroom. Before arriving in Switzerland, she "definitely planned on continuing French and picking up Italian." Her phrasing of "picking up Italian" mirrors the expectations of learning a language merely by finding themselves living in a place where locals speak it as outlined by previous research (Kinginger, 2008; Mendelson, 2004).

Despite this phrasing, Catherine's own expectations of what level she could reach with Italian during her time in Switzerland were relatively low:

I assumed I'd pick up Italian faster than I had picked up French since I was going to be immersed, but I don't think I expected more than that. Except I knew I'd never be fluent or without an accent because I knew I was too old.

Like Amanda, Catherine attributes some of her expected success to the idea of her anticipated immersion, but she also lowers her expectations due to her stated belief that people cannot attain fluency or a native-like accent as an adult. When asked to describe the level she felt that she did reach, she stated, "I usually say that I'm intermediate with French reading/writing/speaking (unless I've been speaking Italian recently, in which case I'm lucky to remember 5 words of French). I usually say I'm advanced in Italian. Fluid, but not fluent." Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether or not she under-reports her abilities here without any kind of proficiency test. Other researchers, however, have shown student tendencies lean more toward underreporting their own levels of proficiency (Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005). Although her unaltered belief that children learn languages better may not have hindered her learning, it may have an effect on her own self-assessment and her inclination to tiptoe around the word "fluent." Her own self-assessment appears to align with her previous expectation and experiences of language learning, implying that her beliefs regarding the level of fluency possible to attain as an adult remained unchanged during her time spent abroad.

Difficulty and Aptitude

When asked about her thoughts regarding the difficulty of language learning and whether or not certain languages proved harder to learn than others, she replied:

> I assumed that learning a language was directly proportional to the amount of effort you put into it. After FC, I realized that hard work is a big factor, but the environment is huge too. I also now think that some languages are harder than others, especially when they have extra elements added on, like a whole new alphabet.

Her beliefs about language difficulty did not alter at the core during her time abroad, but rather shifted in scope and intensity. After her time in Switzerland she came to the conclusion that hard

work was far more important than she had previously learned from her only experience learning languages in the classroom. Her beliefs also expanded to include a more relative scale of difficulty depending on different features of different languages. This may also relate to her recent efforts to learn Mandarin to communicate with her neighbors in Chinatown, New York City. Another element to this quote is her belief in the effect of environment on the level of difficulty in learning a certain language. For Catherine, living in an environment where one can practice their L2 on a regular basis does not imply any kind of a complacent attitude. This lesson in the necessity of learning efforts shows in her contact outside of class during her time abroad, discussed later in the interview.

Catherine's extensive belief in hard work in language learning carries over in her beliefs regarding language aptitude.

I don't believe language aptitude is natural. I think some people learn better because of a whole slew of reasons. They started younger. They were forced to (due to living in that language). The language was presented in a more positive way. They had better teachers. They are more motivated to learn/actually want to learn.

To Catherine, much of learning a language is based more on external factors than natural talents. To some degree language learning is always intentional whether it was "forced" upon someone, students had a positive view of the language from a teacher or someone acts on the motivation to learn. With her statement about the presented positivity of a language, she represents her own deliberate choosing of which language to learn in high school based on her views of how helpful it would prove to her and which teachers under who she could learn the best. Her beliefs about language aptitude correspond well with her belief about the necessity of hard work in language learning.

Grammar and Accuracy

Like Amanda, Catherine's ideas about the place of grammar and vocabulary changed during her time abroad:

> Before FC, grammar and vocab *were* the language. There were rules and grammar and vocab were the tools you used to do your homework… I now see the language as a single entity, not a set of rules. Grammar and vocab are necessary, but not the end all.

Her newfound appreciation for the wholeness of a represents a major shift in thought about language and most likely affected other language learning beliefs and preferences for learning mentioned later in the interview.

Prior to making this statement, Catherine considered how her burgeoning holistic view of language sometimes created confusion between what she heard in her interactions outside of class and how she was learning in her classes while abroad:

> Catherine: In class, I learned the technicals, but sometimes that just confused me regarding what I had learned naturally outside the classroom… As in, I thought "did the teacher say it's 'che' or 'di'" when a month earlier, before I learned that lesson in class, I knew the answer with 100% certainty
>
> Researcher: like you gained more "intuition?"
>
> Catherine: Definitely more intuition through out-of-class learning. In the real world, I learned how it is, and no one confused me by pointing out how it *wasn't* so I didn't have that to confuse me.

This quote outlining her disconnection between classroom learning and her experiences off campus suggests that the experience of having a gap in information and expected knowledge forced Catherine to reformulate her conceptions of language and grammar. This contemplation

likely contributed to Catherine's later holistic conception of language. Since Catherine only really had experience learning in a classroom before Switzerland, her discoveries outside of the classroom were new to her upon her arrival. She implies that she began to trust more in what she learned about Italian outside of class rather than the specifics of what she learned in class by choosing to focus on the realities of the language she found rather than memorizing the exception to the rules.

Expanding on her concept of immersion, Catherine further contrasts her learning in a more naturalistic context with what she learned in a classroom, citing an example of a language she spent time learning in order to get around the African nation of Malawi first at the college, and later after graduation for a photography project:

> I started learning French and Italian in the classroom, so that was mostly rote memorization. I used that with almost all the other languages I tried to learn too. I usually memorize the basic phrases that will get me into a conversation with people, then try to use face-to-face to learn as much more as I can. In Malawi, 80% of the Chichewa I learned was through face-to-face and picking it up solely through the context of what was happening. As such, I don't know words from phrases, and I rarely get the tense right, but I still get by.

Even though she may use the kinds of memorization strategies that she had previously experienced in language classrooms, she learned to put her own communicative twist on them in order to profit from the environment she found herself in. Even though she cannot separate out specific words, she can still communicate and understand meaning, which to her holds more importance. The fact that she sees language as a whole rather than a sum of smaller parts allows her to rely much more on social strategy heavily based on context clues. Since Catherine met

success with this method and conception, she has continued to use it even after her time at the college in learning Mandarin in addition to Chichewa.

Catherine's views regarding the importance of accent and accuracy also reflect how her goal of communication trumps the type of grammar-focused classroom learning that she experienced prior to learning abroad:

> I don't like that my grammar in other languages isn't perfect, but I'd rather be imperfect than not try to communicate at all… It's easier to be understood when you have a perfect accent and perfect accuracy, but… neither are 100% necessary when trying to communicate. I know maybe 100 words in Chichewa, and only 3 or 4 complete sentences, but I was still able to make myself understood.

For her, language is more about knowing how to use it than it is about any sort of memorization and grammar drills; context is key for Catherine. If language learning requires hard work, part of that hard work includes negotiating meaning when one is not understood and how to manipulate language to work with only minimal knowledge. Catherine arrived at many of these conclusions and strategy preferences most likely during her own experience of full immersion with a local Italian-speaking family for whom she worked as an au pair.

Outside Language Contact

One summer, the family that Catherine worked for solicited her au pair services for an entire summer, offering along with it a summer of linguistic immersion in Italian. Catherine recounts:

> It was the au pairing that really pushed me over the edge. I learned more in those three and a half months than I had the entire previous year. I au paired between freshman and

sophomore years, so it was pretty early on. That gave me a lot of confidence speaking

and understanding, which helped me dramatically once I got back in the classroom…

At first, my French was much better than my Italian, so I relied a lot on my French

knowledge to help me with my Italian. I thought I was pretty average during my first

year of Italian classes, but then I jumped to being one of the best in the class after I au

paired. Au pairing was definitely a more brutal way of learning, but in the end, it was

more effective because it was more dramatic, more vital-to-surviving, more pervasive,

etc.

Au pairing was a turning point in Italian for certain, but it was also so with other

languages. Being so confident with Italian made me more confident trying and playing

with other languages.

Catherine's experience as an au pair proved to be a definitive linguistic turning point for her and

her retelling suggests that the success that she found through this summer immersed in Italian

boosted her language skills and most likely affected her thoughts about how language is learned.

Her earlier references to the necessity of hard work when learning a language appear to relate to

this "more brutal way of learning" and the necessity of surviving her linguistic trial by fire after

only one year of learning the target language. This description suggests that, as an au pair, she

met and overcame great linguistic and personal challenge. Her experience positively affected her

confidence levels after finding herself one of the stronger students in the classroom. Catherine

would be more likely to analyze what kinds of experiences and techniques contributed to this

jump in standing after such a confirmation of her skills.

During the interview Catherine referred to the acquisition of a "framework" for learning

languages after one learns a foreign language for the first time. By "framework," she refers to a

mental blueprint or structure in which to interpret languages and conceptualize language learning. The emergence of this belief appears to have roots in this au pair experience, her earlier experiences interacting with Swiss locals and her acquisition of more metacognitive knowledge about her language learning. The fact that she applied what she already learned in her French class to her new Italian situations shows this "framework" at play in her adaptation to her new surroundings.

Catherine profited from her au pair experience by making it a springboard for further development of communication with others in the local community:

[I] spoke Italian regularly in stores, at the train station, etc. I acted as translator when I was with others who didn't speak Italian. I made friends with a Cheese Man in Ponte Tresa[2] that I chatted with every weekend. I tutored the kids in English (and had to interact with their usually bilingual families). Since I tutored such young kids, I often did it in the park where we could play at the same time, so I talked with other kids' families at the park on a regular basis. I picked up my tutor kids from school, so I talked with their teachers too.

The world opened up to Catherine after the connections she made as an au pair. As she became a more experienced tutor, she was able to seek out new opportunities for speaking and was able to use her everyday situations as a locus for her Italian practice whenever she could. Even while she was working with the children in English, she was able to still make further connections with other parents and adults through use of her Italian, gaining more and more confidence with every new connection. She even offered to be the translator in situations that required spoken Italian, placing herself in a position of expertise. Her beliefs and interactions center around this one influential experience of immersion. When she discusses her beliefs before and after her stay in

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[2] This refers to an outdoor market many students like to go to on weekends just across the border to Italy.

Switzerland, it would be more accurate to say that she discusses her beliefs before and after the immersion experience.

Catherine heavily emphasizes the details and positive linguistic effects of immersion. When asked whether or not a language is best learned in a country where it is spoken, she replied:

> I think it's better to be immersed in a language than to learn it in the classroom alone (just based on personal experience), but if you can find immersion outside of a host country, I don't think that's terrible either. A native country will be more thorough and more pervasive though.

Catherine clearly had a positive language learning experience in the Swiss environment to still think so highly about learning language abroad. Catherine must have also made great gains since her self-described proficiency in Italian is greater than that of French even though she studied the latter for a longer period of time. She places more merit, however, on immersive experiences in general no matter where they occur. Unlike the other participants who mention the importance of immersion, she separates the idea of immersion from spending time learning in the host country realizing that living in a host country does not lead to immersive experiences in and of itself.

Catherine's thoughts about the pervasiveness of the language relate to some of the strategies she mentioned using to learn Italian. When talking about the linguistically immersive experience of au pairing, she said, "I carried my English-Italian dictionary with me all the time, but I used it less and less as time went on. I mostly picked things up from conversation… and from reading signs and listening to TV." During this time she mostly focused on learning the language in context rather than choosing to rely on other tools to lead her to answers and understanding. The fact that she stopped carrying around a dictionary testifies to her vocabulary

learning, but it may also imply that she learned how to negotiate meaning and manipulate what she knew of the language. She came into contact with Italian whichever way she turned and learned how to consciously interact with the language that surrounded her.

Even though she advocates immersion, Catherine does not idealize it or see it as a quick remedy to learn a language well. When outlining her struggles, she states:

> No one in the family spoke any English, so I spoke Italian or I didn't speak at all. Never before had I ever had the experience of having something to say and not being able to say it, so it was very frustrating. There were tears, but I stuck with it. I also picked up super naughty stuff from the kid and used it in normal conversation because I didn't realize that a five-year-old would teach me such terrible stuff, so I was embarrassed a lot, but I learned pretty quickly to get over that, mostly because it was either that or be mute.

In the end Catherine's desire to express herself and her identity made her forget about any potential discomfort from the mistakes. She was also forced to sift through the information about the language used by the child she was taking care of in order to learn about the language, compelling her to think more critically about the language she was hearing around her. Such embarrassing incidents taught her to pay extra attention to the contexts in which certain words are used and may have contributed to her seeing the language more as a whole rather than as a sum of its grammatical parts. Like Amanda, Catherine's desire to represent her own identity drove her to jump through linguistic hoops to do so, perhaps helping her forge her new Italian identity in the process or learning to express herself in such a situation.

Catherine stated that, given the chance to give advice to future language learners aspiring to go abroad, she would say:

I think that if I hadn't spent time at FC, I would still have more faith in memorization because I wouldn't have experienced learning on location. If someone wanted to learn a language abroad I'd say that if they were going to school, they'd need 2-4 years, but if they were au pairing and living with people who didn't speak their language, 4-6 months would be enough to get pretty good, though a year living in the language would be best.

Her understanding of fluency here became much more nuanced and context and behavior-oriented. Catherine uses her own experiences as a basis for this advice and implies that learning in an immersion situation led her to adopting different ideas and techniques than she had learned in the classroom that changed her fluency expectations. At the end of the interview, Catherine asserted that she has no regrets about how she spent her time in Switzerland since she felt content and confident with how much Italian she learned.

Catherine's belief changes have influenced the rest of the languages that Catherine has decided to learn since her study abroad experience. When discussing how she chooses to learn languages now she stated:

I rely much less on memorization and textbooks now than I did when I first started learning other languages. That might be because I'm no longer studying in a class or on an official schedule. I use much more face-to-face now. I try to practice Mandarin at the store and the Laundromat and when I pass people in the hall in my building. I have games on my phone to try to learn, but I've picked up more from reading signs than from those games.

