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The Parallel Experience of a Bilingual Child With a Communication Disorder and a College Language Immersion Program

Kate Sussan Elahi
University of Northern Iowa

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THE PARALLEL EXPERIENCE OF
A BILINGUAL CHILD WITH A COMMUNICATION DISORDER AND
A COLLEGE LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAM

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

Kate Sussan Elahi
University of Northern Iowa
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Abstract

For many speech-language pathologists, it is difficult to truly understand the experience a child goes through when they have a communication disorder. Especially when at the same time, a child is learning a new language in an unfamiliar culture. This thesis bridges that gap of understanding by comparing the experience of a bilingual child with a communication disorder and that of a college student studying abroad in a language immersion program. It reviews and compares various literature and studies describing the language characteristics (i.e., form, content, use, and behavior) of bilingual children with a communication disorder. These characteristics are then compared to responses gathered from interviews conducted with college students who had studied abroad and were able to share personal reports and reflections. This thesis will encourage empathy and increased awareness so that speech-language pathologists and anyone who works with a diverse population will be able to offer quality services that are more sensitive to a bilingual/multicultural client's needs.

Introduction

The population of the United States has been rapidly growing over the past few decades and is predicted to reach 438 million people by 2050. Immigrants and their descendants are a driving force behind this change, making up 82% of the growth. With this increase in cultural diversity comes the presence of a large group of people who do not speak English as their primary language (L1). In fact, by the year 2030, it is believed that 40% of children in the United States will be learning English as a second language (L2). The Hispanic population in particular is expected to continue to uphold its place as the fastest growing minority and increase to 29% of the population by 2050 (Fry, 2008). Of the 35.2 million Hispanic people that were surveyed in the 2000 Census, 75% speak a language other than English in the home (Shin & Bruno, 2004).

The speech pathology community has acknowledged this growth and adapted by researching the typical language characteristics of English Language Learners, creating unbiased methods to fairly assess these students for communication disorders, and encouraging speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to make themselves aware of the diverse qualities and needs of other cultures. Although these actions are great strides towards providing quality services to multicultural populations, there is still a lack of personal understanding and empathy toward the clients. Those characteristics are important for a SLP to possess; however, many SLPs find it difficult to truly understand the experience a bilingual child goes through when they have a communication disorder. Even SLPs who did receive therapy as children or watched their siblings go through therapy do not realize how the difficulty of the experience is heightened by being in a completely foreign and unfamiliar culture. This is generally an uncomfortable situation that most people would choose to avoid. However, there is a growing population that is voluntarily entering into this same type of challenging experience.

While the immigrant population grows in the United States, the number of college students choosing to study abroad has also been growing. In the 2008-2009 academic year, 260,327 U.S. students studied abroad. This number has more than doubled since the 130,000 students who ventured outside of the United States a decade ago (Opendoors, 2010). From learning about another culture, becoming more open minded and aware of different world views, or learning another language, there are many obvious personal and societal benefits that stem from studying in a foreign country. However, one major benefit that has been overlooked by the speech pathology field is the bridge that a study abroad experience provides to close the gap of understanding and empathy between the clinician and the multicultural client. There is an obvious need to further study the characteristics of the experience of studying abroad and to examine if it is truly possible to make such a beneficial connection.

As stated before, there have been many studies about the specific language characteristics and deficits of bilingual children with communication disorders, but what is lacking is a close examination of the emotional experience. Although speech pathologists may be able to properly assess and diagnose whether or not a bilingual child has a communication disorder, the therapy provided, interactions with the family, and approach to the client will be limited. There are many apparent similarities in the linguistic characteristics of a bilingual child with a communication disorder and a college student studying abroad in a language immersion program. The environmental situations of these two groups are also very similar. Both are in an unfamiliar culture, attempting to learn a language, and at times having difficulty communicating or expressing themselves. It seems then that the emotional experience of these two groups would be similar as well.

The “foreign language theory” discussed by Kohnert (2008), which compares having a communication disorder to speaking a foreign language, has been criticized as being an inaccurate comparison because the speaker learning a second language still has the comfort of being proficient in a primary language. However, in a language immersion program students may have the comfort of being proficient in their L1, but in their situation it is not an option to use it. Therefore, students must endure the experience of struggling to communicate for an extended period of time, much like a bilingual child with a communication disorder.

Personal interviews of students who have studied abroad and research about multicultural populations within the field of speech pathology were used to make the connection between the two experiences of bilingual children with a communication disorders and a college language immersion program. The interviews explored the personal reflections of students on their language abilities, difficult communication situations they encountered, and their feelings during and after the experience. The initial parallel in the language characteristics and environments of both groups allowed the reported emotional experiences of the students to lead to an understanding of how those same emotions translate to the experience of a bilingual child with a communication disorder.

SLPs who have studied abroad will be able to look at their own experiences from a new perspective that will hopefully grow their appreciation and empathy for the multicultural populations they will inevitably work with. SLPs who have not studied abroad will be exposed to a new experience they may find easier to imagine or relate to and connect it to a personal experience where they have felt like an out-of-place minority. Evaluating the emotions in these situations will open doors to SLPs to connect with their clients, gain their clients’ trust, and work together to overcome obstacles of communication. The purpose of this thesis to determine if the

experience of studying abroad in a language immersion program can create a gateway for students to understand the experience that comes with living with a communication disorder, including the emotions and limitations to daily living that must be endured.

Background Literature

To understand exactly how speech therapy services need to be adapted to bilingual populations, there has been in-depth research done about the specific characteristics of bilingual children who have a communication disorder. It may be difficult to distinguish between a language disorder and a language difference in a bilingual child, but this distinction is imperative for a proper diagnosis of a need for speech therapy or not. It is important to remember that most children who truly have a language disorder in the L2 will also have a communication disorder in their L1 (Battle, 2002). It is also possible that the child may simply have a language delay, which means that language is still developing in a typical order, just slower than what would be expected (Seitel & Garcia, 2009). Kohnert (2008) identified some of the main language disorders to be aware of, which included late talkers, expressive and/or receptive language delay, language-based learning disability, primary language impairment, and specific language impairment. There are many typical characteristics of the mistakes a child who is learning English as a second language will make, but Kayser (2002) gathered a list of commonly reported language difficulties in bilingual children with language disorders. These characteristics can be divided into four categories: form, content, use, and behavior.

Form

The category of “form” describes the production and comprehension of the actual sounds of words (phonemes), the use of the smallest units of language that have meaning (morphemes),

and the construction of sentences (syntax). A bilingual child with a communication disorder may not be able to differentiate between the different tones, phonemes, and morphemes of speech. This can make it very difficult to pick up on the true meaning of what someone is saying or understand the basic words being said. This has overlapping effects on later difficulties with reading and learning processes (Leitao & Fletcher, 2004). The child may struggle to make the connection between what they hear in speech and what they read, making it difficult to comprehend written communication. Learning strategies may be negatively affected because the child will not be able to appropriately create meaning out of incoming speech that would allow him or her to learn and elaborate on existing knowledge.

Production may also prove to be a challenge so that the child would not be able to produce certain phonemes or may confuse them by using incorrect substitutions, omissions, distortions, or wrong order. It is useful to note that the different grammatical features of languages may be used to create specific meanings or connotations within an utterance (Kohnert, 2008). This specific use is seen in the connotation of using a passive voice versus an active voice to express what is happening to someone. In Spanish, the order of the noun and its modifying adjective can influence the strength or meaning of the adjective. Language situations that depend on these slight feature changes may be susceptible to issues with a language disorder.

Morphemes include the use of plurals, verb endings, contractions, and other units that influence the meaning of speech. The correct use of morphemes may be difficult for a bilingual child with a communication disorder because each language has unique morphemic rules to adapt to, which may be confusing. Jackson-Maldonado (2004) explored the presence of verb errors among children whose L1 was Spanish and observed that those errors were more common than noun errors. Jackson-Maldonado reported that the majority of errors occurred when

mistaking the correct person ending while conjugating the imperfect past tense and the subjunctive mood. These aspects of Spanish can be very challenging to grasp because of their reliance on the speaker's ability to plan what he or she is going to say. To effectively use these features in communication requires a firm understanding of the subtleties and connotations of Spanish. Jackson-Maldonado (2004) found that many children would just avoid having to conjugate verbs by using the infinitive form and that they would often over generalize irregular verbs to regular verb forms.

Word order also falls under the category of language form and may become difficult for a bilingual child who struggles with language. For example, in Spanish the adjective generally comes after the noun it modifies, but in English the adjective comes before. Gutiérrez-Clellen (2004) described how the typical subject-verb-object order that is used in English may be used in Spanish, but Spanish has a more common form of the verb followed by the subject. Jackson-Maldonado (2004) observed errors in clitic (i.e., *se/le/te/me*) and preposition use. The order of these clitics and prepositions are important in Spanish and can influence the meaning of actions and their recipients. The particular use of word order may influence comprehension of the speaker and the effectiveness of the communication of the message. Gutiérrez-Clellen (2004) also observed the importance of prepositions and their different uses in English and Spanish. In English, verbs that describe motion are generally followed by a specific preposition to indicate location and direction. Spanish instead uses the connotation of the verb itself to assume that listeners will understand the intent of the speaker. For a bilingual child with a communication disorder, using these extra features of language may prove to be a challenge.

Content

“Content” refers to comprehension of language and questions, word retrieval, and vocabulary. A bilingual child with a communication disorder will generally struggle with all of these areas. Who, what, when, and why questions may also be difficult to comprehend and answer because these questions generally require higher level thinking to understand what is being asked and then to formulate a correct response. The vocabulary level will most likely be poor. Although it has been found that a typical bilingual child has a combined vocabulary that is equal to or greater than that of a monolingual child (Battle, 2002), the bilingual child with a communication disorder will be different in the fact that the vocabulary they do may be at a lower level and they will have difficulty retrieving those words for speech. The content of language is also affected by the inability to hear a word and connect it to a specific thing or experience. This struggle to differentiate and connect words may be expected when learning another language and having limited vocabulary, but when a child shows consistent difficulty with making these connections, it will hinder their ability to communicate and is a sign of a disorder. The child may also refer to objects, actions, and people using the wrong word in conversation.

The act of processing the content of information that is being spoken may be challenging for a bilingual child with a communication disorder. The processing rate will most likely be slower and less efficient than in typical language development (Kohnert, 2008). Since a slight difference in processing speed has such a large impact on language skills in the context of rapid, fluent conversation, this rate will greatly affect a child’s ability to maintain communication. To give an idea of how quick natural speech is, Kohnert (2008) stated that “fluent adult speakers produce 125-225 words per minute and 5-8 syllables or 20-30 phonetic segments per second (e.g., Fromkin & Berstein Ratner, 1998; Liberman, 1970). These linguistic units simultaneously

express meaning- the purpose of language- while adhering to the rules or conventions for combining meaningful units in the ambient language” (p. 90). The rate of speech is astounding and when a child is slowed by a struggle with putting together the basic features of language that are necessary for comprehension, it is quite likely the child will miss crucial information.