Catherine is a very motivated learner and, with her past experiences, she has formed her language learning preferences based on where she found the most success. She chooses to focus mostly on communication and context rather than get stuck on the building blocks of grammar

rules now that she sees the language as more of a whole. She chooses her own schedule and likes to seize every opportunity she can for practice, much like she did after her immersive experience as an au pair.

Belief Changes

Reflecting on how she arrived at these new conclusions Catherine replied: "I think my beliefs formed gradually, but they solidified mostly through the conversations I had with friends." Even though Catherine provides some evidence about how the power of experiences can help guide the shift of language learning beliefs, she also understands that a certain degree of awareness is necessary. Her discussion with her friends helped her put her ideas about language learning into words, and after her definitive immersion experience, she takes these solidified beliefs and puts them into practice in the new languages she endeavors to learn.

Evidence from Catherine's interview suggests that language learning beliefs do change during time spent abroad, but more time spent abroad does not necessarily lead to a more drastic change in beliefs or learning goals. For Catherine, her immersive experience as an au pair helped define who she was as an Italian speaker and as a language learner in general even after her time in Switzerland ended. Since her experience with immersion happened closer to the beginning of her stay in Switzerland, the confidence she found here inspired her to seek more contacts and practice her Italian more during her time abroad. During this crucial experience Catherine, who had previously only had experiences learning language in the classroom, was compelled to reformulate her ideas about language learning in order to find success within her struggle to express herself and connect with others.

One of the biggest belief shifts Catherine described was her shift from a more grammar and vocabulary centric perspective to the idea that language should be dealt with as a

communicative whole. This one belief shift changed a whole host of strategies for Catherine, prompting her to start communicating more in the beginning stages of language learning and looking for context clues to help inform meaning. Her endeavors post-graduation show how much she still applies this knowledge and belief system on her language learning.

Catherine experienced a shift in the degree of how large a role hard work plays in learning a language. After her experiences abroad she believed that hard work was an essential part of language learning and that any sort of natural talent for language learning does not exist. Since Catherine struggled during her time spent immersed in the language, her views about how to attain a certain level inevitably include this struggle. Having overcome these difficulties once, she developed tools of coping and understanding that she could later apply to communicative situations.

Catherine's interview data does suggest that the shifts in her beliefs did prompt differences in her behavior. After her immersion experience she sought out new contacts and fearlessly integrated more into the local community and took the lead in her Italian classes. Catherine's belief change regarding grammar seemed the crux for many of these habits and development of new strategies. Catherine learned to rely on her own skills rather than feel the need to conjure up grammatical minutiae she learned in class, giving her the necessary confidence to create her own language learning experiences even after she has left Switzerland.

Overall Catherine's time in Switzerland gave her a greater feeling of self-efficacy and the knowledge to take advantage of her environment. Her changes in language learning beliefs are tied to her interactive experiences and, sometimes, how they conflicted with her in-class learning. She both shifted her beliefs to cope with the difficulty of immersion, while the success she met with during her immersion helped solidify her shifting beliefs.

Case Study #4: Daliyah- Trouble with French and Static Beliefs

"In some ways, it emphasized on points that I had thought of, in other ways, it was what I was expecting."

Background

Daliyah first began learning languages growing up in Bahrain speaking both Arabic and English from childhood. Her interest in language spread to French in high school and, upon her arrival in Switzerland, she decided to take up Italian. She explained how her family expected her to study abroad so she decided to attend the college because of its extensive travel program. When she arrived at the college's doors she had to make the decision to continue with French, or to begin again with Italian:

> Italian I picked because we were in Lugano, and I wanted the opportunity to speak to some locals (plus it sounded really pretty). I had previously been studying French at school, which I didn't really like, so between Italian and French, I picked Italian.

Daliyah's choice to take Italian was partially based both on its practicality for her time in Switzerland as well as her potential enjoyment of the language itself. Her anticipated learning of Italian allowed her to move away from her previous experiences of frustration associated with learning French. Probing more into what stopped her from enjoying French, Daliyah replied:

> I'm not sure. I studied it for four years at high school, but never really picked it up. I even did French theater and literature at the local Alliance Française but for some reason, it was a lot more challenging for me to pick up than Italian (which I started at university) even though I had more opportunities/time with French.

Even though she declares she does not know why her language learning experiences unfolded in such a way, this disparity between what she experienced learning French and later learning

Italian may have inspired her to think more critically about her language learning. The fact that she has spent so much time during high school learning a language that she could never grasp does not, however, seem to have affected her confidence and she entered into learning Italian with a positive and optimistic attitude.

Difficulty and Aptitude

In light of her lack of success with French, Daliyah believes that the difficulty of languages varies greatly from person to person and language to language and that language aptitude exists to mediate these effects. While at the college, Daliyah found work tutoring some students struggling in Italian, adding to her range of perspectives on language learning. Unlike Catherine she does not always equate hard work with learning a language more quickly:

> I've seen many students put lots of effort into studying Italian, both in my classes and as… a tutor, and still not be able to do as well in class… while other students who didn't need to work as hard were doing really well.

When the researcher asked about why she thought some students were more successful than others she replied:

> I noticed that some of the people that were studying just weren't as confident in their skills, or were worried about making mistakes, so would not be as outspoken in class or with locals, and so would not really have the opportunity to practice in a more spontaneous setting.
>
> Also, some people who speak more than one language, or who learn a certain language might have a hard time learning a different language because the rules can be so different and it's hard to conceptualize… But I do believe that students that go into a language with a preconceived notion could experience more difficulty learning

Daliyah acknowledges herself that when students enter into learning a language with certain ideas about the best way to learn it, it can have an effect on their learning. This relates to her belief recounted later in the interview that fear of making mistakes can create obstacles for language learners. These beliefs may have their origins in her experience and frustration with learning French compared with her easier time of learning Italian. From her tutoring, Daliyah begins to see first-hand how different people experience language learning while acting the guide to help each student learn. Daliyah attributes some of her students' frustration to some linguistic interference and possible preconceived notions of difficulty. Given that she approached Italian with a positive attitude after her frustrations with French shows that she has already had experience with these two factors. Daliyah sees the influence that affective factors can have over the process by citing the students who had difficulty due to their lack of confidence. Her understanding of the pitfalls that her students have fallen into helps her to avoid them in her own future learning as well as to help future tutoring students through similar issues.

Confirming that the difference in her two main foreign language learning efforts helped her to think more critically about her language learning Daliyah stated:

When I was in high school, I would discuss different methods of learning languages with my French teacher, since as I mentioned, I just wasn't picking it up. We explored some options, like one on one sessions, learning through watching, group discussions, but it was mostly trial and error and seeing which method I was most comfortable with. I didn't actively research the subject, or really reflect on it beyond my own challenges.

Even though she implies that her own reflections did not reach beyond a surface level, these struggles still did compel her to ask questions about her learning and to explore more of her options. She became more acquainted with herself and her own style of learning, which aided her

in giving one on one attention to her tutoring students later on and how to actively engage in a series of trial and error.

Grammar, Vocabulary and Accuracy

While tutoring, Daliyah came across certain student difficulties with grammar and vocabulary. Revealing her thoughts about where the two fit into language learning she stated:

> I think they go hand in hand, but I would put a little bit of an emphasis on vocabulary: without the vocab, regardless of how correct your grammar is, you aren't going to be able to express yourself
>
> Grammar is essential for writing, however, even with some errors, you are still able to get your point across (more or less) if you are using the correct words to describe what you are thinking of.

Grammar holds more sway in Daliyah's conception of language learning. She differentiates, however, between written and spoken language, communicative and explicit grammar. Her emphasis on grammar changes with the context. Daliyah honors a more communicative approach to language learning by emphasizing grammar's use in getting a point across, but does not extend this to the use of grammar in writing. For Daliyah, speaking and writing come with different rules about the appropriate usage of grammar. Like both Catherine and Amanda, Daliyah tends to highlight vocabulary by citing its indispensable role in communication. Daliyah asserts that she has always felt this way about language learning, and that her time abroad did not really influence these beliefs.

Daliyah expressed positive feelings and a more communicatively-oriented attitude toward accents considering them sufficiently produced if a native speaker can understand. She mentioned that sometimes, when speaking downtown, locals would mistake her for a Sicilian

because she "speak[s] very quickly and make[s] grammatical errors." She added, "I like to think it's because most of my professors were from southern Italy." Given that most of Daliyah's linguistic contact with Italian happened through the classroom, it is possible that she modeled her accent after professors rather than speakers from her own local environment. Despite her non-native accent, locals still sometimes mistook her for a native speaker of a certain Italian variety, giving her positive feedback and a feeling of success. When this occurred, the locals still chose to engage her in conversation rather than switching to English, which Daliyah admitted happening later in the interview.

To explain her overall open attitude toward accents Daliyah adds: "growing up in a mostly bilingual country, I've come across many different accents." Growing up in such an environment equipped Daliyah with a more fluid idea of accent and its correspondence with linguistic proficiency even before her experience abroad. In this case, she was more comfortable with a range of accents and remained so during and after her time in Switzerland.

Ever since Daliyah's childhood, her contact with multiple languages has been forming her ideas about language and language learning. Like accent, Daliyah knows that accuracy can signal language proficiency and that it has the power to affect the way a native speaker perceives the learner:

> In terms of accuracy, I think as long as you make mistakes, people will assume that it is not a language that you are very fluent in, and while learning that's not a problem, but at a certain point of fluency, mistakes should be minimal/avoided.

Daliyahs gives flexibility to accents, but, she still counts accuracy as an important aspect of gaining fluency when speaking. Daliyah's label of "fluent" implies a high enough proficiency to avoid grammatical mistakes to give a native speaker the impression that the learner really knows

how to speak. Later in the interview Daliyah does take a more forgiving stance toward accuracy when she mentions that "small mistakes are easy to overlook… Even people fluent in English/or any other language can make errors." This suggests that her real beliefs lean more toward "minimal" mistakes rather than a complete avoidance. Daliyah declared that this set of beliefs also remained unchanged during her time abroad.

Fluency and Interaction

On the subject of fluency, Daliyah projected how long it would take to attain pre-sojourn: "I thought it would take 2-3 years if I was surrounded by people who spoke the language (as was the case in Lugano) and maybe longer if I was learning a language that the locals didn't speak." When asked whether or not she felt as if she attained it, she said that she was not as fluent as she would like as a speaker and even less so as a writer. She did not use the word "immersion," here but the concept still applied when she lamented that, had she found more opportunities to surround herself, she may have made greater gains. Overall her original time estimate to attain fluency is not wholly unrealistic, but the English-speaking world of the college did not make total immersion possible for her without actively seeking it.

Even though she never felt totally immersed like Amanda during her Buddhist talks and Catherine during her au pair work, Daliyah still found many opportunities to speak Italian. Even when she was not speaking, Daliyah still felt as if she was gaining more linguistic knowledge by finding herself in an area where the target language is spoken:

> I think when you're around a language enough, that you absorb it. Maybe not entirely, but you start picking up patterns in sentence, vocabulary, nuances in dialect, etc. that's why I think language immersion is a great way to teach a new language.

Even though Daliyah advised future study abroad students to interact more with locals, later in the interview, she still believes that one can absorb certain types of linguistic knowledge when living in a country where it is spoken. Like Catherine, Daliyah emphasizes paying attention to product labels and street signs to build vocabulary skills. This perception may be one reason why she felt more successful in her endeavors to learn Italian, as opposed to her perceived failures in French learning the language in Bahrain.

When asked about the frequency of her interaction Daliyah admitted that she did not interact with locals very often:

> Mostly I would order in Italian, or ask about things in grocery stores/directions downtown, etc. I didn't really interact much with the locals, and those that I did interact with, if they understood/spoke English, would often switch while speaking to me. They were pretty consistent throughout since I was more or less using basic Italian but whenever I went downtown so once or twice a week I would get the chance to speak to someone. I was sitting next to an older Italian woman a few times on the bus back from downtown and she would always give me recipes for different Italian dishes (that was the longest interaction I had with a local).

Daliyah did not encounter many interactions that went beyond the depth her basic Italian could express, but she still was able to use the language on a weekly basis in a communicative context. Over the course of her time in Switzerland the level and frequency of her interactions did not change. The stability of the details of her interactions with the locals corresponds with the stability of her belief system during her time abroad.

Even though these interactions did not alter in their nature, Daliyah did learn how to learn from them:

I always guess words while speaking. Sometimes it helps the listener know that I am
trying to express something and having difficulty, which lets them help me or give me
more time, but it's a good way to practice vocab, especially if you have a patient listener
who's willing to correct you or give you more words.

Daliyah learned how to negotiate meaning in these interactions and liked to use them as an
opportunity for learning and to test her learning. Her learning intentions when speaking rendered
the moments where native speakers switched to English all the more frustrating since she would
lose an opportunity to learn.

Despite her infrequent local interactions, Daliyah did mention that one of her favorite
Italian classes was an upper level class that involved the study of Italian history and literature.
Even though she did not use the language much outside of the classroom, she still had contact
with it and maintained a cultivated passion for the culture surrounding the language. The
connections between the language and culture represented one of Daliyah's favorite aspects of
language learning:

I've always tied language learning together with culture and literature (maybe because of
how I learned English and Arabic growing up) so I expect in depth/well-rounded
education, which includes language and culture, since I believe you can't really
understand the nuances of language or culture without the other.

Daliyah's expectations of learning still related to her childhood experiences learning English and
later, French. The professed connections between language and cultural learning are also evident
in one of her favorite strategies for language learning and for gaining more language contact
outside of the classroom: "I think pop culture is an excellent way to learn language especially if
you start watching something subtitled then slowly phase out the subtitles you can learn a lot

about the culture and language." She also discusses her talent for remembering words learned in context, and using repetition to learn vocabulary better. She listened to music in Italian and read books. Her class that involved both Italian history and literature helped her learn the language while learning about the culture from a primary source. In conclusion Daliyah stated, "I think it's because when growing up learning two languages, you learn that there are some concepts/ideas that are just not as easy to express in a certain language because they do not exist in the culture/tradition." Daliyah exhibits two conceptions of language learning: She explains her forays into the local world, focusing more on communicative language as well as her deep interest and appreciation for a more literary form of the language. Most likely Daliyah transfers what she learns through reading into her conversations and vice versa.

Closing Thoughts

Later in the interview, when the researcher posed the question about what advice she would give to someone who was thinking about studying abroad, Daliyah said:

I would say interact more with the locals, go see more Italian movies, make an effort to speak only in Italian with students from the class/roommates taking Italian basically find more of an opportunity to speak in Italian with locals or other kids from the college and practice often.

Even though she has her ideas about how best to learn a language, she still never felt as if she had as much contact with the local community as she had hoped for. Even though she found indirect contact with Italian, she also notes that many students do not choose to seek such contact. Even though everyone found themselves in an Italian-speaking context, students still found themselves using English with one another and even off campus[3].

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[3] Italian is often used on campus between students in an informal way.

Like many other students that have participated in study abroad, her interview data suggests that Daliyah also has some regrets about her experience learning Italian in Switzerland. Despite wishing to have put in a bit more effort to speak to locals, Daliyah's overall language learning experience proved positive and had encouraged her to keep learning languages even after her time at the college.

Unlike Amanda or Catherine, Daliyah did not experience any large shifts in her belief system during her time abroad. Mostly, her time abroad seemed to confirm ideas that she had previously formulated about language learning while in Bahrain. While abroad, Daliyah did try to keep an open mind about language learning and she was successfully able to help the students she tutored in Italian to learn. Her main shift was in a more fervent belief in the connections between learning language and learning culture as evidenced by her strategies and enjoyment of this aspect of the language learning process.

In addition to the continuation of a rather stable belief system, Daliyah also admits that the frequency and settings of her local interactions never really shifted during her time abroad. She generally kept her interactions in the realm of using basic Italian. This data suggests a correlation here between the development of language learning beliefs and choices about interaction. Daliayah's commentary suggests that her greatest enjoyment in learning stems from her cultural appreciation of pop culture and literature. She preferred these forms of linguistic contact over all others, making the process more enjoyable but also limiting her outside spoken interaction.

Case Study #5: Eric- The Classroom as a Mediator for Contact

"Being in a country can make you lazy, you may just assume you are absorbing the language just by being there, whereas when you are in your own country you, or at least I, put in more effort to try and practice regularly. It is more important to have a

teacher/professor that creates an environment where you actually enjoy studying the new

language…"

Background

Eric's first forays into language learning began in high school where he chose to learn Mandarin due to the Chinese presence in his home area. Eric even spent a few weeks abroad with his classmates in China trying to practice his Mandarin in a real life context. When he arrived in Switzerland, he opted to learn Italian and, later in a more informal setting, French. When asked why he chose to initially pursue learning Italian at the college he replied:

Italian seemed the most practical language to study out of the three (Italian, German and

French) offered... I wanted to learn it as soon as possible so that I could interact with

people in Lugano. I also thought it would be useful for the day to day living in Ticino.

Eric shared the same reason for learning Italian with the other alumni interviewed. Also like the other alumni, he did not decide to attend university in Switzerland for the purpose of learning Italian. His choice of Italian based on what he perceived as the most practical language mirrored his reasons for choosing to learn Chinese in high school. Eric thought that he would have more of a chance to use his Chinese locally due to the Chinese population in his place of residence.

After his experience learning Chinese, Eric entered into his Italian classes with certain expectations of fluency and what advantages learning in Switzerland might bring to his learning:

I wanted to become fluent in Italian, I believed (naively) that by the time I completed the

three requisite levels of Italian, in addition to living in Switzerland for that whole period

that I would be fluent. Basically, I had hoped to be completely fluent by the time I

graduated (3-4 years)…

> On a scale of 1-10, 1 being non-existent and 10 being fluent I would say I reached a 6-7 in Italian. I could hold conversations and I could understand most things when they were spoken to me.

Judging by the score that he gives himself, Eric felt generally successful in his Italian learning even if he did not reach his original goal of complete "fluency." Despite his general success, his comments directly after this in the interview express his feeling of great disillusionment with the idea of learning a language in a country where it is spoken.

After his experience abroad Eric greatly adjusted his ideas about what learning a language in the host country offers:

> I don't think that specifically being "on-site" contributes much to learning a language better or faster… I found out you had to almost go out of your way to speak Italian in Switzerland as most people would just revert to English when you spoke to them and… on campus everyone prefers English. What being on-site offers is context to what you are learning in class. It was much easier to go out and find an Italian newspaper or to wander through town and eavesdrop on the locals. You have an opportunity to pick up colloquial phrases and even possibly an accent.
>
> In my opinion though it is not enough to be "on-site" but rather to be immersed to make a real difference in learning a new language. To be surrounded for the majority of your day by people speaking only in that language and where you are in a position that if you want to get anything done- you are forced to learn that language in order to interact with the people around you.

This longer excerpt sets many of the tones and themes of Eric's interview. Eric's interview stands out from the other participants because he often insists on the importance of what happens

in the classroom to mediate what one encounters outside of the classroom. In the scenario he paints, the off-campus environment in Switzerland grounds classroom learning more than it offers new opportunities of learning. Put more simply, Eric conceptualized the world off campus more like a practice ground for classroom learning rather than standing alone as learning environment in and of itself. Like Daliyah and Catherine, Eric sees the advantage of the "pervasiveness" of a language when learning in the host country. He also shared the beliefs of the other alumni by saying that students should have the experience of needing to speak the target language to get by in order to attain fluency through immersion. Even though he has changed his belief in the idea of learning a language in a location where it is spoken, he does also mention the positive aspects that it did offer him as a learner such as the possibility of exercising reading and listening skills in the context of daily. This emphasis most likely reflects Eric's own habits of linguistic contact outside of class and where he felt the most benefits of this contact.

Difficulty and Aptitude

Eric asserts that he has always had trouble learning languages, but he treats language learning just like he would any other subject. Eric believes that language aptitude is a more natural inborn talent:

> Like some people are more artistically inclined than they are toward mathematics or vice versa, I think languages are easier to people who can think creatively.
>
> Personally, foreign languages have always been my most difficult subjects. I have consistently been an A-B student yet my language grades have remained consistently C-D, which I have always thought was interesting because I feel I put significantly more time and effort into learning a new language than other subjects.

Perhaps his difficulty learning leads him to place more significance on what happens in the classroom and look to his language teachers for more guidance in order to turn his grades around. He shares the frustration in struggling to learn the subject that Amanda also reports, and that Daliyah reports observing in her tutoring students. He had difficulty pinpointing why he put so much time and effort into learning only to feel as if he had not progressed in the end. This frustration most likely affected the way in which he approached learning and contributed to feelings of demotivation in and outside of the classroom.

Tracing back his language learning history Eric appears to have gained a greater understanding of language learning as he continues his effots:

> comprehending Italian was easier… than Chinese, and French was easier than Italian. A large part of this was due to the fact that I had very different teaching styles for all of them, but also I believe because having knowledge of multiple languages certainly helps in understanding new ones.

Eric acknowledges the power of Catherine's idea of a linguistic "framework" for language learning but colors it with the importance of good teaching. How a teacher presents the information is tantamount to how well he will learn a language. Not viewing himself as having any talent for learning yet still amassing experience along the way, Eric looks to the experts to guide him at least in the beginning of his endeavors. Eric's implication that he learned how to transfer knowledge of learning languages from one situation to another suggests a certain level of attained self-efficacy in his approach to language learning, giving him more confidence with each new language he chooses to take on.

Grammar Vocabulary and Accuracy

When discussing the changes in his thoughts about grammar and vocabulary learning Eric continues to draw on the theme of the necessity of teacher presentation for successful language learning:

> To be honest I hadn't given it a whole lot of thought before arriving.... I hadn't yet had multiple experiences learning new languages just Chinese and therefore, did not have any differing instructional styles to compare it to.
>
> Now I believe grammar and vocabulary are very important. In my opinion it is necessary to get a good foundation of basic knowledge in a language before you can take full advantage of immersing yourself with a host family or other such environment. You will of course gain additional vocabulary in those settings but it greatly expedites the process to already have a basic understanding. And grammar can really only be learned in a classroom, you will become very good conversationally by immersing yourself and improve your ability to learn in a classroom taught in that language but grammar takes specific instruction.

Above all, Eric continues to emphasize the influence of each teacher's methods and how this affected his own attitudes. Eric believes that the place for grammar learning is in the classroom, but the place to put it all together is through linguistic immersion outside of the classroom. Even though he separates grammar and conversational proficiency, the two situations must work in tandem to aid in the language acquisition. This relationship seems like the opposite experience from that of Catherine and Ben who saw the classroom learning as somewhat conflicting to the language that she learned outside of the classroom. Eric views the classroom as a more important locus of linguistic education than the world outside. He conceives the classroom environment as the ideal way to build a language learning base of grammar before one can venture out to speak.

Eric's ideas about establishing a linguistic base line up with the previous research (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Magnan & Back, 2007; Marqués-Pascual, 2011) that suggest that students often experience greater gains when they go abroad if they have already achieved a higher level of proficiency or a greater grammatical understanding before they depart.

In addition to the shifts that Eric experienced in his beliefs about grammar and vocabulary, the value of accent and accuracy also changed in intensity. Before his time abroad, Eric considered one fluent if one adopted the accent of a native speaker, made no grammatical mistakes and no longer guessed words during a conversation. After his time abroad, he developed a much more realistic idea of fluency for a non-native speaker and adjusted his beliefs of the importance of a native-like accent:

> It is always a long-term goal to be able to speak like a local without the accent but, that would take so much time and effort that I wouldn't consider it requisite of becoming fluent. It would be a valuable skill if you worked in that language or did in fact use it in some way every day, but if you were using it that much the accent should eventually come naturally. Therefore I don't believe it should really be a specific learning goal while studying the language. That is not to say that you should not try to emulate the way words are pronounced by the locals while you are studying.

Even though Eric no longer deems accent an important aspect of rigorous language study, he still does believe that one should aspire toward a native-like accent while speaking. This idea falls in line with the changes in his ideas about how long it takes for someone to gain fluency. For Eric, acquiring the finer points of a language now comes with time and practice rather than through natural absorption of the linguistic environment. The shifts in his ideas about fluency most likely derive from his own attempts to master the Italian accent and his feedback from native speakers.

Earlier in the interview Eric, like Daliyah, also mentioned his frustrations with locals switching to English, determining that he was not a proficient enough Italian speaker. This frustration may have also inspired Eric to reflect on these issues.

When speaking, Eric sees each conversation as an opportunity to practice speaking and negotiate meaning:

> As far as guessing words while speaking you should always do it, how else will you improve your vocabulary if not by attempting to use words you only roughly know the meaning of and then being corrected by those who know better? I often guess words while speaking English my own native language.

Here he humbly submits to the expertise of other speaker, depending on them to correct him during conversation. Like Miller and Ginsberg (1995) found with their study, Eric's statement suggests that he superimposes a classroom structure on his interactions with others by turning native speakers into feedback-giving "caretakers." This places even more value on the classroom situations for Eric because he uses what he learns in that setting to structure his learning experiences outside of it.

Eric's emphasis on the importance of the teacher seems paradoxical when he discusses how much the role of the student includes. When asked to describe the roles of both student and teacher, he said that before he went abroad he thought that more responsibility should be on the teacher to engage the students. Afterwards, however, he exhibits his newfound self-efficacy by stating:

> I would say that 95% of the effort must be on the student. The student knows how they themselves learn best, they are capable of forcing themselves to study outside of the

classroom, and it is the students' efforts to improve themselves that makes the most

difference.

The role of the teacher, in addition to teaching the technical aspects of the language like

grammar, is to bolster excitement for learning the language and offer suggestions to the

student in new ways they might improve. Suggesting to the student possible

extracurricular activities that could be beneficial, bringing in that cultural aspect to the

class (assuming the instructor has knowledge of the culture from which their language is

coming)

For Eric, his independence for learning a second language increased as he learned more about his

learning. Students are responsible for acquiring their own metacognitive knowledge and teachers

should work to guide this knowledge. He puts the burden of grammar teaching on the teacher,

but the greatest responsibility of the teacher is to teach the language in a more recreational way

in order to cultivate motivation to inspire more linguistic contact outside of the classroom. This

motivation proved more important in helping Eric maintain his language skills in his later

learning endeavors outside of the Swiss context.

Interactions in Two Contexts

Since Eric studied Italian both in Switzerland and in the United States, he compares his

experience of learning in these two different contexts. In Switzerland Eric felt that his struggles

in class resulted from the fact that he did not get the individual attention he needed. When he

studied abroad he arranged an independent study with a professor that, according to Eric, "used

practical teaching methods," unlike what he found in his classes in Switzerland. At the college he

felt that he was not advancing in class and he would arrive "at the start of term eager to learn by

the end of the year, both years, [he] was completely turned off the language." With his new instruction and one on one attention, he felt for the first time that he was making progress.

> When I was in [a] course that I enjoyed (most notably my third year) I felt as though I was learning more, which in turn gave me more confidence to do extracurricular activities that involved using the language. Like reading in Italian, setting up dinners where only Italian could be used, etc... Whereas with the courses that I did not enjoy at all, I would become so frustrated that by the end of the class I wouldn't want to do anything remotely Italian until I was forced to again at the next class.