Use

The category of “use” includes the necessary, practical uses of language in everyday conversations and relationships. A bilingual child with a communication disorder will generally have poor conversational skills, which appear in his or her inability to use proper turn taking, maintain a topic or, the opposite, perseverate on a topic. Making inappropriate comments that do not make sense in the conversation may also be a common occurrence. Sentences will often be short or choppy and limited to a basic, simple structure. This basic utterance form may limit the child’s ability to retell a story or personal experience, which is an important part of being actively involved in a conversation. Being able to organize events and thoughts or use correct vocabulary and time identifiers are higher level language skills that are necessary for this activity, but may be very difficult for the child.

Gutiérrez-Clellen (2004) observed that “narratives can provide significant information about a child’s ability to represent and organize past experiences beyond the level of the sentence or conversational turn” (p. 235). There are many different mental functions occurring at the same time during a narration that allows it to be an excellent predictor of language skills. Gutiérrez-Clellen (2004) described two stages of narrative development. The first focused on the simple sequence of actions and changes in physical state within the story and the second is demonstrated by a more mature focus on motivation and changes in mental state. Without the inclusion of descriptions about internal responses, goals, or mental states, a child’s narrative is incomplete

and uninformative. A child with a communication disorder will be limited in their ability to express those narratives and will be lacking in the information they are able to provide.

Gutiérrez-Clellen (2004) also detailed the common narrative difficulties of bilingual children with language disorders. The list included omission of connections between cause and effect situations, unclear subjects or main actors (i.e., referents), inappropriate introductions of new referents, difficulty providing enough background information about the actions of a character, and difficulty with time distinctions. In addition to trouble with producing a narrative, the child may also have problems comprehending and remembering narratives.

The ability to create narratives falls under another language category called cognitive academic language proficiency. This category of cognition may also refer to the use of language to learn, understand and discuss abstract concepts, work with complex academic vocabulary, and complete formal testing or writing assessments. Activities of language manipulation such as these demand a higher level use of language that requires more cognitive functioning and is often employed in school settings. Another category within language use is basic interpersonal communication skills. Proficiency in this category involves the ability to have basic conversations using simple vocabulary, follow straightforward directions, and understand common phrases (Seitel & Garcia, 2009). Interpersonal communication skills appear to be more practical for everyday use of language, yet proficiency in both categories is critical to fully achieve a strong grasp of a language. Comparing the struggles or divides in performance in each category reveals the specific communication strengths and weaknesses that a child has.

The anxiety and negative feelings that begin to come after difficult, unsuccessful communication experiences will impact the child's social activities. Sociolinguistic competence, which involves the appropriate social use of language (Battle, 2002), is a feature of language that

shows how communication skills extend beyond simply expressing a message and affect social relationships. For example, knowing when to speak, how to speak, and being aware of the status of members of the community and how to properly address them. The child may limit their friendships to low achievers so they do not feel judged and may avoid any group interactions with classmates. In an effort to avoid speaking, the child may seem withdrawn or begin to rely on gestures to communicate.

Typical bilingual children will develop strategies to deal with situations where there is a breakdown in communication such as circumlocution, paraphrasing, avoidance, or modifications. Through other social strategies, which involve relying on the people around and their impressions, or cognitive strategies, which focus on the mental functions of guessing, using context, or attempting to find the main idea, children are able to compensate for a lack of understanding. However, as Kayser (2002) stated, “This ability to develop the second language (L2) through communication strategies may be problematic to children with a language disorder” (p. 207).

Behavior

With all these struggles in communication, it is inevitable that the child’s behavior will be affected. If the child is having trouble comprehending what is being said, he or she may have a short attention span, get distracted easily, or daydream often. Immediate gratification becomes important to the child and he or she may not have the patience for longer, difficult tasks. The child may also lack organizational skills and appear to be confused often. Many of these behaviors seem to be interconnected and cause one another. It becomes apparent that the ability to communicate greatly impacts performance and the effect of these struggles is visible through behavior.

After becoming more aware of the characteristics of bilingual children with communication disorders, it is easy to see how these difficulties may be heightened in school and social environments. When addressing language disorders, Kohnert (2008) stated, “These deficits [in children] may negatively affect social interactions and cognitive development in the early years and compromise literacy and learning during the school years” (p. 83). Many school activities focus on tasks that will challenge students to improve their abilities to express themselves, process and understand new information, and then manipulate that information. For a bilingual child who is already dealing with being a minority in an unfamiliar culture, having a communication disorder adds to the challenge of this experience. School may become a stressful place that the child feels apprehensive about attending, which will limit the education process and the child’s ability to reach their highest potential. They might also avoid social interactions, thereby limiting the development of social skills that are imperative for any future career or relationship.

These issues are all possible hypotheses of how a bilingual child with a communication disorder might feel and react in these situations. Unfortunately, there has not been much research done about the psychological and emotional effects of the presence of a communication disorder in a bilingual child. Those effects could play a significant role in education, relationships, and the child’s future. It would be useful for a speech-language pathologist to understand them so that the SLP may better work with the client and figure out ways to overcome those obstacles. Kohnert (2008) offered encouragement saying, “Children with LD [language disorders] can and do learn two languages, given sufficient, enriched opportunities in each language” (p. 104). However, if the obstacles and difficulties are not addressed, then the child’s progress in therapy will be limited.

The first step in testing the hypothesis that a study abroad experience is comparable to being a bilingual child with a communication disorder was to examine the language characteristics of college students who have participated in a language immersion program and compare them to the previously discussed characteristics of a bilingual child with a communication disorder. Further investigation of the students' experiences in various social and academic environments allowed exploration of the students' feelings and emotions in such situations.

Methods

In order to get personal, firsthand accounts of the language immersion experience for college students, it was necessary to interview four students who had participated in study abroad programs. A research plan was formed and then reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board to outline the interview process (See Appendix A). The personal interviews were then conducted one-on-one with the researcher and consisted of questions about language skills before, during, and after the program, the environments in which the students lived and interacted, and the emotions experienced when using the language throughout their time of immersion. Two of the students interviewed were male, two were female, and all went to Spain to study for five months, or one semester. They had all studied Spanish in high school (3-4 years) and had taken Spanish classes for three semesters at the University of Northern Iowa. In order to keep responses anonymous, the students were given Spanish names to identify the answers. The two males are referred to as Omar and Gomez and the two females are Conchita and Josefina.

The program they participated in was UNI Semester in Spain (UNISIS), which is designed for students who have studied Spanish at the university level for about two years. The students live with their own Spanish host family and take classes at la Universidad de Oviedo

(UO) in Asturias in Northern Spain. The program within UO is called “Cursos de español para extranjeros” (Spanish Studies for Foreigners) and it offers students the opportunity to take classes with other students from all over the world and to be taught by native Spanish professors. Oviedo, the capitol of the autonomous community of Asturias, is a large urban city and has a population of 212,174 citizens, most of which do not speak any English.

The purpose of these interviews was to explore the previous categories of language difficulties within the experiences of the students and to capture the emotional reactions to these situations. The interview questions (See Appendix B) began by identifying the initial skill level in Spanish and personal level of confidence in the language. The interviewees were asked to answer some of the questions using a rating scale of 1 to 5. 1 represented the lowest rating (i.e., least confident, fewest family interactions) and 5 represented the highest (i.e., most confident, absolutely loved their classes). The students’ levels of confidence made it possible to evaluate if their responses would be able to be compared to the experience of a bilingual child with a communication disorder who most likely has a lower level of confidence in his or her English abilities. The college students were specifically asked about how they would compare speaking skills to reading and writing in Spanish. A consistent higher struggle in one area over another would most likely be present in the bilingual child as well. This created more connections in the academic aspects of language use. The first section of the interview also identified the living situation of the students, which allowed for comparisons of social environments.

The second part of the interview focused on defining the characteristics of the college students’ language skills. To draw conclusions about the academic experience of going to school and being exposed to only a secondary language, the first questions asked were about the students’ enjoyment of classes and their personal judgment of how effective the classes were.

The questions continued by examining the specific common language errors within grammar and vocabulary that the students noticed themselves making. This information was extracted from personal reflections and then from giving the interviewees a list of some typical characteristics of a bilingual child with a communication disorder and asking them to identify which characteristics they had observed in themselves. These observations would then be compared to the evidence that has been identified in the literature. The difficulty of comprehension of native speakers was also assessed and correlated with specific situations to identify the effects of certain environments on fluency and language use.

After clarifying the language characteristics of students in an immersive study abroad program, the third part of the interview sought to explore the emotions experienced during social interactions. The living situation was explored in further detail to identify the amount of interaction the students had with their host families and how they felt during conversations. Living situations were important to examine because that was where many basic needs needed to be communicated, such as food, schedules, or personal issues. The host family may have been a great resource, yet since the family members did not speak any English, the family could also have been a source of stress. There was a high possibility of miscommunication in these relationships that may have resulted in awkward or embarrassing situations.

Since the host family setting would have inevitably become somewhat comfortable and familiar to the students, this section of the interview also explored the feelings experienced when interacting with native speakers in public locations. In addition to being forced to use a foreign language to communicate, the students also had to adapt to the cultural differences that are unavoidable when visiting another country. The students were asked to identify the cultural differences they observed and the impact that those differences had on communication. In

situations where there is a lack of understanding, it is generally helpful to use specific strategies to compensate, so the interviewees shared what approaches they used to overcome those gaps in communication. They also described their own activities and the actions of others that were most helpful in the process of improving their language skills. This information would be useful in identifying possible services to offer and things to be aware of when working with a bilingual child with a communication disorder.

The results of the interviews were then compared to the literature review. The main focus of these comparisons was on the common language characteristics of the students who participated in the language immersion program and a bilingual child with a communication disorder, as reported in the literature. By finding a parallel in this information and the similarity of situation and environment, it will allow further conclusions to be made about the emotional and psychological experiences of each group. In the transcription of the interviews (See Appendix C), some filler words (e.g., like, um) were eliminated, but the quotes are accurate accounts of what the interviewees truly reported.

Results

After beginning the interview process, it was clear that the environments of these students were very similar to the environment of a bilingual child in the United States. When the students were not with their friends from the United States, they were completely immersed in the L2. This immersion is the same for a bilingual child anywhere outside the home, if the L1 is still primarily spoken there. For both groups, school is a place where they are challenged and never given a break to revert to the primary language of comfort. Social situations also require these groups to be able to use their L2 skills to effectively communicate the message of what they want or feel. Even in the home setting, the students were not able to ignore the need for

concentration and focus while talking to their host family. For a bilingual child who also has a communication disorder, using language will always take concentration and focus, especially when using the L2.

Language Characteristics

Form. To begin, it is necessary to examine the reports of the students' language skills. All the students struggled with the grammar rules that were different from the familiar rules they had easily learned in English. This struggle led to difficulty within the language category of form. The students specifically reported the unfamiliar grammar's effect on their ability to discriminate certain phonemes and morphemes. The gender of a noun in Spanish, whether masculine or feminine, affects the article that precedes it, the ending of the word, and the adjectives that describe it. Since there is no gender difference between nouns in their native language, the students were challenged to adapt to this rule.