For Eric, the level of enjoyment he experienced in learning the language directly related to his motivation to use it outside of the classroom. What happened in the classroom played a bigger role for Eric than for all of the other participants in terms of its influence on his perception of his own abilities, his motivation to seek outside interaction, and his critical thinking about his own habits and consciously held epistemological belief system.

> Finally finding the motivation to engage in more extracurricular activities in the United States, Eric explains his habits of finding linguistic contact outside of class in both contexts:

> It is important to have or find access to practice the language regularly, but that doesn't mean you have to necessarily be in that country. You can take out a subscription to a newspaper, find a language club, watch movies, get a children's book that you know well in English and read it in the new language, etc...
> Being in a country can make you lazy, you may just assume you are absorbing the language just by being there, whereas when you are in your own country you, or at least I, put in more effort to try and practice regularly. It is more important to have a teacher/professor that creates an environment where you actually enjoy studying the new

language, it is that enjoyment that creates the enthusiasm to put in effort for

extracurricular studying

Eric finally received his desired personalized attention and living in an area away from the

language actually compelled him to find more opportunities to use it outside of class to maintain

it. Interestingly, Eric's learning outside of the Swiss context proved more fruitful for him in this

regard than his previous endeavors in the host country. Finally feeling as if he found success,

Eric changed his language learning beliefs to fit the context where he felt the most success in

learning Italian. Forcing himself to be bolder about his language maintenance while in the U.S.

inspired him to use the environment off campus upon his return to Switzerland.

Despite his self- declared laziness, Eric did make efforts to have linguistic contact outside

of class while in Switzerland both before and after his experience in the U.S.:

I would say I sought interaction outside of campus more than most. My first year I

bought several lower level books in Italian hoping to improve my reading and

comprehension. I intentionally made regular trips downtown with the sole intent of

interacting with the Ticinese[4]. I used my position in student government to create the

student-to-host family program… in which I participated myself and lived with a local

family during the summer of 2007, I selected the Sicilian academic travel hoping to

improve my Italian and finally I organized several trips with the destination in Italy so

that I could practice, most notable of which was after graduation I worked on a farm in

central Italy for several weeks with a family that spoke only Italian.

Eric worked to set up situations where he was forced to speak Italian throughout his learning

experience. He also worked to create more opportunities for other students to come into contact

with locals and get more practice with Italian, knowing that interacting with locals did not come

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[4] From the canton of Ticino, where the city of Lugano is located

easily for the other students. Even though Eric expresses disillusionment with how quickly he thought he could learn in the Swiss environment, his level of interaction and drive appears to remain rather high despite his own feelings of inadequacy.

Eric hypothesized that other students did not seek as much interaction off campus because they felt as if they would be more detached from campus life if they did so. He used his own experience living with a host family as an example: "I did notice the one semester I lived with the host family, I did have a lot of opportunity to practice Italian but I hardly ever spent time with other students outside of class." In terms of his level of interaction outside of the classroom, Eric outlines a choice that each student has: to choose a life spending time with their English-speaking cohorts, or to venture out seeking out opportunities to speak Italian on their own. Perhaps this difficulty to find such a balance contributes more to a student's interactive choices than their language learning belief system. To some degree students may feel as if they are abandoning the friends they have made on campus if they choose to integrate more with the local community most likely lowering the amount of interaction that takes place in Italian outside of class.

Looking back at his interactions, Eric recounts some of his most memorable experiences. Like Catherine and Amanda, they include some of his more uncomfortable moments:

The most memorable moments were the frustration of being completely immersed in environments where speaking Italian was my only option of communication. i.e. living with the host family, working on the farm or spending a week walking the Camino de Santiago with an old Italian man who didn't speak a word of English. While they were frustrating they were also the most beneficial times that I learned Italian.

Conversationally, I learned more in several weeks in these environments than I did a

whole semester in any of my courses.

Here, Eric deliberately makes the distinction between learning conversational Italian and

learning Italian grammar. He feels like he improves his speaking more quickly in a more

naturalistic environment, but he still prefers to have the grammar instruction in class to create the

building blocks. It is important to note that, like Catherine, Eric's experienced a linguistic

turning point during his experience learning one on one. He mostly chose to engage in the

aforementioned activities only after his time feeling successful in the United States.

Looking back, Eric thought his biggest belief change was in his conception of how much

time and work language learning involves:

Before… I would have said that just spending the extra time studying would have been

enough.

Now I believe it is essential to get that extracurricular experience, the immersion aspect.

I don't believe you can become proficient in a language in the classroom alone. For

example when I wanted to learn French I surrounded myself with French speakers and

forced myself to speak French for a large portion of every day. Many of my new

strategies for learning a language are resultant of my failures to learn Italian at the

college.

Here Eric states explicitly that these moments of struggle and success are what led him to think

more critically about his language learning and how to make it "easier or at least more efficient."

Eric's later adoption of more communicative strategies to learning a language emulates those of

Catherine when he makes an effort to speak earlier in the learning process. His efforts in learning

French show Eric's shift in favor of more communicative strategies despite his insistence on the importance of a teacher's methods in other parts of his interview.

Despite his new preference for more communicative learning strategies with learning French, Eric still focuses on the classroom environment in learning when reflecting on what he would have done differently could he begin his adventure anew:

> I would have picked a language to learn based on the professors teaching them. I would have found the most interesting and enthusiastic professor and gone with whatever language they were teaching. I believe I would have had better luck at picking the language up and then using the knowledge and experience gained learning that language to make studying future languages easier. Maybe sought out private tutoring, since I seem to learn better in a one on one environment.

Once again, Eric emphasizes the influence of a teacher over his desire to learn and his own abilities. Catherine echoed this sentiment when she chose to learn French in high school based on the teacher that taught it. Eric left Switzerland with a better sense of how he learned, so he also mentions the importance he personally places on one on one tutoring.

Closing Thoughts

Eric sets himself apart from the other alumni interviewed with his professed importance of the classroom for increasing his motivation as a learner and for introducing key grammar concepts he could use later in interactions. During his time spent abroad Eric learned more about how he himself learned. After he graduated he had the confidence to branch out and engage in learning French after his Italian experience. His experience is unique from the other alumni interview because he was able to compare learning Italian both in Switzerland and in the United States. In the end, Eric's class in the United States proved the most beneficial to his learning of

Italian and in cultivating his motivation to practice outside of the classroom setting. He offset his professed "laziness" when he found an appreciation for the language learning process.

Eric's language learning beliefs showed a shift during his time spent in Switzerland. Even though he places heavy emphasis on the methods a teacher uses to present information and inspire motivation, he later stated that the grand majority of the responsibility lay with the student and their ability to find out how they learn the best. Eric also left with a new understanding of the length of time and effort it takes to achieve his definition of fluency. He became more forgiving of errors and accent, and grammar and vocabulary rose in importance.

Most importantly, Eric's struggles to learn Italian forced him to explore why he met with such resistance, leading him to reflect more about his language learning. After Eric finally did find success learning with one on one tutoring, and later, though more linguistically immersive experiences, he began to understand how he learns best and to reformulate his language learning beliefs.

Based on Eric's interview data his experience of finally finding classroom success in language learning gave him the confidence to venture out and seek more opportunities to seek contact outside of the classroom. His classroom struggle and loss of motivation semester after semester and his subsequent feelings of success serve as the experience that led him to reformulate his beliefs and find the confidence to place himself in more linguistically immersive situations. From this perspective, the experience of overcoming his linguistic struggles rather than the changes in the beliefs themselves triggered a change in interactive behavior.

Case Study # 6: Professor- The Professor/Student Communication Gap

"I think there is more excitement at the beginning and there is a lot of ambition in terms of seeking that contact and then for whatever reason there's a kind of a fatigue that sets in or a complacency."

Background

The professor started teaching at the college six years ago and has taught Italian language classes at several levels in addition to his culture studies classes since his time there. He grew up in an Italian-American family and, consequently, learned both English and Italian growing up. Later on, he studied both French and Spanish and has since travelled to several francophone and hispanophone countries. Growing up bilingual and later learning other Romance languages, the professor has a wealth of language learning experience as well as language teaching experience. Overall, the professor's responses and commentary about the students during the interview mirrored some of the interviewed alumni's recounted experiences and told the story from another point of view. He has had years of opportunity to engage students in conversations about their language learning abroad and field student questions about what they may find outside the campus walls that he related during the interview.

Student Success

When replying to questions, the researcher asked the professor to discuss language learning beliefs from both his point of view and from his perception of the student's point of view. To begin, the professor replied to the question about the difficulty level of learning languages, and, like several of the alumni participants, immediately brought up the question of aptitude. From his perspective, "usually you can tell whether somebody is going to be successful or even moderately successful within the first semester or two." A student's performance early in their Italian study usually reflects their aptitude and what their performance will be like throughout the program. This reflects Daliyah's observations in her own tutoring students and her commentary on their lack of confidence. Eric also contributes to this discussion since he described himself as one of those students that never felt like he performed successfully in

language classes. This observation comes after years of watching the patterns of students and trying to work individually with students to help them meet their language requirement. Naturally, he asks himself what he can do as a professor to facilitate his students' learning.

In his efforts to change what his students learn in the classroom and find more language learning success, he has evaluated the place of grammar teaching:

> I am kind of increasingly opposed to… explicit grammar instruction although that was how I was taught both French and Spanish… I feel like… there is a lot of resistance from some students when you try to embed the grammar in communicative functions and they don't see the grammar the way that they are used to seeing it back in the states and in their textbooks.

> As far as vocabulary, I think that… you can't do anything without words, but it's more how it's introduced and… I think ideally it would be fantastic for it to be experiential as opposed to like a listing of words that people have to learn…. Being in… Italian speaking Switzerland in an Italian speaking classroom we're kind of naturally set up for that to happen, but it doesn't.

In line with the testimonies of Daliyah and Eric, some students are not totally comfortable leaving the traditional grammar-centered classroom idea of language learning behind. This commentary also relates to Miller and Ginsberg's (1995) study outlined earlier regarding folklinguistic language learning beliefs. The researchers observed that many of the American students studying in Russia tried to reproduce classroom-like parameters when interacting with locals by expecting them to correct their speech and by focusing more on grammatical success than on communicative success. Here, the professor essentially states that the students do not enter into interaction in Italian outside of their class often enough to learn how to learn

vocabulary within a communicative context. The professor also highlights the importance of the communicative aspects of language and how vocabulary is used and introduced rather than the quantity that one might learn in or outside of class. During the alumni interviews, Daliyah, Catherine and Amanda all discuss learning vocabulary words in context downtown. Catherine and Amanda report paying attention to product labels, cooking directions and street signs and Daliyah mentioned that she treated her interactions downtown as an opportunity to test out new vocabulary words and learn new ones. This suggests that at least some vocabulary learning occurs in the context of daily life and communicative interaction.

Following this thread, the professor further elaborated on his observations of student habits outside of the classroom:

> I think that people come in excited about the idea of being in a foreign country and it makes sense to them that language is part of that experience, but I think that people become very complacent very quickly when they realize that they can get along very well with just English and also they can get along very well with just hanging out with other students and not really integrating too much. I'm speaking very generally. I would say that probably 75% of the students here don't really take advantage of the context and then maybe 25% does.

Many of the alumni discussed language learning as more of a secondary goal during their time at the college, but that they still expected to reach fluency in Italian before they left. They originally conceived it as a task that would be accomplished with time from living in an italophone area; they viewed it as an extra added perk to their stay in Switzerland rather than their first priority for moving there. The professor's observation in this quote corresponds with Eric's statements about how he felt that learning Italian in Switzerland made him "lazy" and actually decreased his

drive to actively seek contact because he still assumed that he would absorb the language from his surroundings. The percentage of students that do make an effort to take advantage of the context that the professor cites seems rather small given the amount of time that students spend at the school. As observed in the interviews with the alumni participants, many other factors come into play for each student regarding the frequency and depth of their contact outside of class such as their own dedication to life on campus and a lack of confidence with the language.

Proficiency Levels and Grammar

One hypothesis offered by the professor was that students would most likely have more enthusiasm to interact if they already arrived in Switzerland with a certain level of proficiency:

> When I did end up going to Latin America, I don't think that I was necessarily ready yet and I think that what I heard afterwards is that it probably would have been better for me to get to kind of an intermediate- like B1- level or B2 level and then probably I would have reached a higher degree of fluency faster… I spent a lot of time in Latin America struggling with Spanish…That's kind of a roundabout way of saying that I think that the fundamentals of the language can really be learned anywhere, but when you want to perfect your language then I think you need to go to the country where the language is spoken.

The assertion that students that go abroad with a high level of proficiency have experienced greater gains during their time abroad has been backed up by research from several sources (Kinginger, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007; Marqués- Pascual, 2011). This also echoes Eric's own impressions and conclusions. He believed that, had he been more invested or proficient before arriving in Switzerland, he might have been able to engage more with the locals.

The professor continues to explain how this struggle can dampen a student's enthusiasm for learning:

> I think it can be sometimes discouraging for people you know, students, who come to Switzerland not speaking any Italian and then trying to learn the Italian while they're also trying to get by and around... It creates a… little bit of a hostility towards the language and towards the language teachers and towards that language program. It's like why aren't we learning this fast enough, and there are so many ways to answer that question and, you know, part of the responsibility is the language program, and part of the responsibility is just that students don't necessarily have realistic expectations of how fast language acquisition can take place and… what you can achieve in a limited amount of time depending on how much effort you put into it…That frustration can create an obstacle to learning.

This extract from the interview illuminates many key issues for the students. All of the alumni interviewed modified their ideas about how long it takes to attain fluency in a foreign language after their time at the college, citing that their initial thoughts were often too fast given their linguistic circumstances at the college. As the data from the alumni interviews suggests, when students face the reality of language learning in such a way, they readjust their ideas about what it takes to learn a language according to their own personal experiences of learning. Here, the professor's concern is that students cannot really engage in Italian conversation until they reach least an intermediate level and that students might not work up the courage to interact with locals until they reach a more advanced level of the language. The only alumna who was able to manage this task at these early stages was Catherine, but she discussed still having to rely on her previous French learning in the early stages of Italian communication with her au pair family.

For students who arrive in Switzerland without any background in learning a language, this transition may prove more difficult.

Related to student confidence while seeking local interaction, the professor explains his ideas surrounding the importance of grammatical accuracy and accent when speaking:

As long as people are comfortable in expressing themselves in different contexts and on different subjects, even at varying levels of complexity and sophistication, it's important for the message to get across, but it's not so important for it to be perfect.

As a teacher embracing this belief, he encourages students to learn how to express themselves in the language and to use the grammar and vocabulary of a language to fit their own needs and personalities. He prefers this situation to students finding themselves too immersed in a study of explicit grammar. This assertion fits with the commentary of the alumni. All alumni participants who arrived at the college with higher ideals of accent and accuracy modified them to fit a learner's standard rather than a native speaker's standard during their time abroad.

Teaching and Other External Factors

The possibilities for intercultural communication abound both in English and in Italian for both students and professors at the college. When asked about how he sees his role as a language teacher in such a singular situation, he responded:

I guess I conceptualize my role as a little bit like a cheerleader for the language and I try to think about the fact that Italian specifically is not a language that people have any kind of… use for after they leave, so, what's in it for the student? What are they going to get out of the contact with this language and what are they going to get out of this time that they are spending learning this language which, you know, is not, is not Chinese or Arabic or Spanish? It's a romance language that is tied to a lot of beautiful things, but not necessarily

to the majors that most of the students are concentrating on, so I kind of I just you know

try to get them excited about the language you know acquisition process and the fact that

they are connecting with the environment where they live and try to point them in the

direction of whatever works for them you know is alright.

The professor recognizes the importance of honoring learner diversity and acknowledging the

differences in learning beliefs and preferences in his students. He sees himself as a guide to the

right path that can lead to the enjoyment of the language learning process. The distinction the

professor implies here between the process and the final proficiency result of the program is key

to his conception of his role and what he believes that students need the most from their classes.

During his interview, Eric corroborated this notion by saying that, if he could go back and give

his pre-college self advice, he would choose a class and a language to study based on the most

"interesting and enthusiastic professor." For Eric, the affective factors of motivation and

enjoyment of learning played a large role in his impression of learning Italian in Switzerland.

Even though many students opt to take Italian to fulfill their language requirement, the professor

also knows that students tend to think about the future and whether or not learning this language

will aid them in their future endeavors. This factor also affects the amount of effort each student

chooses to put forth and, in turn, what types of interactive situations they would choose to place

themselves in.

Later in the interview the professor expounds on the connections between student effort

and the place of Italian in the world by reflecting on the impact of the greater socio-economic

situation of the world:

If I think back… to the first year I was here… there's been like an economic crisis or

two… there have been like a couple of wars…These things do impact the way that people

think about education in general and the investment that they are making in their

education… The perception of what they want to get out of it does impact the priorities

that they place on language learning and I think that there has been a kind of a feeling

of… what am I getting out of learning Italian, you know, and in kind of a recession type

crisis period, I think that languages like Italian will tend to suffer. There's always been at

the college a mixed feeling about Spanish and how important Spanish is, you know, for

the… North American students, and Italian suffers from that too because it's like well

why are we having so many Italian classes, why don't we have more Spanish classes.

This observation bears a resemblance to Kinginger's (2008) study regarding the impact of

political relations and national perceptions on the experience of American students studying in

France. Her data collected through oral interviews and journals of the participants suggested that

the larger socio-economic status of the world does impact student perceptions of French people

and their attitudes towards them. This, in turn, influences their interactive experiences while

abroad learning French by changing the dynamic of their relations and interactive interpretations.

For many study abroad students staying only one semester or a year their academics come

secondary (Ogden, 2007), but when a student is enrolled at a foreign university their grades still

remain a priority because their graduation depends upon it. For students interested in receiving

the most return out of their education investment during this period of economic crisis, this

requirement ties these students more to the campus than other study abroad students. Some

students may have to choose more carefully how to budget their time and learning efforts toward

the classes that most interest them and to maintain a certain GPA. As mentioned by the alumni,

their primary reason for choosing to go to college in Switzerland related more to travel and

international experience rather than specifically to language learning. When not in class students

may prioritize their studies and travels above stronger attempts at immersing themselves in local culture.

The professor explained that when, recently, the language coordinator in charge of the modern languages programming adopted a more communicative approach, professors and students alike resisted. The professor discusses some ideas for ushering in the new methodologies and for curbing student resistance:

Now we are going to have workshops for the instructors and part of that you know will be addressing the need for the student to kind of reconceptualize what it is that they're doing. So, professors may be devoting what may be the first full class to just explaining… the how of language learning.

This information suggests that some professors are considering discussing language learning beliefs with their students in order to mitigate this rejection of a more communicative approach to language learning. As shown by the interviews with alumni, students often walk into the classroom already with certain notions about language learning, crafted, in some cases, through years of previous experience and attempts at learning a foreign language. Only over the course of their years spent learning Italian in Switzerland and through certain experiences of success did many of the alumni adopt a more communicative attitude toward language and language learning.

Near the end of the interview the professor speaks to his frustrations about his unsuccessful attempts at trying to inspire his students to engage more with speaking Italian in the community:

I'm trying different things, but it seems like people are doing their damndest to stay on campus and I don't know why because Via Ponte Tresa is not such an interesting place to

be I think. You know, I think people are probably having fun in their dorms and they're

having their 20 year old lives and dramas and romances and everything is happening, you

know, in a close proximity so it's very hard to get them to- away from that.

Language learning beliefs aside, students want to try their best to seize this time of their lives,

and this means that they have to pick and choose their priorities. The alumni all admitted that

their choice to learn Italian was more incidental in their choice to attend the college than an

initial intention and perhaps this affected their learning the most.

The professor elaborates on this idea:

I mean it's probably an ongoing process and at 20 I think that maturity is something that

in some people is more and in some people is less and when you come into contact with

the obstacle of language learning … it really puts the students' maturity to the test and

people will react to that in different ways. As long as the dialogue continues I think the

learning follows. It's just when people close themselves off then, you know, that's when

you get into trouble

More than language learning beliefs, the professor sees other affective factors as far more

influential in terms of its effects on linguistic performance and interactive behaviors. Students

with no experience living on their own want to explore this freedom at this time of life and this

leads to prioritizing different aspects of their lives. Even Eric stated in his interview that the time

with his host family where he felt the most connected with the local community, he also felt the

most distanced from his friends and from campus life.

The professor mentioned that this clash of beliefs systems provoked many students to

drop the more communicative-oriented courses because "their perception is that because they are

not doing the grammar in a formal- in an explicit way that they're actually just not getting any

information." Even though the students found themselves surrounded by an Italian-speaking community, they still did not feel successful using a more communicative approach toward language learning either in or outside of the classroom. When the professor presented methods contrary to the expectations of the students' language learning, the students chose to stick with their grammar-centric beliefs and drop the class. Even Eric who admitted that he improved his speaking skills in a more immersive environment still felt at the end of his studies that one should learn grammar in the classroom to teach the building blocks of language.

To give an example of a student who experienced this difficulty in the communicative classroom, the professor relates the troubles of a particular student of Korean origin that struggled in a more communicatively-oriented class:

She speaks Korean fluently and apparently she says she also speaks other languages but her way of learning Korean you know was as a child because of a Korean parent and she was very very resistant to this communicative method and ended up not doing well at all and really wanting to succeed but not being able to succeed in the Italian class… I'm not exactly sure what happened there… She just said that, and this was of course just her perspective, but there were a limited number of students who were getting it. Probably out of a class of 17 there were probably like 2 or 3 or 4 students who were getting it and… she just felt like there was no room for the weaker students, no room to ask questions… She is… an A student who speaks another language fluently and it was kind of sad to see her you know fail through the Italian program because she wasn't a slacker, that's for sure.

Although the professor discussed a belief in linguistic aptitude, it does not appear to play a role here. He mentions the student's work ethic in conjunction with his confusion about why she struggled, still unsure about where the difficulty lay. Eric also shared this issue, earning A's in

all of his courses except for Italian. According to this student's testimony, the students had decided to drop the class because they did not feel successful and they did not understand the material the way it was presented. The fact that the students struggled with this methodology may discourage them in the future from approaching locals with the same communicative mentality downtown. The interview data from the alumni suggests that students tend to follow strategies and reformulate beliefs depending on their areas of success after a period of trial and error.

The professor recounts his own efforts to coax students into not being so intimidated by speaking the language in class or in the outside world:

> I have this ongoing joke slash persona that I have in my language classes where, like the star wars trilogy, I say like they already know how to speak the language it's just like they have to get it out, like the force… I really try to get them to understand that a lot… of the acquisition process and the production process in language has to do with them maintaining kind of a sense of relaxation… It should be a fun stress-free process.

For the professor, part of being that cheerleader is trying to give his students the confidence to learn the language and to speak it. He speaks here about cultivating a love for the "acquisition process" which can stand in opposition to ideas about the necessity of reaching a certain linguistic goal. If the students learned to embrace the process, they might be more inclined to seek out further interaction downtown and to disregard their own errors in the stages of their interlanguage. Daliyah found this love for the process in her contact with Italian books and music and Eric found it near the end of his time in Switzerland through his immersive experiences working on a farm in Italy.

Student Interaction

Seeing that many of his students did not integrate much with the local Italian speakers, the professor attempted to inspire his students to venture out through a language mentor program:

> The way I designed the language mentorship program was that they were supposed to be the facilitators that actually got the students off campus and going to these types of events… There was an issue there about cost. You know, it's going to cost us money if we get off campus and if I take them downtown.

As any professor knows, money is an obstacle for most university students and, in the case of study abroad especially, can also stand in the way of students being able to interact more outside of class. For students that choose to stay in Switzerland for the full four years, money does become an issue since students cannot work off campus to earn extra money and many must learn how to budget well or find a job through a campus scholarship program. The professor explained that this became such an issue for the language mentors that many of them merely showed their students movies in the target language in order to offer free linguistic contact outside of class. The professor felt that this defeated the purpose of the idea of a language mentor acting as a peer mediator between class and interaction with the local community. Language learning beliefs or not, students have other concerns that can inhibit and change the nature of their interactions and, by extension, their conception of language learning.

Though money can be a factor in changing interactive habits, age and maturity can also have an effect. In explaining behaviors and attitudes between his newer students and his more advanced students, the professor stated:

> I think there is more excitement at the beginning and there is a lot of ambition in terms of seeking that contact and then for whatever reason there's a kind of a fatigue that sets in or

a complacency. I don't know how the students explain it, but certainly in terms of the language my perspective of what the students are feeling is just that they're being just hit with too much grammar in the first year… it's like one tense after another after another after another after another after another. It just gets to the second year and then they had to review and they just can't take it anymore so they just come to class just very demotivated and very bored. Especially if they haven't been doing exceptionally well because then it's just like a constant failure after failure after failure…

When considering the effect of time on a language learning experience while abroad, it seems that an enthusiasm for learning has an expiration date or can be tied to the level of a student's feeling of success. The professor offers his own theory that the grammar-heavy activities students do in class do not correspond with the communicative linguistic reality they see outside the campus walls. If students do not understand the grammar presented to them during their first year of study, they arrive at the conclusion early in the language learning process that they are not capable of understanding grammar easily. Since so many of the alumni insisted on the existence of language learning aptitude, students might also simply believe that they were not born with the talent. Here, the professor runs into a conflict: if students focus more on the communicative aspect of language the first few years, the students leave the classrooms because they do not feel that they are learning. Conversely, the professor believes that students lose interest in learning the language because teachers try to hammer in too much grammar in the first few years. The beliefs and expectations of learning that the students have do not always match with the ideas of the professors and both students and professors alike ask how they can redress this gap. This gap in learning expectations can have an effect on student learning and, subsequently, on student interactions and confidence in speaking outside of class.

The professor believes in the delicate nature of motivation to learn Italian at the college. When the researcher asked about his views as to whether or not students have a real desire to learn Italian and to have more contact with the community, he replied:

At the beginning, yes, and for the people who stay for the four years I would say yes… I think the people who graduate from the college still believe in that ever since I've been here. I think that's because they feel it's difficult to be, you know, far away from home in a different place and that motivation, if it's not kept alive, then there's a desire to kind of understand why is it dying and not necessarily to look inward, but to try to kind of find a scapegoat- someone is to blame. The college is to blame for the reason why I am not motivated to learn Italian I don't know. But, it does happen quite frequently.

The professor understands the overall desire of students to find friends in a faraway place, to settle into Switzerland before they venture out to explore. He believes that many students tend to blame the institution rather than asking themselves why their own motivation wanes. The interviews with the alumni, however, show that students did often reflect on issues of language and often sought their own methods of contact outside of class. Many were forced to learn how they learn in order to meet their motivation and goals, despite some of the students' frustrations with their classes.

Final Thoughts

Overall the professor concludes that for him the key is to inspire his students to enjoy the language learning process. Rather than focusing on trying to explain or discuss language learning beliefs with them, he advocates more efforts towards focusing their enjoyment of the process and maintaining student motivation and interest. This corresponds to Eric's testimony from his interview about the influential role of professors in his perceptions and confidence in seeking

interaction in Italian. Catherine even mentions how her choice of linguistic study in high school depended under which teacher she would study.