Three of the students also described issues with verb conjugations, specifically with the subjunctive mood. Spanish has different verb endings for each person which change according to tense. The root of the word may also change according to person and tense. Stem-changing verbs can be very difficult for English speakers to pick up. The speakers will often confuse the morphemes of the verb endings, which may change the subject, thereby completely changing the intended meaning of a sentence. The subjunctive mood is also a difficult concept to grasp because the concept exists in English, but there is no identifying grammatical marker used to differentiate it. The subjunctive is used after certain phrases, in commands, and in phrases expressing uncertainty. Ironically, the correct use of subjunctive always seems to be uncertain for English speakers. Since it is a higher level concept, it is often not taught in classes until the end of a semester if at all, so the students felt very insecure using it.

Spanish also makes a grammatical differentiation in past tense that English does not. The imperfect past tense is used to denote actions that were habitual, descriptions, or actions without a specific parameter of time. The perfective past tense is generally used for actions that have a finite end or actions that interrupt another action. The decision of which tense to use may be clear and obvious, or it may be more subject to the speaker and the meaning he or she wants to convey. Josefina described her confusion with these verbs when she said, “That’s really difficult for me still to know when to use one or the other, because then I’ll hear other people, like native speakers, using the imperfect when I had convinced myself you’re not supposed to use it in that situation.” The grammatical uses of these phonemes and morphemes are difficult to grasp for second language learners because they carry subtle meanings that require an intuitive familiarity with the language to use correctly.

Another area of form that the students struggled with was substitution, omission, distortion, or inability to produce certain sounds. When assessing her own difficulties within sound production, Conchita stated, “I can’t roll my r’s, so that’s a big one. I say words wrong because I can’t do that.” Language acquisition begins from the moment a child is born, but as the child matures and gets older, he or she acquires the necessary sounds for the language of the environment and often loses the ability to produce or hear sounds of other languages. Not being able to identify certain phonemes affects the language learning process because often times the learner is not even aware of sound differences that are being missed. Gomez discussed his own unawareness of sound distortion, specifically saying, “It wasn’t until I got back [to the United States] that I realized I made incorrect diphthong pronunciation of the ‘-ue.’” Spanish has only five vowel sounds, while English has about fourteen different vowels. One would think that an English speaker would have no trouble with using fewer vowel sounds, but in fact, English

speakers quickly forget and often use English vowels in their Spanish speech. This substitution frequently occurs when a Spanish word looks very similar to a word in English, yet has a different pronunciation.

Difficulties with form were also reported in the students' uses of incorrect word order. Josefina described, "I would usually want to translate things literally from English into Spanish and it wouldn't have anything to do with the way they say it in Spanish. And then they wouldn't understand me and I... would just drop the subject because I thought it was funny, but they really had no idea what it was." Conchita echoed Josefina's experience when she said, "I would try to use English word order in Spanish, which most of the time isn't accurate." As stated before, Spanish generally places the descriptive adjective after the noun it is modifying, which is the opposite of English form. Another common struggle for second language learners of Spanish is the placement of clitics (i.e., direct and indirect object pronouns) and the use of the correct pronoun with reflexive verbs. Because the structure of Spanish is different from what the students were accustomed to in English, speaking and putting sentences together proved to be quite difficult.

Producing the correct form was a challenge for the students, but the ability to comprehend speech was also affected by their ability to identify the words and analyze the form. Gomez expressed this frustration in the situation of talking to a native speaker: "When you [the native Spanish speaker] are saying it all at a native pace, I get caught up in a word and then you're two sentences down the road before I'm like, 'Oh, forget it.' And try and catch up with the story." In addition to frustration experienced on the listener's part, there may also be miscommunications that result from confusion with word order. Conchita explained that "there

were many times where just one word or one sentence wrong or missed will change the whole meaning of what you're talking about and it gets really embarrassing.”

These characteristics of the form of the students' language skills parallel many of the characteristics of a bilingual child with a communication disorder previously described. Jackson-Maldonado (2004) and Gutiérrez-Clellen's (2004) observations about struggles with verb conjugation, word order and use of prepositions and pronouns appeared in the children's native Spanish and English. These complicated language concepts of Spanish that the college students faced are also difficult for a bilingual child with a communication disorder to grasp in their L1, in addition to the struggles they may show when learning English. Being forced to learn and use the L2 to communicate adds to the difficulty the child already has with higher level language concepts by introducing new ones that are strange and unlike what they have been exposed to in the familiar environment of the home.

Content. Under the language category of content, the college students seemed to struggle with word retrieval and poor vocabulary the most. Omar recalled that “sometimes there would just be a word and I couldn't think how to say it, so I would have to use negotiation of meaning and try to explain my way around it, which takes a little bit longer of trying to say what you want to say. And you can't say what you want to say in the most efficient way.” Many of the students used circumlocution, a process defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “the use of an unnecessarily large amount of words to describe an idea” or “evasion of speech.” This definition coincides with Omar's description of his inability to efficiently express himself in Spanish. For Gomez, circumlocution was not an option for overcoming the issue of a lack of vocabulary. He explained, “I haven't mastered the art of circumlocution yet, so sometimes I feel like if I don't

know the word exactly, then I'm not able to skirt around it and describe it in another way.

Vocabulary is another area where I definitely want to improve."

Conchita explained the issue when she said, "Word retrieval was a problem because I had a limited vocabulary and limited experience with the words, so they weren't as easy to retrieve as the words I've been saying my whole life." Experience and contact with words makes them easier to recall, but when the students were being exposed to many new words a day, it was difficult to find opportunities to frequently use them and build that retention rate. Conchita's observation also introduces the idea of blocks to communication that may result from a lack of vocabulary.

All of the students reported having limited language content because of a lack of vocabulary. In addition to a limited vocabulary, the students were unaware of the specific connotations associated with each word. The true meaning or comprehension of language was often lost because of the lack of this awareness. Just looking up a word in the dictionary did not necessarily help the students in their ability to truly decipher a message. Conchita explained her vocabulary issues when she recalled that "especially at the beginning I didn't know a lot of words, so you sound younger than you are because of your limited vocabulary and you might use the wrong words." Josefina put the problem into a natural context when she described the regular evening conversations she would have with her host family:

When you're stuck there, you don't want to go whip out your dictionary or anything. So when you're explaining something about your life back here [in the United States] and you just don't know the word, I had to explain the word and kind of talk around it. And [my host mother] would just try to guess what I was trying to say because I couldn't communicate sometimes exactly what I was trying to say, which was hard.

Not being able to express personal feelings or thoughts may cause miscommunication or simply a lack of deep communication. Conchita's conversations were limited because "especially in the beginning, I didn't have much to say because of my limited vocabulary so I talked about basic, small things."

Some of these same struggles are evident in bilingual children with communication disorders. Circumlocution in particular is often seen in persons who stutter, who use it as a strategy to avoid having to say a certain word or confront a certain topic (Guitar, 2006). The use of circumlocution can actually be a positive strategy for someone learning a second language to communicate their message even if they are not able to recall certain words. It may allow bilingual children to get past a limited vocabulary. However, as Gomez illustrated, circumlocution is still a language skill. Without strong control of the other aspects of language, using more language to describe an idea may actually be a greater struggle. Both the students and the bilingual children begin with a limited amount of basic, necessary vocabulary that may be at a poor level compared to expectations, but with work and practice it is possible to grow.

Use. The language category of use was probably the most challenging for the college students who participated in the language immersion program in Spain. Since they did not feel completely comfortable speaking Spanish, many of them reported poor conversational skills.

During interactions with her host family and their extended family, Josefina reported that:

It was difficult for me to understand every single word that they were saying and laugh at the appropriate moments, have a good comeback, or just keep the conversation flowing. I would just kind of stare at them and be like, "Oh, shoot! I need to really be comprehending what this person has to say, but I really don't know."

Obviously, the conversational skills go beyond simply communicating basic needs, they affect how people relate to each other and interact with one another. Josefina had a strategy to deal with her struggle to speak fluently and correctly:

I always thought about what I was going to say and planned it out...and then I would repeat it in my head over and over...Then I would be able to say it, usually correctly. Sometimes in my head I'd be able to say it a lot faster than I would in real time. When it came out I would maybe stutter, or the nerves would take over and I would just go slower.

While this strategy aided Josefina in her ability to produce correct language, it often hindered the actual fluidity of conversation. She described the conversations saying:

That person would be speaking for two minutes and I wouldn't really retain what they said because I was too busy rehearsing in my head...It would make having conversations like that a little bit more slow because I didn't really have time to think about it beforehand and rehearse it, so I would have to say it as it came to my head and many times it would be wrong.

Language reception generally comes much easier when learning a second language, but when it is neglected to further the ability to express language, it will suffer. The amount of information Josefina was actually able to comprehend was reduced greatly by her efforts to form the production of language in her head.

In addition to difficulty with easy conversation flow, the college students also reported struggling with fluency in their production of speech. Gomez reported that fluency was one of his biggest concerns when he went to Spain. He explained, "My experiences earlier on stressed more of the grammatical aspect of language and we would just kind of speak and it's ok to fumble your words, but you just try and communicate and get your message across...so I felt

pretty uncomfortable [in Spain] just saying something.” Even after mastering the technical aspects and detail of a language, the idea of actual communication within conversation may still be intimidating. A simple conversation would challenge the students on a variety of levels. Their comprehension, ability to form grammatically correct sentences, and then the action of actually saying what they thought in the correct manner were all tested daily, and this situation put a strain on many of the students.

Included in this idea of conversation and use, the college students had major difficulties with topic maintenance and elaboration. As Conchita put it, “It’s difficult to go on about a topic when you don’t know a lot of words and it’s difficult to read people and their interest in something when you’re just hearing the words, you’re not hearing the inflection or the emotion in [their speech].” Conchita was so focused on understanding each word, she failed to put all of it together to form a cohesive understanding of what the person was feeling and expressing. Not being able to gain a true level of comprehension limited her from being sensitive to and expanding on the interests of the people with whom she was interacting.

Conchita and Gomez in particular expressed that they did not have strong relationships with their host families. Much of this was attributed to the fact that they were not able to maintain topics or certain conversations. Conchita said, “I think [conversation] was awkward because of our lack of topics and it was difficult to keep a conversation going when you’re like, ‘Oh how was your day?’ ‘Good, how was yours?’ ‘Good.’ I think it would have been a lot easier if we had more to talk about.” When asked if she thought it was the language barrier that prevented conversation or just personality differences, she replied, “I would say language is a big part of it because if you don’t have anything to talk about, what do you do?” She had also expressed that she is normally a person who can talk to anyone and make conversation easily. It

is interesting to note how personalities or abilities to relate to others can be so affected by the level of language skill a person possesses.