One of the most interesting trends that emerges is the difference in the perspectives between the students and the teachers. There seems to be a disconnect between the way that students expect to learn the local language while abroad and what actually happens. As suggested by the alumni interview data, many of these initial perceptions shift during their time abroad to correspond better with student experience. This, however, can happen over the course of four years and students may only change their language learning behaviors after this time period and never be able to mesh their ideas about language learning with their classroom learning. Although most of the alumni admitted the importance of grammar, they changed their ideas about the necessity of accuracy when speaking after having been presented with the more communicative reality of language. This still leaves the question to the professor about how best to spend class time in a way that both instructors and students perceive as advantageous.

The professor's observations of the students' habits seem to be in line with what the students themselves noticed. He sees that the grand majority do not choose to take him up on his suggestions about what he can do, but he also sees that the students who choose to earn their degrees at the college also have academic concerns and social concerns that keep them very tied to campus life. Instead of seeing correlations between student beliefs about language learning and these behaviors, the professor places more significance on the correlation between an appreciation and enjoyment of the language learning process and seeking outside linguistic contact. Once students begin to feel as if they have failed in class, then they will not be inspired to interact locally.

Some of the reasons for students' hesitation to interact more with the local environment might be due to other external factors. The professor hypothesizes that the current economic situation may inspire students to prioritize both their money and learning efforts to situations they see as the most profitable. Since students most likely will not use Italian after their time in Switzerland, the professor believes that students might choose to spend more time working toward their majors or enrolling in a Spanish class.

The professor also mentions the relative maturity levels of the students and how the differing maturity levels might affect how individual students react in certain situations. He also believes that, at this age, students tend to prioritize their English-speaking friends and their life on campus to situations of linguistic discomfort that lie beyond.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Research question #1: Do language learning beliefs change?

In answer to the first research question about whether or not language learning beliefs change while abroad, the interview data suggests that they do. The set of beliefs that changed differs from participant to participant in terms of which beliefs changed, the degree to which they changed and the scope of understanding that accompanied the change. Despite the individual nature and nuances of these changes, certain overall trends emerged regarding which beliefs were more likely to remain unchanged and those which were the most susceptible.

The belief that children learn languages better than adults remained the most common unchanged belief among all of the participants. Some of the interviewees, however, exhibited a more nuanced approach to the question after time spent abroad. Ben, for example, believed that learning languages as an adult is entirely possible but requires a restructuring of thought processes and changes the types of strategies and approaches one must use. Even Catherine's successes as a learner did not lead her to totally discount her pre-sojourn expectations of not being able to attain fluency due to her status as adult learner. This belief does not appear to have hindered her abilities and confidence as a learner, but it did limit her own conception of how proficient she was or could become. Daliyah, Amanda and Eric stated either that meeting so many bilinguals while abroad continued to reinforce their beliefs about early L2 learning, or that, even though their belief did not change, they understood more deeply why learning languages is easier for children after their experiences as an adult. To varying degrees the time spent abroad either reinforced this belief or the participant slightly altered the details in order to retain this belief.

The idea that children learn languages better than adults, known in the world of second

language acquisition as the "critical period" for second language learning, has been questioned by researchers but still remains a prevalent belief among learners and teachers alike (Baker, 2011; Chavez, 1995; Horwitz, 1999; Peacock, 1999). In Colin Baker's (2011) textbook about bilingualism he gives a concise summary of the findings regarding the belief that children learn better than adults. He asserts that the "difference found between younger and older learners reflects typical outcomes rather than potential" (p. 124). He also quotes Marinova-Todd et al. (2000 as cited in Baker, 2011) with her statement that "age differences reflect differences in the situation of learning rather than in the capacity to learn" (p.125). Even though children do often gain higher proficiencies if they begin learning their second language earlier, that does not mean that they are inherently better equipped for learning languages. While children do often experience a more "advantageous period" (Baker, 2011, p.125) in learning adults have been known to achieve high levels of proficiency. Adult learners of foreign languages often know others who have learned their second language as children and see this as evidence giving credence to a widely-held societal belief. Although the interview data does not provide any evidence that such a belief hinders student learning, it does give evidence that it may limit a student's goals regarding how proficient they have the potential to become.

The interview data suggests that beliefs about the difficulty of learning language and language aptitude also did not change much while abroad. All alumni believed in the relative difficulty of languages and that learning a language more similar to one's native tongue is easier. All of the alumni mentioned that the difficulty of a language also depends on the experiences, efforts and aptitude of each individual. When the alumni discussed linguistic aptitude, most of them described it in terms of natural talent by explaining that everyone has an aptitude for some subject or another. A few of the alumni, however, did not subscribe to the idea that such an

aptitude occurs naturally or could be applied to every context of language learning. Catherine, for example, attributed language aptitude to a whole list of other factors including linguistic background and methods that a teacher used to present the language. At the end of her time abroad, she also mentioned effort as a huge factor in aptitude. Ben attributed aptitude to one's choice of strategy and stated that certain people had differing levels of aptitude in different situations. After describing their conception of language aptitude, all of the alumni professed that they did not possess this linguistic aptitude and felt that learning languages did not come easily to them. Almost all of the alumni added that, after their time in Switzerland, they discovered that learning how to learn one language can simplify the task for future language learning endeavors. This discovery most likely relates to their increased metacognitive knowledge and discovery of learning preferences. All except one participant tied this acquisition of a language learning "framework" as a contributor to linguistic aptitude.

Even though the alumni did not say so explicitly, the data suggests that they interpreted the fact that they met with learning struggles as their own lack of aptitude. In Peacock's (1999) study of language learning beliefs he found that 71% of his students believed in the existence of aptitude, but only 14% believed that they possessed it. Chavez (1995) responded to her finding that students in their second year of learning often agree more strongly with the idea of an "innate language-learning talent" by positing that students often look outside of themselves for reasons for their successes suggesting that they do not see their successes as accomplished by themselves. The data from these studies suggest that students either judge themselves harshly or believe that language learning should be easier. In either case, this lack of belief in their own aptitude implies a lack of confidence in their skills and may have an effect on their learning.

One study by Brecht, Davidson and Ginsberg (1995) sought to find factors that could

possibly predict increased language gain while abroad. The researchers used the proficiency scores and aptitude tests of 658 students who studied abroad for four months in Russia and compared it against several traits such as age, gender, citizenship, levels of education, major etc. Their data suggested a correlation between those students who experienced more gains in proficiency during their sojourn and previous or additional language learning experiences in high school and university. These data lend support the idea of gaining a language learning "framework" and that focusing on inspiring students to discover their own learning preferences will likely benefit them in their future language learning endeavors.

Beliefs about where grammar and vocabulary fit in to the language learning process proved the most changeable. Each participant experienced this change differently. Amanda went from seeing grammar as an obstacle to communication to seeing grammar as a necessary framework for understanding languages in general as well as each individual language's inner-workings. Both Ben and Catherine report having moved to a more communicative whole language approach. After learning abroad, they choose to learn the language more from the context than from explicit grammar rules in class. Eric went from reportedly not paying much attention to grammar at all to believing that grammar and vocabulary work as the basic foundation for learning a language. Overall the alumni became much more aware of the place of grammar and vocabulary during their time abroad and each changed their conception of and, subsequently, their ideas about how best to learn these aspects of language.

Beliefs about accent and accuracy also experienced a shift from the alumni participants. For Amanda, her belief in the importance of having a "correct" accent stayed the same, but during her time abroad accent became an issue of identity. She conceived the usage of a native-like accent as a way to work toward her goal of blending in and being mistaken for a Swiss

person. Both Daliyah and Eric mentioned the power of accent and accuracy in determining whether or not a native speaker chooses to switch to English when the students were speaking or not, affecting the level of input one receives. After their time abroad most of the alumni reduced the amount of influence they thought that accent and accuracy should have in their learning. The alumni agree that they need to make mistakes at first in order to learn from them. Daliyah and Eric believe that one should improve their accent and grammatical accuracy as they continue to practice, but that fear of making mistakes should not stop one from communicating. For both Ben and Amanda the emphasis one should place on accent and accuracy depended on the target language. Ben gives the example of the importance of accent when learning a tonal language because one change in tone can make the different between saying "cow" and "mom." According to Amanda's viewpoint, she must exercise more caution when speaking French around French people than Italian around Italian speakers since she believes that francophones are much more particular about accent when speaking. Overall the alumni learned to focus less on accent and accuracy in favor of communicating during their time abroad, but each added their own nuances to their beliefs after their time abroad.

For many, the question about whether or not learning culture comprises an important part of language learning changed. This belief evolved differently for each participant. For Amanda this took the form of a changing idea of culture and how her experiences of culture felt embedded in certain Italian words that she learned along the way. The word for the grape harvest, la vendemmia, held special place for her due to her experience aiding a local vineyard in picking grapes during the grape harvest. For her the word "just doesn't explain fully and with the same intensity that cultural experience and heritage." Daliyah expressed a similar sentiment citing idioms as being very culturally-ingrained and bound to their original language. Ben,

Catherine and Eric all believed that, though the two are related, learning culture should not be a necessary part of learning the language. These three expressed the idea that, though they may have previously thought of the two as inextricably connected without really knowing why, their experiences led them to different conclusions after more reflection. Catherine and Eric both agreed that learning culture would not detract from language learning, but that it would not offer them any new understanding about the language itself.

Interestingly the issue of whether or not one can learn a language best in the host country yielded differing and sometimes paradoxical results. Amanda, Ben and Daliyah all maintained their belief that such a situation is advantageous to the learner and generally preferable to the classroom. Eric and Catherine both separated learning in a host country from learning in an immersive environment, pointing out that the two did not necessarily coincide. Despite all the professed regrets of Amanda and Daliyah about not interacting enough with locals, they still believed in the idea of learning a language in the host country. Perhaps one of the biggest paradoxes was that students still embraced the idea of learning a language in the host country even though they felt that they did not take enough advantage of the opportunities of making contact with locals or reaching the level of proficiency they desired to attain according to their own goals and standards. Even if some of the alumni did not reach their goals, they chose to revise their goals of fluency and attainment instead of revising their own belief about learning in the host country. Even if they did not feel as if they took proper advantage of the environment, they still perceived linguistic gains they would not have had if they had not studied in Switzerland and almost all of the alumni discussed the power of incidental learning of the rhythm of the language by listening and vocabulary by looking at food packages and street signs.

Overall the alumni interviewed experienced shifts both in the intensity and scope of their

beliefs, and, in some few cases, even a core shift. To respond to the first research question, the data analyzed suggests that belief changes do occur in students studying abroad but each belief evolved differently for each participant. This further corroborates results from previous studies conducted about belief change during study abroad and at home (Kern, 1995; Miller & Ginsberg, 1995; Ellis, 2008; Navarro, 2011).

In Kern's (1995) study investigating belief changes in university French students over the course of the semester and their correspondence to the learning beliefs of their instructors, he administered the BALLI once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end. The averages that Kern calculated for the class as a whole did not show much change but, after analyzing the questionnaires on an individual level, Kern found that 35%- 59% of the questionnaire responses changed over a 15 week period. The majority of these belief changes were in the strength and degree of the belief rather than a shift in agreement or disagreement with a certain item. Even though the students who took the questionnaire did not exhibit a momentous shift in their language learning beliefs, Kern's (1995) study offers evidence that even after only a semester of learning in a classroom students have experiences that either strengthen or weaken certain beliefs. Just like in Kern's (1995) study, the alumni participants interviewed for the current study exhibited more individual differences in scope, intensity and nuances of each belief than they exhibited overall trends in belief shift as a whole.

At the end of the experience, all of the alumni professed that they knew more about their learning preferences and that this knowledge aided them in becoming more self-directed learners. This shift into greater self-efficacy also reflected a decreased dependency overall on classroom learning and an increased ability to learn from their surrounding environment. The few that discussed their current efforts to learn a new language also explained how gaining this

metacognitive knowledge has aided them in these language learning endeavors. Ellis (2008), Navarro (2011), Yang and Kim (2011), and Amuzie and Winke (2009) all reported similar findings of increased self-efficacy during their participants' time abroad.

When Miller and Ginsberg (1995) investigated folklinguistic learning beliefs in students studying abroad in Russia, they found that most of the students still had a more linguistic focus than a communicative focus in their interactions with native speakers. The alumni interviewed here, however, often exhibit a more communicative focus in their described beliefs. All of the alumni, for example, relaxed their ideas regarding accent and accuracy as well as their previously strict conception of "fluency." Most of them placed more emphasis on vocabulary than on grammar because one can communicate more with the right words than with the right grammar when learning how to speak. This difference could be attributed to the extended amount of time that students came into contact with Swiss locals.

Although a few researchers have posited that language learning beliefs can affect student learning, few researchers have investigated this notion (Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1999). One of the main studies that do investigate this notion is Matthew Peacock's (1999) study. Peacock (1999) administered the BALLI to 202 EFL learners and 45 EFL teachers in Hong Kong. In addition to this, the researcher administered proficiency tests in all four skill areas to all of the students and asked each student to fill out a self- assessment of their proficiency. His data yielded four beliefs that were significantly correlated to proficiency. The students that agreed with the statement "learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of grammar rules" were significantly less proficient than those who disagreed. More proficient students also did not underestimate the difficulty of language learning or the time it would take to gain fluency. They also believe that errors committed in the beginning of

learning a second language could be corrected later and they believed it better to speak even if their utterance was not grammatically correct.

The interview data for the alumni suggest that the participants interviewed in this study moved toward these beliefs that, according to Peacock's (1999) data, aid learners in gaining more proficiency. All of the participants, for example, arrived at more forgiving conceptions of fluency and all of them adjusted their estimates of what it takes to gain fluency in a language. Even though Eric and Amanda still place importance on grammar learning they still both tend to favor more communicative ideals and strategies in their learning. Even if researchers have called into question the idea that studying abroad can lead to language gains, the interview data gathered from the alumni suggest that studying abroad can lead to a reconceptualization of language learning beliefs that can lead to further language gains down the road. (Freed, 1995; Isabelli-Garcìa, 2006; Magnan & Back, 2007; Freed & Segalowitz 2004). In the end, however, the difference lies in how the alumni reacted to their experiences and whether or not they follow their own belief systems. Ellis (2008) came to similar conclusions when he stated:

> the fact that learners hold a particular belief is no guarantee they will act on it; conflicts with other strongly held beliefs, situational constraints, or personal reasons may prevent them. If beliefs do impact on learning, it is likely that they do so indirectly by influencing the kinds of learning strategies learners employ (p. 13).

Research Question #2: Experiences that contributed to belief changes

In looking at the interview data every one of the participants experienced some struggle in their learning and often witnessed the language learning struggles of others. The participants often describe these situations of struggle and of undergoing a process of trial and error as their most trying linguistic moments as well as their most rewarding. The participants who overcame

the greatest struggles experienced the most drastic shifts of beliefs. Catherine, for example, describes her difficulty in finding herself immersed in her au pair family, but this experience taught her to learn more from the context rather than books and shaped the rest of her learning efforts abroad. Eric never felt successful in a classroom environment but, once he received more one on one attention outside of the host country Eric was able to understand more about which learning strategies brought him the most success. This knowledge led him to seek more opportunities for contact off campus with more confidence than previously. Often, the changes or the lack of changes in each participant's belief systems relate back to how the alumni reacted to their own personal learning struggles and they chose to stick with the beliefs that matched their own experiences of success following these struggles. The following section attempts to attach a model to certain shifts and processes in language learning beliefs.

Immersion and the Transformational Learning Model

All of the alumni mentioned the powers of linguistic immersion to deliver gains in linguistic proficiency, but when the alumni spoke of immersion they often also mentioned the challenge that accompanies it. Catherine reported tears, Eric professed his frustrations with self-expression, and Amanda lamented her mental fatigue. Almost all of the alumni, however, expressed a belief that these survival moments, their moment of being forced to use the target language, yielded the most dramatic improvements. The alumni used the word "immersion" as if it were a specific strategy or technique for learning a language more quickly and thoroughly, but they also did not divorce it from the discomfort often involved in these influential experiences.

The interview data suggests that each student's personal struggles led them to reformulate their belief systems or at least to reflect on them. Daliyah's struggle to understand why she could never learn French after years of study, Eric's struggle to stay motivated in and outside of the

classroom, Catherine's frustrating immersion experience early in her learning and Amanda's frustrations with learning compelled them to all explore their language learning options and achieve greater self-efficacy. Each participant reported their dealings with a system of linguistic and strategic trial and error.

This sequence of learning mirrors Mezirow's (1978) idea of transformational learning. Transformational learning entails an individual development outside of the "social expectations associated with the different phases of life" (Tennant, 1993, p. 39). Put more simply, transformational learning describes how individuals develop outside of the "normal" trajectory of maturity development from different stages of life. This type of learning affects reconsideration and a critical reflection upon previously-held "meaning perspectives," or, embedded assumptions (Cranton, 1997). The term "meaning perspectives" refers to assumptions that each person holds that make up their structure for interpreting the world. Each learner may or may not be aware of some of these assumptions since they are often deeply embedded in his or her world view. Although Mezirow's idea of transformational learning has been critiqued for a lack of consideration of outside socio-economic forces on learning, his more individual focus still provides a meaningful framework for the processes the alumni described during their interviews (Tenant, 1993).

According to Mezirow (as cited in Brock, 2010), the ten steps of transformational learning are:

> a disorienting dilemma, self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change, exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions, critical assessment of assumptions, provisional trying of new roles, planning a

course of action, acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing ones' plans,

building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships and a

reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

(p. 123).

Mezirow argues that one does not have to go through all of the steps in order to reach a point of

transformation (Brock, 2010). The main idea of this model is to give a structure to an

individual's process of questioning long-held assumptions that they may not have even been

aware of having prior to his or her encounter with the "disorienting dilemma."

These steps mirror much of what the alumni described having experienced and provides a

framework for these experiences. For several of the students, their struggles to learn Italian either

in class or in immersion situations created a "disorienting dilemma" to solve. All of the alumni

interviewed described their own "exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions"

in their quest for successful strategies for learning. Eric, for example, reevaluated the

responsibilities and roles of the teacher and those of the student after his own experiments of trial

and error to learn how he learned languages the best. Catherine explored her role of a native

English speaker of Italian during her summer of immersion, struggling to express her identity in

a language she had only just begun to learn throughout the previous year. Daliyah recounts her

teacher's assistance in trying to find strategic matches to help her grasp French.

The data suggests that the participants then entered into the following stages of "critical

assessment of assumptions," and "provisional trying of new roles," by adjusting their own ideas

about learning language depending on where they found the most success in solving their

dilemma, not necessarily the path that offered the most comfort or ease. After each participant

found their own paths toward success, they forged ahead to the next step described: "building of

competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships and a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective." As each gained more confidence in their skills and their newfound methods of learning, they were able to integrate their new ideas into their language learning efforts and seek out new learning situations. After her immersion experience, Catherine lost much of her fear of seeking interactions with locals in different settings. After Eric found success in learning with his one on one professor, he returned to Switzerland ready to place himself in more immersive situations. For Eric, Catherine and Daliyah, they have even carried their strategies and beliefs to new language learning endeavors after their experience learning Italian at the college: Catherine has employed her more communicative strategies learned during her immersion experience to learn both Chichewa and Mandarin, Eric decided to learn French on-site with help from his French-speaking wife and Daliyah had recently taken up study of Japanese at the time of the interview. Even though the efficacy of studying abroad for gaining proficiency has been questioned (Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2009; Magnan & Back, 2007), students still gain valuable personal metacognitive knowledge that continues to affect their lives and learning behaviors even after the initial "disorienting dilemma" has been solved.

In applying such a model to the experiences of the alumni interviewed one can begin to understand more deeply the steps that such students follow. With this understanding comes the possibility of constructing support systems during each student's struggles in order to help guide this process. Since struggle seems inevitable on the road toward greater proficiency perhaps educators abroad can work to better prepare students for the challenges they will meet and provide resources for their transitions.

Even though Mezirow conceived of transformational learning as independent of

normative maturity development, the two can coincide (Tennant, 1993). In his original work outlining the idea, Mezirow (1978) states, "maturity may be seen as a developmental process of movement through the adult years toward meaning perspectives that are progressively more inclusive, discriminating and more integrative of experience" (p. 106). Put more simply, as people grow older and more mature, they become more aware of their own embedded assumptions and learn how to integrate their own experiences into these meaning perspectives. In the case of the alumni, they learned how to integrate their own experiences of trial and error into their learning of Italian in Switzerland. This idea gives credence to the comments of the professor that assert that the different maturity levels of students can have an effect on their reactions to different language learning situations and yield different language learning outcomes.

Mori (1999), citing an idea from Abram and Vann (1987), states that "learners' beliefs guide their approach to specific learning contexts, and the approach is manifested in the observable or unobservable strategies which directly influences the degree of success in language learning (p. 378)." Although the data uncovered in the interviews supports this idea, success can also inform strategies if a student has experienced failure in a series of strategic trial and error. This data suggests that the process of belief reformulation and the potential of a subsequent behavior change are not linear. Each failure or success informs a learner's beliefs and strategy in an ongoing fashion during the practice of trial and error.

Research question #3: Do belief changes affect interactive patterns?

Every alumna and alumnus related a different history of interactions with locals. The most commonly reported interactions involve day to day interactions at the grocery store and indirect contact through watching Italian movies, reading in Italian or even eavesdropping on

locals. Even if some of these interactions seem incidental, students often describe taking a more deliberate approach toward them. Daliyah and Eric, for example, cited viewing even the simplest interactions as an opportunity for practice in the target language and would sometimes test vocabulary out on purpose in such situations. Catherine and Amanda both discuss practicing their knowledge on street signs and food packaging. The same kinds of contact were also most commonly reported by participants in previous work researching time on task in study abroad situations by Mendelson (2004), and by Pellegrino-Aveni (2005).

All participants described varying levels of feeling immersed in the Italian language and surrounding culture during their stay in Switzerland: Amanda recounted her moments feeling immersed during the lectures she attended at the local Buddhist temple, Catherine found an immersive experience earlier in her learning through her position one summer as an au pair to an Italian speaking family, Ben recounts talking with locals at restaurants and bars, Daliyah's longest interactions involved learning about Italian cooking from an older woman she sometimes found herself next to while riding the bus, and Eric participated in a home stay and later spent time volunteering on an Italian farm. The alumni tend to cite these particular experiences as responsible for their most fruitful learning during their time abroad.

Comparing shifts in language learning belief systems and behavior yields a few different correlations. Daliyah, the student who reported the least amount of integration and interaction with the local community, also reported little change in her belief system. She stated in her interview that mostly her views remained unchanged, and that her experiences abroad merely reinforced her previously-formed ideas. It is possible that Daliyah already underwent her struggle and reformation of language learning beliefs before she left for Switzerland in her efforts to learn French. Catherine, on the other hand, reported the highest volume of contact and

experienced some of the most drastic belief changes among the alumni participants, especially in her newfound view that grammar is inseparable from the language itself. These two cases in particular suggest a connection between interactive habits in the target language outside of class and changes in language learning beliefs. The details of this connection, however, are not straightforward.

For both Catherine and Eric, the two alumni who reported the highest degree of immersive experiences, many of the changes in their language learning beliefs appeared to orbit around one critical incident. After Catherine's initial challenging immersion experience, she changed many of her language learning strategies and let her confidence guide her to new interactions and learning situations. This experience opened the door for all of her subsequent interactions. After Eric's stay in the United States spending time learning one on one with a professor, he returned to Switzerland and set up his immersive experience working on farms in Italy and felt confident enough in his learning skills to make conscious efforts to learn communicative French while travelling around France. Before his learning in the United States, Eric never sought this degree of interaction or attempted to only to feel demotivated. Both alumni changed their habits after they felt as if they had found some success and confidence in their learning. Judging by their changes in behavior and strategy use, both Catherine and Eric exhibit a "before" and "after" version of their learning habits and ideas surrounding the incident in question. This suggests that changes in language learning beliefs are linked more to specific student experiences of struggle and subsequent success.

The relationship between the belief changes and interactions is more cyclical than linear. A correlation exists between changes in beliefs and changes in interaction, but the alumni each had to undergo a transformative learning experience where they questioned and reformulated

their beliefs according to their feelings of success. Generally the relations between belief changes and changes in contact started with struggles in learning and in interacting in the target language, followed by belief reformulation, followed by an integration of new belief changes and new more confident interactions. This cycle of steps may repeat itself throughout the trial and error of the learning struggle. Even if the two are related, no direct causal relationship between belief changes and interaction can be posited since student struggles can take many forms and manifest in different areas and aspects of a language. Also, as discovered in the interviews, students appear influenced by a number of external factors that could affect the types of situations they could find themselves in in the first place. These factors also might affect whether or not the students deem it worthy to work through the linguistic struggle.

The Classroom and Institution as Mediator

Apart from evidence that could be used in answering the research questions, the role of the classroom and the institution as a mediator of interactions outside of class emerged both from the professor and the alumni as a theme in the data. This theme bears mentioning to inform future programming.

As each participant described their challenges to seek interaction outside of the classroom, several recounted how their interactions with Italian while abroad were mostly the result of an intentional action rather than the experience of automatic immersion they had anticipated. Balancing their lives on a campus where English is the lingua franca with their desire to speak Italian with locals proved difficult for the alumni and for the students the professor reports having observed. Eric even states that during his time spent with his Italian speaking host family, he felt as if he did not have the opportunity to stay involved in campus life and spend time with his friends from the college. The professor also observed this phenomenon

in the habits and lifestyles of his students over the years. The only alumna whose data suggests she bridged this gap was Catherine since she had access to much linguistic contact outside of class through her work as an English tutor and as an au pair. Outside of this previously-allotted time, she found herself able to still stay involved with life on campus through friends and class.

The interview data of Eric and the professor especially highlight the relationship between the teacher and the classroom and student learning and interaction while abroad. Students still leave their experience abroad with unmet expectations of language learning and both students and professors alike ask themselves how they can reduce these sentiments of regret. The only alumna interviewed that did not have any additional advice for herself pre-sojourn was Catherine who says that, had she the opportunity to restart her time in Switzerland she would not change the sequence of events. Following the advice that Daliyah and Amanda would have given in retrospect about integrating further in the local community, the professor attests to have attempted to facilitate more integration with the local community in conjunction with language learning without meeting much success. Judging by the regrets and interests expressed by the alumni during their interviews, students have the desire and sometimes the motivation to participate in such activities but, once again, the possibilities of interaction may be limited or influenced by other socio-economic and affective factors.

Other Factors

One viable explanation that the professor offers for the gap between learner desires and learner behaviors is the students' prioritization of investment of time and money. While in Switzerland, many of the students do not have any access to work opportunities beyond the offerings of the college itself. The cost of attending clubs, lectures, concerts or other activities downtown can keep more frugal students away from further integration into the local

community. The professor cites the recent economic downturn as a real factor for students when making these decisions.