Gomez, a self-described quiet person, had conversations with his host mother that were usually limited to the few minutes she spent preparing his meal. His taciturn nature may have influenced the amount and depth of these conversations and all of his communication habits, but language ability may also have been a factor. Gomez reported that he felt he perseverated on certain topics, which may have been due to a lack of vocabulary or ability to elaborate on topics. His defense was to limit his conversations to what he knew and felt comfortable speaking about. On the other hand, Omar has an outgoing personality that allowed him to feel more comfortable talking and using language to include broader topics. He felt that he interacted with people in his environment extensively, explaining that:

I think part of it is definitely my personality. I'm kind of an extrovert, but I think if you were an introvert, it might be a little more difficult because you're not going to be as willing to take those chances. And I don't get embarrassed very easily, but for someone who gets embarrassed easily, it would be a little more nerve-wracking to be in that situation with a native speaker.

The ability to have a conversation and maintain a topic may have been partly influenced by personality, but an important effect of the language skills was seen in turn taking abilities.

Conchita described how proper turn taking became a more difficult problem in Spanish "because in English you can usually...hear someone pausing...In Spanish, when you're focusing so much on the words that you're not hearing those cues as much, you don't know when to speak." Subtle cues and non-verbal signals in conversations were difficult to detect when the

listeners were struggling to comprehend the meaning. In order to maintain a fluid conversation, it is necessary to be aware of these shifts in dialogue.

Retelling stories or narrating personal experiences was a challenge for the students sometimes, mostly because of their limited vocabulary and struggles with proper verb tenses. Gomez admitted to struggling with retelling the stories because of his personal feelings of low vocabulary. Conchita attempted to overcome these issues by forming the story in English in her head and then translating it into Spanish. As described before, this solution could lead to grammatical issues that would affect the ability of the speaker to effectively convey his or her message.

When using Spanish, many of the students reported commenting inappropriately, which most often occurred because of a lack of understanding of the topic or cultural norms. Conchita described a specific situation that happened at the beginning of her time in Spain when she joined a group of Europeans for dinner:

Everyone is speaking Spanish, they've already been there for a semester, I just got there. And they were talking about a car, but I think they're talking about a movie. So I go to comment on the movie and they're all looking at me like, 'What are you talking about?' Situations like that happened to me where I got a gist of what they were talking about, so I assumed, "Ok, I can interject now!" And when I did, I knew immediately that was not appropriate at all.

Josefina experienced similar situations when she made an effort to joke with the Spaniards. She recalled that "I would try and be funny and say something that in my mind I thought would be funny in Spanish, and they would just laugh at me, not with me because it just sounded dumb." This may have been a result of improper translation, but it also could have been a cultural

difference in the appreciation of humor. These comments may have been completely acceptable in the familiar culture of the United States, but without common references and culture, Josefina was limited in her ability to make comments that were appropriate for certain situations.

Many of the students interviewed also reported that their friendships were limited to low achievers. Josefina explained it by saying, “I was with Americans who didn’t speak Spanish very well either. And I was with those Americans at school and then we would also take weekend trips. We would attempt to speak Spanish together, but eventually we would always just switch back into English.” The college students felt more comfortable surrounding themselves with others who were facing similar struggles and were at similar levels. They also knew that they would be able to revert back to English if necessary to communicate.

These characteristics of language use are all mirrored in the experience of a bilingual child with a communication disorder. The college students were extremely limited in their ability to use language to fully express themselves and communicate. A bilingual child with a communication disorder may lack the confidence of using the L2, which is a much greater challenge to learn since they already struggle with language. The college students’ strategy to retell narratives by first constructing them in English and then translating shows that they have the ability to organize events mentally, but the content of their actual production may still be flawed due to an inability to coordinate grammar rules. This coordination of grammar is also a struggle for the bilingual child who furthermore has issues with sequencing events. With limited vocabulary and limited conversation skills, a bilingual child with a communication disorder will also display poor topic maintenance and perseverance. As seen in the college students, the depth of conversations was restricted to basic routines or simple topics and this hindered the development of certain relationships. This deficiency in relationships may cause the child to also

limit themselves to low achievers that they feel they are able to relate to or may prevent them from developing strong friendships and social skills.

Behavior. Behavior is a form of communication and when someone is struggling with verbal communication, the feelings often become evident in their actions. The college students seemed to exhibit most of the behavioral characteristics of a bilingual child with a communication disorder when they were in situations in which they were unfamiliar with a topic or did not understand. Conchita said, “I was very easily distracted, especially in my Hispanic American class, because I didn’t know what was going on. So I would start writing something and then suddenly I missed a whole section!” Requiring students to perform multiple language tasks at once, such as listening and writing, when they were already struggling in each individual area created a large strain on their comprehension skills. Although her previous example was from a class, Conchita also found that listening could be a challenge while watching television. She explained, “It was very easy to get lost if you missed one little part, then suddenly something else is going on. Well, this isn’t interesting anymore!” Comprehension was crucial for the students to achieve understanding and maintain attention.

Staying on task also proved to be a challenge for Conchita in school and at home watching television. If she could not understand what the professor was teaching, her mind began to stray to weekend plans or meeting up with friends later that afternoon. Attending to a certain activity required heavy concentration, as she explained, “I think it was more difficult to stay on task because you have to focus, even watching Spanish television. I loved watching Spanish television, but it hurt afterwards. My brain hurt from thinking so much while watching TV!” Usually mindless activities of relaxation like reading a book or magazine, watching television, or chatting with family became processes that required intense thought and effort.

Another visible effect of these strains was the appearance of confusion. After a weekend of being completely immersed in Spanish with her host family, Josefina reported that she appeared confused, “especially when I had to zone out and couldn’t handle it anymore.” Conchita also described her interactions at home saying, “I probably appeared confused to my host mom every day because she never seemed to know what I was saying.” Their conversations were sometimes filled with miscommunications, such as Conchita answering her host mother with a response that had nothing to do with the question asked, giving the obvious impression that she was confused.

All of these categories of behavior, use, content, and form are indicators of a person’s ability to effectively use language to communicate. The college students in the language immersion program in Spain reported many of the exact same language characteristics that Kayser (2002) observed in bilingual children with a communication disorder. The fact that each interaction the college students had required constant thought, effort, analysis of conversation, and planning of speech production shows that these students had a communication disorder while they were in Spain. As discussed previously, both of these groups are living in similar situations of language immersion and both are challenged with the necessity of using their L2 to communicate and learn. Since both the college students and the bilingual children share these language characteristics and social and academic environments, it can be assumed that the emotions experienced by the college students would greatly parallel that of the children.

While talking to the interviewees, many common themes and patterns surfaced from their responses. These themes allow for a broader understanding of what really impacts the way people use and understand speech. The students also identified many common emotions they experienced while struggling with the language and common errors that they made during their

time abroad. The thematic characteristics that are identified provide insight into some of the deeper feelings and realities of living with a deficit in communication ability.

Themes

The greatest theme that emerged from the interviews was that context was a major influencing force and had a significant effect on the students' ability and comfort in using the language. Here context refers to the situation in which language is used and experienced. If a student was familiar with the topic being discussed, they felt much more confident in their ability to learn, understand, and communicate. To pass the time and increase her learning, Conchita would often watch American television shows in Spanish. She explained that the television programs were "shows I was familiar with, so I knew the storyline and then I was just watching it in Spanish. I knew what was going on, so it made it easier to absorb those words." The students also reported that knowing what to expect in a given situation or having a routine allowed them to feel more comfortable and relaxed with Spanish.

As Gomez illustrated, "The professors knew who they were speaking to and perhaps they changed the way they spoke to make it more understandable for second language learners... Whereas if you're on the street, or with... the Spaniards you've come to know, there the speech was natural, as if it was another Spaniard they were speaking with. So in those moments, it was more difficult to understand and I'd have to ask for repetition or clarification fairly often." A bilingual child with a communication disorder may be lucky enough to work with a teacher who has been trained to work with English Language Learners or a speech-language pathologist so that they can specifically work to improve their English skills. However, being in the natural context of a classroom with students who are native speakers or in social interactions with peers who fluently speak the child's L2 may provide significant challenges.

Even within the school setting, where people are more likely to have patience with the student or child learning the second language, unfamiliar contexts can make learning difficult. Josefina described some feelings of aggravation in certain classes by saying, “We [the international students] would just get frustrated because we had no idea- it was Hispanic America, so Latin American history and we were like, ‘we have no idea!’ So it was challenging and I didn’t really look forward to that class.” Without some context from which the students could draw on prior knowledge, they felt extremely lost learning entirely new, foreign concepts in an already unfamiliar second language.

The students reported that the most difficult context for using their Spanish was when they were caught off guard and approached randomly by a native speaker or put into a new situation with new people. For people who were already struggling with constructing language, being put on the spot quickly caused the students to struggle to communicate. Unfortunately, these types of situations are the natural contexts that all people face every day. When dealing with these situations becomes a struggle, every day becomes a challenge. Although the students saw these natural contexts as the most difficult situations of communication, they also valued natural contexts as a practical form of learning. Conchita would occasionally spend time with a group of Spaniards and although it felt uncomfortable at times, she enjoyed being able to listen and then join the conversation when she was ready. Josefina also described how most of her learning was gained from conversations she would have at home with her host mother, another very natural context. However, in both of these situations, Conchita and Josefina each had a familiar person that they were able to converse with, making the interaction more comfortable.

Natural context exchanges with native speakers were often complicated by a lack of shared cultural understandings. When discussing difficult communication situations, Gomez said that:

Most of the problems I'm mentioning are in the cafés with the natives. They're telling you their day, or they're telling you a story. They went to some city and you think you know what the norms are for going somewhere, but because cultural differences are so great, you're not sure which context to work from. So it's almost like you're not working from within one.

Once again, without a common context of understanding to work from to communicate, the students may be left feeling lost and confused.

For a bilingual child with a communication disorder, context would have just as great of an influence. Academic use of language is a crucial skill for children to have as they grow up so that it may lead them to future success in society. However, if a student is receiving help and support within the classroom, it is the natural contexts and environments that will become the most challenging. In addition to proper academic use of language, there is a strong need to be able to socially communicate and relate to others in order to be successful. Speech therapy often focuses on creating the most natural context possible for students to learn and practice in, but for a bilingual child this becomes even more important. While they are working to overcome a language or speech disorder, the child is also forced to use his or her L2 and adapt to the unfamiliar expectations of another culture.

A big issue within the idea of natural contexts is the next theme that emerged from the interviews: the idea that erroneous assumptions about the students' abilities to speak Spanish often resulted in miscommunications or frustration. These issues often came about when talking

to people in public who were unaware or insensitive to the situation of the college students as foreigners with a limited grasp on the common language. Conchita captured the experience well when she said:

I think sometimes [talking in public] was scarier because these people don't realize...you're an exchange student and Spanish isn't your first language. This isn't a big city like Madrid or Barcelona where they encounter tourists every day. This is a place where this is their daily life, everyone speaks Spanish. **So I think it was intimidating knowing these people are going to be stunned that we don't understand them.** And some knew that we were Americans, I think it was intimidating, but at the same time it was fun to get to play that role for a little while of not being the exchange student that everyone else knows you as. And if you could trick them, that was really good! [Emphasis added]

Many students may feel uneasy about the expectations and abilities of others in the environment.

Omar felt the most difficult communication situation was talking with a native speaker who believes something should be easy and quick to explain, so they speak at a very rapid pace. This assumption of a common understanding or ability to understand left many of the students behind in conversations. There were also misunderstandings about the students' levels of comprehension. Gomez explained his own situation when he said, "I think usually with me, I can just be quiet and nod my head and so people think, 'Oh, you're just a nice guy! He just agrees, he's very agreeable.'" Conchita had a similar experience with her host mother which possibly affected their relationship and Conchita's learning opportunities within the home. She explained that, "I didn't talk a whole lot and she would just [think], 'Ok, she doesn't want to talk.' She wouldn't push me to talk and I think that's important that...a host family does push the student because if not, they're not going to learn as much."

Sometimes the students' limited abilities in the language were obvious to people in public and they would treat the students differently. When going to the weekly public market in Oviedo, Josefina felt that the vendors heard her accent and would not even bother bartering with her because "they probably thought I was stupid and that they could just cheat me out of getting a good deal." She began bringing her host mother to communicate for her, a common strategy people will use when they do not feel confident in their own abilities to communicate. To avoid being dismissed by the vendors as someone not worth dealing with, Josefina sought support from someone she could trust.

Within the interactions with their host families, the college students' conversations usually seemed to be limited to the environment and routines. As Omar described his family conversations, "Things that we interacted with would be like eating, and then we'd always sit in the salón and watch TV and talk about what we were watching or whatever was happening." Conchita had a similar experience and described how "sometimes we'd be sitting at lunch and something on television would capture both of us and we would talk about that, but most of the time it was more forced conversation." Television became a major source of conversation for the students and their host families because they were able to passively view what was occurring and make small comments. This allowed them to use short, basic sentences to communicate a feeling or opinion and share an experience with their families.

A bilingual child with a communication disorder may struggle with composing sentences and communicating messages about an abstract concept. Asking open ended questions without any stimulus picture or object to work with may leave the child feeling stuck and limited in their ability to speak. To improve their basic skills in using language, it is easier to focus on a present topic that everyone is able to see and understand. Providing a context to work with gives

confidence to the student and the bilingual child because they are able to use language and draw on objects in their environment to continue conversation.

Daily routines in the home also shaped many of the interactions between the students and their families. As Gomez reported, “[My host mom and I] didn’t talk that much. The most we would talk was when it was meal time, when she was bringing the meal to my table.” Conchita also said, “We did not talk very often...It was a lot of routine, maintenance conversations.” This illustrates how the students were able to master the most basic vocabulary that was necessary for communicating needs and schedules. This is important vocabulary for a person to have to function within their environment, yet not working on expanding this use may limit the depth of relationships. This created a lonely experience for some of the students. Gomez described eating alone and Conchita felt awkward living alone with one woman after coming from large family. When language learners are not exposed to a variety of life situations, they may feel trapped in their vocabulary and ability to express themselves fully.

These feelings of limitation lead to the next theme of the interviews. It was observed that the amount of confidence in language skills seemed to affect bonding with others and feelings of comfort. Omar, a student who felt confident in his Spanish abilities, described his feelings around his host family throughout his time in Spain:

At first I felt uncomfortable and was very nervous just to strike up a conversation, but

then...I got more comfortable being around them and more comfortable being able to express myself and use my language with them...Then it was honestly like they were my family and I could talk to them about anything.

Josefina also had a change of feelings from the instant she met her host family to the months that followed. She recalled:

On the first day I was already convinced that [my host family's home] was a dump and that I couldn't be with these people...And then that day during lunch, we started talking and it was a just a really good conversation and it really got me talking...so I knew from that point on that I needed to stay with them so I could keep learning.

Josefina described situations interacting with her host family by saying, "When they make you feel at home and more comfortable, it makes you want to be able to open up to them and at least attempt to try and speak." For Omar and Josefina, conversations and practicing their language skills helped them feel closer and more connected to their families. They both felt as if they had very strong relationships with their host families and made efforts to spend time with them and expand their conversation topics. They felt more confident in their abilities to share their emotions and express themselves.

Conchita felt that "some of the other students got really close to their host parents, but at the same time, I think those are people that were more advanced in Spanish." Conchita felt less advanced in her own Spanish skills and described having forced, unnatural conversations with her host mother that felt awkward at times. She explained the forced conversations by saying, "I think a big part of it was the language, because I'm a person that can talk a lot all the time to anyone. I can talk to strangers, anyone. So I think I would have found more things for us to talk about had I understood the language better." By feeling more afraid and doubting her language skills, Conchita talked with her host mother less, which led to a lack of bonding with her host mother.

For a bilingual child with a communication disorder, the experience of bonding with others may be similar to that of Conchita. Without the ability to share personal information and converse, the child may feel shy and unable to relate to or understand their peers, teachers, or

other people outside of the home. They may have the same feelings of fear and doubt that Conchita had and avoid conversing with others because it is not comfortable and makes the language learner feel less intelligent.

This level of confidence in language also seemed to affect the experience of fitting in and experiencing a sense of belonging. While Josefina was in Spain living among native Spaniards, she began to take on many of the non-verbal characteristics of communication that the Spaniards used. Through gestures, facial expressions, and tone, Josefina mimicked the actions of the Spaniards which began to influence her speaking abilities and boost her confidence. She described the effect of her use of Spanish non-verbal characteristics when she said, “I feel like it came a lot easier to speak [Spanish]. That way I could take on the gestures, take on the attitude, and also take on the accent without feeling too foolish... And I almost felt like I started to fit in more when I acted like that.”

These culture specific features of language often led to confusion for the college students. For example, Conchita observed that in Spanish culture, “curse words are used a lot more prevalently there, so it’s difficult to rate someone’s mood or reaction based on just words.” She also noticed that “they use their hands a lot more, so at first it seems almost like they’re angry because they’re using their hands so much or gestures.” When a person has no experience or understanding of the specific connotations that exist in a culture, the meaning within communication is likely to be confused or distorted. It may also create a barrier between people if they have different expectations of one another that neither person is aware of. However, Conchita also said, “The culture is totally different than what you’re used to, so that’s part of it, but I think that after time that would subside. You get used to it and that becomes your norm, so it must be language that’s really holding you back.” So these non-verbal characteristics and

connotations may be confusing at times, but with education and experience, it is possible to adapt and gain understanding.

None of the students besides Josefina mentioned adopting these characteristics, which might actually be very difficult for a bilingual child with a communication disorder to even perceive anyway. Conchita was previously quoted as saying that the concentration required to just listen and understand the meaning of words within sentences would sometimes block the ability to detect intonation and pauses. Many children with communication disorders have this same struggle. It would help them to be made aware of these characteristics, especially when dealing with a new culture in which they have no prior knowledge or familiarity about how people use non-verbal cues in communication. This information would allow them to become better observers of the people around them and feel more a part of the culture.

Two major sources of frustration for the college students when communicating with natives were accents and rapid speech rate. All of the students seemed to have had a class with a specific professor that had a strange accent and was teaching Latin American history. They all reported having a hard time understanding her and that, combined with their lack of interest or previous knowledge in the subject, created a difficult learning environment. When asked about the ability to understand native speakers, Omar responded that “it definitely depended on where the native speaker was from because I traveled a little bit, and then if I’d go to places, like Andalucía... understanding them and comprehending some of the things they would say, because they speak a little bit differently, was a bit more difficult.” Clarity of speech appeared to be a major influencing factor of the students’ comprehension ability.

To the ear of a second language learner, the speech of a native speaker of the L2 always seems to sound extremely fast. All of the students reported having to ask speakers to slow down

so that they would be able to fully comprehend what the speakers were saying. If the rate of speech was too quick, the listeners felt like they would lose the meaning and then give up trying to understand or become distracted. Conchita expressed surprise at how missing just one word was able to cause setbacks and miscommunications within a conversation. When asked about accommodations that native speakers would make for them in conversation, almost all of the students replied that slowing down helped increase their level of comprehension significantly.

Accent and speech rate would most likely cause frustration for a bilingual student with a language disorder as well. If the child has gained a beginning sense of familiarity with the L2 and its pronunciation, having to adapt to another form of pronunciation would most likely be very challenging. Small changes in speech may be much harder for the child to adapt to in their level of comprehension because they already have a limited grasp on the language and the concepts within that language. Appropriate speech rate is also very important for the child's ability to understand speech. As seen in the reports of the college students, listening can be a difficult task that requires a lot of focus and comprehension to put together all of the incoming language factors at once. These factors include vocabulary, form, connotation, and intonation.

All of these themes discussed lead to an understanding of the emotions experienced by the college students during their time of language immersion, but there were also many emotions that were specifically identified in the interviews. One of these was intimidation. When describing his feelings at the time of his arrival, Omar said, "It is a little bit intimidating to be thrown into someone else's home who speaks the language you're trying to learn fluently." Conchita also expressed feelings of intimidation when interacting with people in public places. At times the students felt apprehensive about using their limited language skills to communicate.

Another interesting feeling Conchita expressed was that of being alone and needing to fend for herself. She described interactions with native speakers saying:

Going out with a group of Spaniards, they are patient to a certain extent, but after awhile, they're going to go back to their normal speed and normal conversations. At first they might slow down and make sure I understand everything they're saying, but they're not going to do that all night...So for a little while then they switch, like "Ok, we can't take care of you anymore. We're going back to our conversation. If you can keep up, good for you. If not, sorry."

Like the isolation Conchita felt during her interactions surrounded by native Spanish speakers, it surely must be intimidating for a bilingual child to jump into social and academic situations in which everyone else uses a language that he or she cannot speak fluently.

Unless the child has family or close friends nearby, the child is on his or her own and must find a way to navigate these new environments and communicate. Academic situations often call for group participation or individual performance in front of the class, by solving a problem, answering a question, or reading aloud. These situations would definitely be as intimidating for bilingual children with a communication disorder as they were for the college students when the students did those same activities in their classes, were immersed in social situations with Spaniards, or lived with native speakers.

Frustrated by their inability to fluently communicate and their limited vocabulary, the students often felt misunderstood by their host families and the people around them. This also brought about self-conscious feelings of appearing stupid or unintelligent. As Conchita put it, "I think I probably appeared confused a lot, and...it lowers your intelligence level to those people." These feelings could also translate to a fear of judgment from others. Gomez experienced this as

he described, “My effective filter was probably raised a little bit. I didn’t want to make a mistake, didn’t want to look unknowledgeable or incompetent, especially with a native speaker. And so these factors limited my use of the language.”

These feelings are familiar to anyone who is learning a second language and especially people with communication disorders. A bilingual child with a communication disorder may appear to be very quiet and withdrawn in an effort to avoid speaking to others and feeling embarrassed. It is unfortunate how paralyzing the fear of what other people think can be when speaking. This fear will limit the amount people try to speak because they know that if they do not speak, they will not make a mistake. This makes learning much more difficult, but is inevitable when a person struggles to communicate. People in society do seem to judge others if they have an accent or speech impediment, but it is important to realize that a person’s intelligence is not influenced by those factors and one way to prove that is by speaking.