The professor also connects the downturn with student attitudes toward their personal investment in Italian during their time abroad. Since the use of Italian is rather restricted to southern Switzerland and Italy itself, students may not feel like they have any use for learning the language beyond their immediate needs. Since all of the alumni admit that learning Italian only became a goal after finding themselves in Switzerland, many students choose to be content with conducting their lives in English during their stay in Switzerland. By splitting the time between the world of campus and the world beyond, many students who do not initially have the proficiency may not be invested enough in their learning endeavor to seek out new learning situations. These attitudes can absolutely affect whether or not students find themselves in any sort of "disorienting dilemma" in the first place.

The professor discussed more recent additions to the language program geared toward facilitating more contact between the students at the college and other local Swiss students. The professor began to send out e-mails of lists of local events, hoping to tempt some of his students into attending. Despite these weekly mentions of events, he reports that very few students ever attended. The college has also since adopted a tandem program with a local university. This program pairs students at the college with local students and they take turns conversing in both English and in Italian so that both can work to improve their spoken proficiency in the target language. Even with the advent of these new program offerings, luring students off of the college territory has still proved difficult in the eyes of the professor. There is no evidence here whether or not this lack of contact affects the students' overall proficiency, but it does reflect the ongoing

frustration of many students and professors involved with developing linguistic learning experiences for students abroad.

In his interview, the professor talked of a "fatigue" that sets in in some of the older students in regards to their pursuit of learning Italian. Studies investigating the coping strategies of demotivated students offer some insight into what some of the students and alumni have experienced (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009; Falout, 2012). In Falout's 2004 and 2009 studies, he and his fellow researchers administered questionnaires to university-level Japanese learners of English regarding which factors contributed the most to student demotivation. The researchers discovered that the use of the grammar translation method in classrooms and the teachers proved a large de-motivational element for students, corroborating the professor's hypothesis that hitting students with too much grammar in their first year of studying Italian can leave them feeling demotivated to continue learning. The data from these two studies also suggest that students who cannot build self-confidence through feelings of success in their language classroom may react through self-deprecation, paving the way to further demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004, Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009).

In Falout's 2012 study, he posits that a "learner's antecedent psychological conditions can influence fluctuations of motivation levels and predict future developments regarding learning" (p. 5). Antecedent conditions include: "self-concept, attitude and value toward the subject, preferences of learning environment, goal focus, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and expectations of success" (Gorham & Millette, 1997 as cited in Falout, 2012, p. 5). Put more simply, antecedent conditions relate to the attitudinal and psychological conditions most often based on past learning experiences that each student brings into the classroom. In the realm of this hypothesis, a student's very affective disposition when they travel abroad may also

contribute to shaping their learning experience and the kinds of interaction they pursue outside of the classroom. The researcher surveyed 157 university students in EFL courses to discover whether or not they exhibited positive or negative antecedent conditions and which coping strategies they used during times of demotivation or struggle in learning English. Even though both students with positive antecedent conditions and those with negative antecedent conditions experienced demotivation in their classes, students with negative antecedent conditions tended to cite their lack of confidence as the largest de-motivational factor and engage in self-blame for their perceived failures. These students tended to adopt more adaptive coping strategies to confront their demotivation much later than those with positive antecedent conditions. Students with positive antecedent conditions were more likely to use social networks, relying on others to re-motivate them during their struggles suggesting that they are more adept at finding their own methods of support.

These studies work to confirm the professor's own ideas about student demotivation as at least partially a result of the grammar-focused classes that they came into contact with. He and the other Italian professors must learn how to stop students from taking what they perceive as their linguistic failures to heart and suggest new coping strategies to guide students through their struggles. Linguistic struggles are a natural part of language learning and professors should set up a community and support system to help students maintain their motivation through these struggles because, as the alumni would testify, these moments of struggles are also those that prove the most rewarding and rich for learning.

Conclusion

To investigate the connections between changes in language learning beliefs and habits of out-of-class interaction abroad, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with alumni of an American college located in Switzerland. After analyzing the interview data in an in-depth case study approach, the data recovered suggests that language learning beliefs do change over the course of a study abroad experience and that certain incidents of learning struggle contributed to these belief changes.

Beliefs about grammar and vocabulary as well as the length of time it takes to attain fluency were among the beliefs the most susceptible to change and the belief that children learn better than adults was the least likely to change. All of the participants also found themselves more willing to make mistakes for the sake of communication in the target language as well by the end of their time abroad. The changes in each participant's belief system were highly individualized and rooted in their personal collection of language learning experiences. All of the participants gained a new level of self-efficacy and metalinguistic knowledge that has already helped a few of them begin new language learning endeavors even after their time abroad.

The experiences that contributed the most to these belief changes were the greatest struggles that the alumni experienced in their learning. These struggles included immersive experiences, fighting demotivation in the classroom and the search for effective learning strategies. These moments where the alumni were presented with the reality of the difficulty of language learning forced them to reflect more deeply about their own learning, resulting in a greater metacognitive awareness and self-efficacy. The alumni tended to reformulate their beliefs according to where they found the most success in language learning after undergoing their struggle. Two participants in particular had difficult learning experiences that proved linguistic belief turning points. What they describe feeling through these incidents fits with Mezirow's

(1978) framework of transformational learning.

The web of connections between language learning belief change and interactional behavior are multi-faceted and often include several factors outside of each learner's direct linguistic experiences. The process of how changes in learner beliefs affect learner behavior is in no way linear and often requires the presence of a struggle, often encountered through interactive experiences with native speakers. The interview with the professor introduced other factors that may have more of an influence over student interactive habits such as maturity and financial means. Since these factors no doubt played a role in the interactive patterns of the alumni, no definitive causal relationship between changes in learning beliefs and changes in these patterns exists.

Implications and Recommendations

When considering a study abroad program with a language learning component, an institution must consider how they can better facilitate interaction between the students and the native speakers in the area and truly utilize the environment to its highest potential. The following recommendations come from comments by the interviewed alumni and the professor.

None of the alumni interviewed planned on studying Italian before arriving in Switzerland. Since the learners did not arrive invested in their language learning, other subjects and classes easily took priority. Perhaps students could undergo some Italian preparation before they arrive so that they already have some phrases at the ready to help them interact around town (Chavez, 1995). Students could learn simple greetings and how to order food by watching videos made by the institution so that they can feel success in language learning right upon their arrival. Perhaps these early feelings of communicative success will help bolster motivation and investment earlier in the learning process.

One of the main obstacles to interaction that the professor pointed out is the lack of money. The institution could help by funding more Italian language activities that the students could engage in. It could try to generate interest in their tandem program through these activities as well to help further cultivate connections between the students and the alumni. Professors could also try and integrate more of these types of activities in their assignments to students. Beginning students could, for example, keep a learning journal where they can record their impressions of learning in the Swiss environment and could receive the reactions and encouragement of the professor.

In order to see better how students experience the classroom, professors could begin to engage students in discussing their language learning beliefs in class, perhaps presenting statistics to see how their thoughts match up with other learners or previous research. Professors could also use various forms of classroom assessment techniques (CATs) to ascertain student opinions about the course. One useful instrument is the critical incident questionnaire (Brookfield, 1995). Developed by Stephen Brookfield (1995), this instrument lets teachers know when students are the most engaged in their classes and when they feel the most distant. The language professors can, in turn, use the information to guide future lessons.

In the interviews, all of the alumni interviewed outlined their learning struggles and subsequent feelings of hard-won success. These struggles, though difficult, eventually led to greater learner autonomy, increased metacognitive knowledge, and a boost in confidence for the learners. Even though it might be instinctual for professors to want to make the language learning process easier, the data suggests that instead of trying to prevent or mitigate struggle, they should focus more of their efforts toward cultivating a solid learning community and teaching students helpful coping strategies. Professors should emphasize that this struggle is

normal and cheer students on through their difficulties. Professors could also invite older or more advanced Italian students to come into beginner classes and discuss their strategies and struggles with the new students. As Magnan and Back (2007) found in their study, a third party who has become more proficient in the target language can offer great help in guiding students towards their own successes.

As the professor stated in his interview, teachers should assure that students enjoy the process of learning and feel that what they are learning in the classroom is relevant. Students should be invited to chart their own linguistic progress and set realistic goals for themselves. These goals could stray from the grammatical and touch more on the affective factors of confidence and the importance of successful communication. Once students feel more control of their learning, they might feel more comfortable taking risks. In addition, evidence from past research (Falout & Maruryama, 2004; Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009) has indicated that a grammar heavy approach demotivates students. In light of this, the institution should keep trying to integrate the communicative approach to learning and strengthen the connections between the language and the lives of the students by giving them more communicative skills to apply in the community.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is its lack of generalizability. Although the case study method of presentation allows a more detailed understanding of individual cases to inform future programming decisions, this also means that the data gathered does not apply to all study abroad programs or all individual cases. Another limitation of this study is the possibility of forgetfulness and misreporting on the side of the participants due to the time lapse in between each alumna's and alumnus's departure from Switzerland up until the time of their interview.

One possible advantage to this gap, however, is the possibility that all of the alumni have had time to reflect on these issues since their time in Switzerland. The "epilogues" that these students provided to what they learned about their language learning while abroad also helped underline the effect of their learning experiences while abroad.

Future Research

Many of the changes in language beliefs surround certain critical incidents where the participants struggled, tried new strategies, and subsequently found success. Finding success after taking on a challenge led many of the participants to rethinking their belief systems.

Following up on the data that came to light, future studies could include student perceptions of immersion, possible techniques for cultivating linguistic appreciation while abroad, questionnaires about student perceptions of contact outside of the classroom, connections between socio-economic status and interactive habits while abroad, the viability of incidental vocabulary learning, and possible relations between language learning and the maturity development while abroad.

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Appendix A: Guiding Research Questions

Guiding Interview Questions- Adapted from the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1985) (Alumni):

1.) Describe your language background. i.e What languages do you speak, how long have you spoken them?

    a. Why did you decide to learn the language(s) in question?

2.) Please describe your experiences being abroad (if any) before attending the college.

3.) Why did you decide to go to the college? Did you go there with the direct desire of learning Italian/ a foreign language?

    a. What was your major?

4.) What were your expectations of language learning? That is to say, what level of the language were you hoping to attain? How long did you think it would take you to attain this level?

    a. What level would you say that you obtained? (keeping in mind that most students under-report)

    b. Did you have any special ideas of what advantages learning Italian in Lugano would bring before you left?

    c. Was there any special way you were expecting to learn the language when you arrived in Switzerland?

5.) Why did you choose to take Italian courses?

6.) What was your relationship with the Italian courses?

    a. How did you apply what you learned to the world outside of the campus walls?

7.) How often would you say that you sought interaction in Italian outside of class?

    a. In which settings did these interactions take place?

    b. Did the kind and volume of these interactions change as you spent more time in Switzerland?

8.) Are there any particular experiences in speaking Italian (or not) that stick out in your mind?

9.) Can you state how you felt about the following questions before and after your time at the college?

a. Do you believe that learning language is difficult? Or that learning some languages are more difficult than others?

b. Do you believe that a "foreign language aptitude" exists, and if so, do you think that you have it?

c. What is the importance of grammar in language learning?

d. What is the importance of vocabulary in language learning?

e. Is it better to learn a language as a child?

f. Is it important to speak a language with a perfect accent? Perfect accuracy? Is it okay to guess words while speaking?

g. Is it better to learn a language in the host country?

h. Is it necessary to know the culture behind the language in order to speak the language well?

i. What is your role in the learning process? Individual or in a network(Question added Dec. 13 2012)

j. Have you ever really reflected on these questions before? Was there a particular incident that made you reflect on these issues?

k. Discussions with friends?

10.) What would you say are/were your language learning and communicative strategies? Have these changed over your time in Switzerland?

11.) Would you say that your beliefs about how one learns a language changed at all during your time abroad?

a. Is there any particular experience or incident that may have had a hand in inspiring these changes?

12.) Would you say that these changes in your beliefs changed the way that you behaved, or would you say that it is the other way around?

a. What is your relationship with these stated beliefs and how you approach learning a language?

b. Shifts in circumstances?

13.) Did you ever discuss language learning beliefs or strategies with language professors?

14.) If you could go back in time to before you departed for the college, what advice about language learning would you give yourself?

    a. Do you wish that your behaviors would have been different?

    b. What would you change if you had another chance to learn a language abroad?

15.) If you had spent less time abroad do you think your thoughts about language learning would be different? If so, how so?

    a. If there was someone you know debating whether or not to stay a semester or a year, which length of time would you recommend?

Possible Interview Questions (Professors):

1.) Language background: What languages do you speak and how long have you been speaking them?

    a. Why did you choose to learn them

2.) How long have you been teaching at the college?

3.) Why did you decide to teach there?

4.) Can you give an overview of how you believe languages are best learned and why?

5.) Specific language belief questions: You do you feel about them and how do you think your students do?

    a. Questions

    b. Do you notice changes in these beliefs from your more advanced students? Older students? More recent students and previous students?

    c. Student adaptation

6.) In what way(s) do you consider these ideas when creating a lesson plan?

    a. Have you ever had any student reactions to a certain belief-driven lesson plan that you found surprising?

7.) Do you ever explicitly address the question of language learning beliefs in your classrooms?

    a. What is your role in this in the classroom?

    b. What were student reactions?

8.) Do you ever work to create interactive opportunities for students outside of the classroom?

     a. Do you ever discuss strategies and tips to do so?

     b. Motivations?

     c. Self-directed?

9.) What would you say is the general attitude of students toward the Italian language and culture?

10.)   Based on your own personal informal observations, do you feel that students generally have a desire to speak Italian?

     a. How often would you say they speak Italian outside of the classroom? In what settings?

How often do they come to you with language-related questions based on experiences they had outside of the classroom? If yes, what kind of questions