Being in an unfamiliar culture and speaking a foreign language often led to feelings of being out of place. Conchita simply expressed, “I was out of my element there.” After spending an entire weekend with her Spanish host family and listening to them gossip and use vocabulary she had never heard, Josefina said, “I just felt like all of a sudden, like too much of an outsider.” This feeling of alienation also led them to feel like they were unable to participate so that they then distanced themselves from the people around them. Josefina described some moments when “they would all just be bantering back and for and then I wouldn’t ever be able to interject or contribute to the conversation and so I would just kind of space out.”

These would definitely be familiar feelings for a bilingual child with a communication disorder. The familiar comfort of the home culture would be very far away in the public school setting. The child would be immersed in an unfamiliar culture with different language, rules,

expectations, and values that they may have difficulty understanding and relating to. Every society is filled with unspoken rules for relationships and friendships that a child may struggle to grasp. Because the child struggles to communicate with language and befriend others, it is quite likely that he or she will feel out of place or unable to participate in jokes and conversations. A mode of self-defense or withdrawing might be similar to the “space out” reaction of Josefina.

These feelings of being an outsider also relate to the feeling of being uncomfortable that was often experienced by the college students. Gomez recalled situations at grocery stores or in public when he felt “more distant, slightly more uncomfortable. Just get in, get out, get what you need, don’t ask questions. Just give [the cashier] a five or a twenty so you don’t have to ask how much it was, so you don’t have to mess with change or anything.” He also expressed feelings of pressure and nervousness when describing his first few days in Spain:

At the beginning there’s this urge, or invisible pressure to communicate [with your host family] somewhat because you’re like, “I can’t just not say anything with these strangers now.” So you’re trying to say some things, but at the same times, that’s when I was the most nervous.

Using a second language can always be an uncomfortable experience because the speaker is pushed outside of their comfort zone. The speaker doubts their ability to understand what others will say and their own ability to produce a response if questioned. If they have a need, it is going to be a struggle to make sure that what they need is effectively conveyed to the right person. A bilingual child with a language disorder will have these same concerns and emotions. When interacting with people in public or in school settings, they may not receive the patience that they need when attempting to communicate. That lack of patience and understanding may create

additional pressure and nervousness that makes their ability to communicate even more challenged.

More emotions reported by the college students were: lost without context, frustrated, scared, overwhelmed, nerve wracked, and stressed out. Josefina shared that “listening to people was ok, and speaking was pretty terrifying at first.” She also recalled:

I remember a couple of times I would just have to zone out because my brain couldn't take it

any more. I couldn't understand what they were saying because they were speaking so fast and then I felt kind of stupid because I would be sitting there and then have a delayed reaction because then I would understand what they said.

In addition to these feelings of being overwhelmed and scared, she also described how stressful it could be when trying to speak with natives when she said, “I feel like you do get stressed out when you know you can't communicate well or at a native competency. You just feel stupid or you feel at a disadvantage.”

Discussion

Significance

All of these strong emotions described are likely to be felt by a bilingual child with a communication disorder. Speech-language pathologists will be able to provide higher quality services and to effectively work with the child's family if they can appreciate what this experience must be like. Being familiar with the common struggles and knowing what characteristics to expect will allow SLPs to be prepared and anticipate the needs of the child. Therapy strategies and techniques may be designed with sensitivity to the feelings that come with being forced to use a second language in addition to having a communication disorder. By exploring the emotional effects of what it is like being in an unfamiliar culture and having

extremely limited communication skills, speech-language pathologists and anyone working with a bilingual child with a communication disorder will gain a crucial understanding and empathy for the child that endures this experience.

Limitations

This study may have been limited by the specificity of comparing a bilingual child with a communication disorder as opposed to a monolingual child with a communication disorder. A bilingual child who exhibits a true communication disorder in English would also have a language disorder in their native language. Although the college students appeared to have a language disorder in Spanish, none of them have a disorder in English. A comparison with a monolingual child might have been more applicable because it would have allowed a perspective of the college students as being monolingual in their environment in Spain. Since the college students were only able to use one language in Spain, and their ability to speak English was irrelevant, this may have been a more accurate comparison. However, they still had the skills and knowledge of being proficient in one language, so the process of learning was much easier for them than it would be for a bilingual child with a communication disorder.

Final Thoughts

This thesis proves how powerful the ability to communicate really is. Through the different aspects of form, content, and use, it becomes possible to manipulate thoughts and express wants, needs, beliefs, and personality. A true appreciation for the strength of this ability can be best gained when one is put in a situation where one does not have it. It has been found that a study abroad language immersion program creates a surprisingly accurate simulation of this experience and people who participate in such programs will benefit greatly by gaining a personal understanding of life without strong, effective communication skills.

Based on the similar environments and language characteristics of the college students in the language immersion program and bilingual children with a communication disorder, these children will likely face some of the exact same situations and be forced to deal with the same emotions that the students experienced. The interviews have revealed personal information and reflections that are crucial for understanding the experience of having a communication disorder, especially when the person is not able to use their own native language. These students were challenged and pushed beyond their comfort zones while living in a foreign country and struggling to form even the most basic sentences to communicate. There were moments when they knew what they wanted to say, but they could not say it; they were not able to understand what others were saying to them; people were not able to understand them; and they were intimidated by the lack of patience and understanding they faced. For many people with speech disorders, this kind of experience occurs almost every day.

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Appendix A

University of Northern Iowa

Standard Application for Human Participants Review

Note: Before completing application, investigators must consult guidance at:

<http://www.uni.edu/osp/irb> Always check website to download current forms.

All items must be completed and the form must be typed or printed electronically. Submit 2 hard copies to

Title of proposal: **Honors Thesis- Spanish Culture Survey**

Name of (PI) Principal Investigator(s): **Kate Elahi**

PI Status: Faculty Undergraduate Student Graduate Student Staff Non-UNI

Project Type: Faculty/Staff Research Thesis/Dissertation

Other-specify: _____

PI Department: **Communication Sciences & Disorders** PI Phone: **402-312-1043** PI Email: **kate.elahi@gmail.com**

PI Address or Mail Code: **2124 West 27th Street 131D Cedar Falls, IA 50613**

Faculty Advisor Mail Code: **0356** Advisor Phone: **319-273-2577** Advisor Email: **ken.bleile@uni.edu**

Source of Funding: _____

Project dates: Beginning **February 2011** Through **April 2011**

the Human Participants Review Committee, Office of Sponsored Programs, 213 East Bartlett, mail code 0394

All key personnel and Advisor (if applicable) must be listed and must complete IRB training/certification in Human Participants Protections. Attach a copy of the certificate, if not already on file *in the IRB office*.

Principal Investigator Kate Elahi Certificate Attached On
File

Co-Investigator(s) Certificate(s) Attached On File

Faculty Advisor Dr. Ken Bleile Certificate Attached On File

Other Key Personnel: _____(name) Certificate Attached On File

Other Key Personnel: _____(name) Certificate Attached On File

SIGNATURES: The undersigned acknowledge that: 1. this application represents an accurate and complete description of the proposed research; 2. the research will be conducted in compliance with the recommendations of and only after approval has been received the UNI IRB. The PI is responsible for reporting any adverse events or problems to the IRB, for requesting prior IRB approval for modifications, and for requesting continuing review and approval.

Principal Investigator: Kate Elahi
TYPED NAME SIGNATURE DATE

Co-Investigator(s): _____
TYPED NAME SIGNATURE DATE

Faculty Advisor (required for all student projects): Ken Bleile
TYPED NAME SIGNATURE DATE

Committee Use Only		
EXEMPT FROM CONTINUING REVIEW <input type="checkbox"/>	EXPEDITED APPROVAL <input type="checkbox"/>	FULL BOARD APPROVAL <input type="checkbox"/>
REVIEW COMMITTEE SIGNATURE _____	DATE _____	
Period of approval: Effective _____ through _____		

A. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH.

Explain 1) why this research is important and what the primary purposes are, 2) what question(s) or hypotheses this activity is designed to answer, and 3) whether and how the results will be used or disseminated to others.

1) This research is important because many recent studies have shown that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) today do not understand the growing culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the United States. In order to provide correct and helpful services to these populations, SLPs need to be educated about the specific characteristics of other cultures and how those affect the process of language learning. This research will attempt to define some of the most influencing factors of being bilingual and multicultural.

2) The primary question of this activity is: how is the culture of Spanish speakers different from the typical, English-speaking, Anglo culture of the Midwest? The next question would be: how should these differences affect the way a SLP gives therapy?

3) These results will be combined with other research done about Spanish bilingualism to create a pamphlet that may be distributed to SLPs. The findings of this research will also be presented at the University of Northern Iowa.

B. RESEARCH PROCEDURES INVOLVED.

Provide a step-by-step description of all study procedures (e.g., where and how these procedures will take place, presentation of materials, description of activity required, topic of questionnaire or interview). Provide this information for each phase of the study (pilot, screening, intervention and follow-up). Attach questionnaires, interview questions/topic areas, scales, and/or examples of materials to be presented to participants.

I have created a questionnaire that will ask how the individual perceives certain characteristics of their culture. Using a questionnaire gives individuals the freedom to express their personal, unique observations. I will select certain individuals based upon their cultural background and how they were raised. I will be looking for people who were born and grew up in Spanish speaking cultures so that I will be able to review the perspectives of native speakers. I will send the questionnaire to them and ask them to return it by a certain date. This will allow the individual to take time to reflect on the questions and provide thoughtful, meaningful answers. I will not keep identifying information that would link the respondents to their answers by having them return the survey anonymously. I will then review the information and compile it into a useful summary of the main differences of Spanish-speaking cultures compared to Midwestern culture.

C. DECEPTION.

If any deception or withholding of complete information is required for this activity: a) explain why this is necessary and b) explain if, how, when, and by whom participants will be debriefed. Attach debriefing script.

There will be no deception because I want the individuals to know that I will be seriously using this information in an effort to better understand their culture.

D. PARTICIPANTS.

1. Approximately how many participants will you need to **complete** this study?

Number 8 Age Range(s) 20-50

2. What characteristics (inclusion criteria) must participants have to be in this study? (Answer for each participant group, if different.)

The participants must be bilingual in Spanish and English. They must have lived in a Spanish-speaking culture for at least 10 years. They also must have spent at least one year in the Midwest.

3. Describe how you will recruit your participants and who will be directly involved in the recruitment. Key personnel directly responsible for recruitment and collection of data must complete human participant protection training. Attach all recruiting advertisements, flyers, contact letters, telephone contact protocols, web site template, PSPM description, etc. that you will use to recruit participants. If you plan to contact them verbally, in person or over the telephone, you must provide a script of what will be said.

Note: Recruitment materials, whether written or oral, should include at least: a) purpose of the research; b) general description of what the research will entail; and c) your contact information if individuals are interested in participating in the research.

I am going to send letters or e-mails to the participants I am interested in working with.

4. How will you protect participants' privacy during recruitment? Note: This question does not pertain to the confidentiality of the data; rather it relates to protecting privacy in the recruitment process when recruitment may involve risks to potential participants. Individual and indirect methods of contacting potential participants assist in protecting privacy.

I will send individual e-mails or letters so that no one else is aware that a certain individual is being asked to participate.

5. Explain what steps you will take during the recruitment process to minimize potential undue influence, coercion, or the appearance of coercion. What is your relationship to the potential participants? If participants are employees, students, clients, or patients of the PI or any key personnel, please describe how undue influence or coercion will be mitigated.

Some of the participants may be professors I have had. I will minimize any appearance of coercion by sending a letter or e-mail that they will be free to choose to respond to or not. Also, I will explain that the information will be returned to me anonymously so they will not be linked to the answers they provide.

6. Will you give compensation or reimbursement to participants in the form of gifts, payments, services without charge, or course credit? If course credit is provided, please provide a listing of the research alternatives and the amount of credit given for participation and alternatives.

No Yes If yes, explain:

7. Where will the study procedures be carried out? If any procedures occur off-campus, who is involved in conducting that research? Attach copies of IRB approvals or letters of cooperation from non-UNI research sites if procedures will be carried out elsewhere. (Letters of cooperation are required from all schools where data collection will take place, including Price Lab School.)

On campus Off campus Both on- and off-campus

8. Do offsite research collaborators involved in participant recruitment or data collection have human participants protections training? Note: Individuals serving as a "conduit" for the researcher (i.e., reading a recruitment script developed by the researcher and not in a supervisory or evaluative role with participants) are not considered key personnel and human participants training is not required.

No Yes Don't know Not applicable

E. RISKS AND BENEFITS.

1. All research carries some social, economic, psychological, or physical risk. Describe the nature and degree of risk of possible injury, stress, discomfort, invasion of privacy, and other side effects from all study procedures, activities, and devices (standard and experimental), interviews and questionnaires. Include psychosocial, emotional and political risks as well as physical risks.

There is possibly a psychosocial or emotional risk as participants are being asked to evaluate their personal lives, upbringing and culture.

2. Explain what steps you will take to minimize risks of harm and to protect participants' confidentiality, rights and welfare. (If you will include protected groups of participants which include minors, fetuses in utero, prisoners, pregnant women, or cognitively impaired or economically or educationally disadvantaged participants, please identify the group(s) and answer this question for each group.)

In the letter asking participants to be involved, I clearly explained what will be on the questionnaire. They will be prepared for the questions that they see and have the option to not participate if they choose not to. My adviser and I will be the only ones with access to their answers and I will ensure that the names are not included in that information.

3. Study procedures often have the potential to lead to the unintended discovery of a participant's personal medical, psychological, and/or psycho-social conditions that could be considered to be a risk for that participant. Examples might include disease, genetic predispositions, suicidal behavior, substance use difficulties, interpersonal problems, legal problems or other private information. How will you handle such discoveries in a sensitive way if they occur?

I would compose a carefully worded letter that would be reviewed by my adviser stating that an issue had been found during the study. I would then advise them to seek help or counseling from the proper source.

4. Describe the anticipated benefits of this research for individual participants. If none, state "None."

They will be given the opportunity to reexamine their own culture and appreciate it for its differences and uniqueness.

5. Describe the anticipated benefits of this research for the field or society, and explain how the benefits outweigh the risks.

The field of speech-language pathology will greatly benefit from this because many speech-language pathologists today have expressed frustration at not understanding or being aware of the cultural characteristics of Spanish-speaking cultures. This information will help them understand Spanish-speakers, their families and values so that they can better provide therapy. Speech pathologists will be better prepared to work with the parents of their clients and understand how they might need to adapt therapy to meet the specific multicultural needs. The overall benefit of these results far outweighs the small possibility that talking about one's cultural background could cause emotional or psychosocial issues.

F. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH DATA.

1. Will you record any participant identifiers? (Direct personal identifiers include information such as name, address, telephone number, social security number, identification number, medical record number, license number, photographs, biometric information, etc. Indirect personal identifiers include information such as race, gender, age, zip code, IP address, major, etc.)

No Yes If yes, explain a) why recording identifiers is necessary and b) what methods you will use to maintain confidentiality of the data (e.g., separating the identifiers from the other data; assigning a code number to each participant to which only the research team has access; encrypting the data files; use of passwords and firewalls, and/or destroying tapes after transcription is complete and using pseudonyms.) Also explain, c) who will have access to the research data other than members of the research team, (e.g., sponsors, advisers, government agencies) and d) how long you intend to keep the data.

I will record indirect identifiers. The age of participants could have an effect on the way they perceive culture. How much time the participant spent in a Spanish-speaking culture and in the Midwest would also have an effect. Which Spanish speaking culture the individual is a member of would affect the type of cultural experience they had as not all Spanish-speaking cultures are the same.

I will assign a number and hide the names.

No one else will have access to the data besides my adviser and me.

I only intend to keep the information until my thesis project is complete in the spring of 2011.

2. After data collection is complete, will you retain a link between study code numbers and direct identifiers?

No Yes If yes, explain why this is necessary and for how long you will keep this link.

3. Do you anticipate using any data (information, interview data, etc.) from this study for other studies in the future?

No Yes If yes, explain and **include this information in the consent form.**

G. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

1. Will you access participants' medical, academic, or other personal records for screening purposes or data collection during this study? Note: A record means any information recorded in any

way, including handwritten, print, computer media, video or audio tape, film, photographs, microfilm, or microfiche that is directly related to a participant.

No Yes. If yes, specify types of records, what information you will take from the records and how you will use them. **Permission for such access must be included in the consent form.**

2. Will you make sound or video recordings or photographs of study participants?

No Yes. If yes, explain what type of recordings you will make, how long you will keep them, and if anyone other than the members of the research team will be able to see them. **A statement regarding the utilization of photographs or recordings must be included in the consent information.**

H. CONSENT FORMS/PROCESS (Check all that apply.)

Written Consent - Attach a copy of all consent and assent forms.

Oral Consent - Provide a) justification for not obtaining written consent, and b) a script for seeking oral consent and/or assent.

Elements of Consent Provided via Letter or Electronic Display – Provide a) justification for not obtaining written consent, and b) the text for the letter of consent or the electronic display.)

Waiver of Consent Provide a written justification of waiver of consent process. Note that waiver of consent is extremely rare and would only be granted if the consent process itself posed a greater risk to participants than did participation in the research.

Recruitment Letter:

Dear _____ :

I am currently working on my Honors thesis about the parallel experience of a bilingual child with a communication disorder and a college language immersion program. My research will allow me to compare these two experiences and will be beneficial to the field of speech-language pathology and others as it will instill a greater sense of empathy and understanding of what it is like to have a communication disorder in a foreign culture. To get accurate first-hand accounts of the experience of studying abroad while learning a language, I am conducting individual interviews with students who have studied abroad. I believe the personal reflections and anecdotes will be very valuable for making meaningful comparisons. Your responses will be recorded to ensure accurate reporting of your responses, but all identifying information will be changed.

If you feel you are qualified to describe your experience studying abroad while learning a new language and feel comfortable to participate, I would greatly appreciate your input. Participation involves scheduling a time at your convenience to meet with me for about an hour in a private study room in the library. If you are interested in assisting me in my research or have any questions, please e-mail me at kate.elahi@gmail.com .

Thank you,

Kate Elahi

Letter of Consent:

Honors Thesis – Spanish Culture Survey

Investigator: Kate Elahi

You are invited to participate in a research project for an Honors thesis that will be conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

This interview is being conducted as research to gain a better understanding of the emotions and experiences of learning another language while studying abroad. These experiences will then be compared to the experiences of a bilingual child with a communication disorder to see if there are any common characteristics.

The interview will last about an hour and will be recorded so your responses may be accurately reported. The recording will then be transcribed and your responses will be used in a final thesis paper to explain my findings and comparisons. You will be asked basic questions about difficulties you had learning the language, errors you might have made, and how you progressed in the language. You will also be asked about different experiences and interactions you had with native people of the country you were in. This interview will take place at College Hill Lutheran Church (2322 Olive Street).

Risks to participation are minimal. Discomfort is possible if you do not feel comfortable talking about your experiences studying abroad or while describing an uncomfortable situation.

There are no direct personal benefits to participating in this research, but there may be benefits to general knowledge or to society.

Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. In the written report, names and specific identifying information will be changed to keep it anonymous. The information could possibly be presented at a research day in the capitol, another scholarly conference, and it will be presented on the Honors Research Day in April.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized.

If you have any questions about the study you may contact Kate Elahi at 402-312-1043 or kate.elahi@gmail.com or the project investigator's faculty advisor, Dr. Ken Bleile, at the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2577. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, Anita Gordon, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about the rights of research participants and the participant review process.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

(Signature of advisor)

(Date)

Appendix B

College Student Interview

Today I am going to ask you some questions about your experience studying abroad. For some responses, I will ask you to use a rating scale from 1-5, with 1 being the worst, and 5 being the best.

- 1) Where did you study abroad?
- 2) For how long?
- 3) What language (L2) were you learning?
- 4) Had you taken many classes of that language before you left? How confident did you feel speaking the language, 1 being very insecure and 5 being completely confident? Reading or writing?
- 5) What was your living situation?

Characteristics of language skills

- 6) Did you enjoy the classes in the country you were studying in, scale of 1 to 5?
- 7) Do you feel like you learned a lot from your classes, scale of 1 to 5?
- 8) What were common language errors you noticed yourself making?/What did you struggle with the most?
 - a. Any specific parts of grammar? (Verb conjugation, plural, nouns, prepositions, direct objects)
 - b. Vocabulary?
- 9) Did you ever find yourself code switching? (Substituting an English word or phrase in the middle of a sentence in the L2?)
 - a. If so, did you notice a change in the amount of code switching from the beginning to the end of your time there?
- 10) Was it ever difficult to comprehend and understand what native speakers were saying to you, scale of 1 (always) to 5 (never had any problems)?
 - a. In what situations was it most difficult?
 - b. In what situations was it easiest?
- 11) This is a list of some defining characteristics of a person who has a communication disorder (present list). Do you feel like you showed some of these same characteristics during your time studying abroad?

Form

Inability to discriminate tones, phonemes, and morphemes
 Inability to produce phonemes /s/, /l/, /r/ and /r/

Substitutes, omits, or distorts sounds
 Reverses the order of sounds in words
 Uses incorrect word order
 Substitutes schwa for articles, pronouns, and other grammatical structures

Content

Comprehension of who, what, when, and why questions
 Word retrieval difficulties
 Inability to associate sounds with objects or experiences
 Inappropriate verbal labels for common objects, actions, and persons
 Poor vocabulary

Use

Poor conversational skills
 Poor topic maintenance
 Poor turn-taking
 Perseverates on a topic
 Comments inappropriately
 Difficulty with retelling stories
 Difficulty with narrating personal experiences
 Difficulty with classifying events with verbal labels
 Friendships may be limited to low achievers
 Limited group interactions with classmates
 Uses gestures

Behaviors

Short attention span, Distractibility
 Daydreams, Demands immediate gratification
 Disorganized, Unable to stay on task
 Appears confused

Tone= the sound Phoneme= individual letter/sound

Morpheme=smallest unit that can change meaning (e.g., plural, verb endings, masculine/feminine agreement) Schwa= “uuuhh” sound Perseverate= to continue on the same topic

12) Can you describe some examples of these?

Emotions in social interactions

- 13) If you lived with a host family, did you have many daily interactions with your family?
- a. How often would you talk with them, scale of 1 (never) to 5 (many times, everyday)?
 - b. For about how long each time?
 - c. How did you feel during these conversations? (Comfortable, stressed, embarrassed, etc.)
 - d. How did the quality/amount of these interactions change from the beginning to the end of your time there?
- 14) Were there ever any serious miscommunications between you and your host family or teachers?
- 15) What kind of feelings did you experience when interacting with people in public (stores, movie theater, etc.)?
- a. Did you ever try to avoid these situations?
- 16) Were there any specific cultural differences that were difficult to adapt to in conversation? (time, eye contact, gestures, greeting)
- 17) What kind of strategies did you use to make up for a lack of understanding or communication ability? (Gestures, pretend you understand, cues from facial expressions/tone of voice, asking a friend who shares your L1, using context, guessing, etc.)
- 18) What do you think best helped to improve your language skills? (conversation partner, classes, family, etc.)
- 19) Are there any things that other people could have done to make you feel more comfortable speaking?

Appendix C

Conchita Interview- Transcription

Yo: Ok so today I am going to ask you some questions about your experience studying abroad and for some responses I'm going to ask you to use a rating scale of 1 to 5 with one being the worst and 5 being the best. I can explain that more later, but first of all, where did you study abroad?

C: In Oviedo, Spain

Y: And for how long were you there?

C: 5 months

Y: What language were you learning?

C: Spanish

Y: Had you taken many classes of that language before you left and kind of like how confident did you feel?

C: Um, I had taken three years in high school and um then taken a year off, took three classes in college and felt-

Y: On a scale of 1-5, one insecure and 5 very confident

C: Probably a 2, not very confident at all.

Y: And is that more of your speaking abilities? Or reading, writing? Kind of the same?

C: I guess more speaking. Also writing, but like reading I was ok, I guess that would be more of a 3 or a 4. But speaking and writing was a challenge, putting the words together.

Y: What was your living situation while you were there?

C: I lived with one older woman in an apartment within the city, like a half hour walking distance from campus and it was just the two of us.

Y: That's nice. Did you enjoy the classes you were taking in Spain on a scale of 1-5, 1 you hated them or 5 you absolutely loved them?

C: I'd say like a 4. Yeah, I think we learned more outside of the classroom, but the classes were still valuable.

Y: Were there some classes you liked more than others?

C: Yeah.

Y: Which ones did you not like or like?

C: I really enjoyed phonetics because I can speak a whole lot better and even if I don't know what I'm saying I can say it right. Hispanoamericana, or Hispanic America, that was a very difficult class because I couldn't understand the professor so that was a challenge and her content was fairly dry at times, but some of it was interesting. Just difficult to understand.

Y: What do you think made it difficult to understand?

C: I think she had a different accent than my other professors. Like I don't think she was from Spain so all of them had more the Spain accent and she had, I'm not sure, more like Cuban or something.

Y: Just something different?

C: Something different that when she spoke, I didn't know what she was saying, even though she was speaking in the same language.

Y: Interesting. Do you feel like you learned a lot from your classes on a scale of 1-5?

C: Um, I would say a 3. I learned a lot in the classes, but not so much that- that's not all I learned. Like I learned a whole lot outside of the classroom and some of it was very basic, but I'd say I learned the most in phonetics, which was a huge help to me because I didn't know how to say the words right, and now I do.

Y: What were the common language errors you noticed yourself making or what did you struggle with the most?

C: Well, the things we don't have in English, like feminine and masculine is difficult to keep up with those. Especially when you're talking about "it," which for us is neutral, but there you have to know what "it" is when you're talking about it. So like if I'm talking about, "oh, it's really dark outside!" I have to know if I'm talking about the weather or the sky and if that's masculine or feminine too. Use that "it," that was difficult. And conjugation of the subjunctive is very difficult and when to use it. I'd say I got alright, I was fairly good at the other past, present, and future. But the unique ones and the exceptions to the rules were difficult. But I think it was mostly just things we don't have in English like masculine and feminine subjunctive, we don't have that either. So you have to train yourself to think, so that was really difficult.

Y: That's a really good point. What about vocabulary? Or was it mostly just grammar problems?

C: Um, yeah it was mostly grammar. But I guess remembering words and not hearing one word- say you know this word already, but you don't know another word, so you think you heard this word, but they were actually saying something else, a word that you just don't know. And that could be really bad if you think it's some innocent word and it's actually very offensive, or you accidentally say a word wrong and it's offensive and you don't even know it.

Y: Did you ever find yourself codeswitching? Which is substituting an English word or phrase in the middle of a sentence in Spanish.

C: Like in English or in Spanish?

Y: I guess I was thinking more while you were speaking Spanish, would you throw in English words sometimes or just switch back and forth?

C: When I was speaking to other English speakers I would throw English words in, but with my host mom, that's not going to help.

Y: Never even tried?

C: I might have on occasion said "Oh in English it's this word!" And then I start describing it, but usually with solely Spanish speakers, I would just start describing the word, because I knew it wasn't really going to help. So only with English speakers did I actually do that.

Y: I guess this next question, I don't know if it's really relevant then, so did you notice a change in the amount of codeswitching from the beginning to the end of your time there?

C: Well I guess I did it a lot with the English speakers, like the other study abroad students, but I would say we did it less at the end. But not as much as we should have, like we should have been speaking only in Spanish and in the end we still were speaking some English. But I would say there was a big difference because we knew a lot more and we were more comfortable with using it with each other even though we both already knew English.

Y: Was it ever difficult to comprehend or understand what native speakers were saying to you? On a scale of 1, always difficult, to 5, you never had any problems.

C: I would say 3. Kind of in the middle because it just depended on how fast they were speaking. If they were talking about a subject I'm familiar with or not, or if they change subjects quickly and I didn't pick up on that subject change. Then I would understand less, but if they were talking about something I was familiar with or I was used to their accent, then it was much easier and I could understand what they were saying.

Y: So in what situations was it most difficult to understand? And in what situations was it easiest?

C: I would say the most difficult was accents just because they said the words differently than I was used to. Or maybe running into someone on the street and they ask you a random question, because you have no context of what that question could be. So you don't know are they going to ask you about the weather? Are they going to ask you about directions? Are they going to ask you about some totally unrelated topic? So I think meeting up with people randomly, or just people approaching you on the street, that was the most difficult. And probably the easiest was with most of the professors because you were with them every day. You knew what the class was about so you knew what to expect to hear, and you got used to the way they spoke. With my host mom, I guess it was usually easy because we had a routine, so I was able to understand her, but it was just the getting caught off guard was the most difficult times.

Y: That makes sense. This is a list of some defining characteristics of a person who has a communication disorder. And do you feel like you showed some of these same characteristics during your time studying abroad? And if you have any specific examples of them, feel free- take your time, there's a lot there.

C: Well to start, I would say incorrect word order was definitely a problem because I was used to English and so I would try to use English word order in Spanish, which most of the time isn't accurate. So I would do that a lot. I can't roll my "r's." So that's a big one. I say words wrong because I can't do that.

I think some questions with content were more difficult because they're asked differently. Whereas we have the word "do" in English, they don't. So understanding when they're asking what is more difficult.

Word retrieval was a problem because I had a limited vocabulary and limited experience with the words so they weren't as easy to retrieve as words I've been saying my whole life.

Well, poor vocabulary, yes. Especially at the beginning, I didn't know a lot of words, so you sound younger than you are because of your limited vocabulary and might use the wrong words.

Inappropriate verbal labels, how would you explain that one?

Y: I guess verbal as far as what you call them or what you say, like saying something is wrong...

C: Um, I guess that would happen with just a translation, like for us, the word "jeans" maybe. For them, it also means "cowboy." Like the word for "jeans," so you might think you're using the wrong word. I guess that would go more so as an example for English. Like they use a word thinking it means one thing...I don't know, I guess-

Y: It could be the other way.

C: But yeah, we have different words for the same object. Like if I'm going to look up the word, let's say I look up the word for "boot." And in the definition, in the Spanish-English dictionary it tells me that it's "bota" or something. But to them, a boot isn't a shoe you wear on your foot. It means something else. And so even though I looked up the word, and that's the Spanish word for the English word "boot," it could have a different context to them.

Y: I feel like too for a lot of their verbs, some of their verbs have different connotations that sometimes you know, as far as getting angry. "Don't say that word! That's a South American word!"

C: Yeah, and like curse words are used a lot more prevalently there. So it's difficult to know, like rate someone's mood or reaction based on just words. Because they have different labels than ours do.

I would say I had a lot of these. Poor conversational skills, especially in the beginning, I didn't have much to say because of my limited vocabulary, so I talked about basic, small talk things.

Poor topic maintenance, yeah it's difficult to go on about a topic when you don't know a lot of words. And it's difficult to read people and their interest in something when like you're just hearing the words, you're not hearing the inflection and not the emotion in it. Would poor turn taking be like cutting people off?

Y: I'd say so. Or kind of just with the back and forth and everything.

C: Well I do that in English too. I don't really know when it's my turn to speak sometimes and I cut people off, so I would say that was also a problem in Spanish, where it was worse there because in English you can usually, well in a native language, you can hear someone pausing, like go ahead and

speak. In Spanish when you're focusing so much on the words that you're not hearing those cues as much, so you don't know when to speak, so that you might just blurt something out while someone else is going to continue talking. I would say I do that.

Y: You can't anticipate things as well?

C: Yeah.

I didn't comment appropriately sometimes. I remember a bunch of occasions of that happening. Like sitting at dinner with a table of Europeans, everyone's speaking Spanish, they've already been there for a semester. I just got there. And they were talking about a car, but I think they're talking about a movie. So I go to comment on the movie, and they're all looking at me like, "What are you talking about?" Situations like that happened to me where I got a gist of what they were talking about so I assumed, "Ok, I can interject now!" And when I did, I knew immediately, ok, that was not appropriate at all.

I don't think I had as much difficulty with retelling stories because it might not come out the same I guess, but I would think about it in Spanish and English, because that's just a thought process in my head. So I could form the story in my head in English and then I would just switch it to Spanish, so I don't think that was as difficult, but still difficult.

Um, friendships limited to low achievers... With that Spanish, yes! Not with the Americans because we were all on the same level. But, some Spaniards didn't want to deal with you because you were a lot of work for them. Going out with a group of Spaniards, they are patient to an extent, but after a while, they're going to go back to their normal speed and normal conversations. Like at first they might slow down and make sure I understand everything they're saying, but they're not going to do that all night or all the time we're hanging out. So for a little then they switch, like Ok, we can't take care of you anymore. We're going to go back to our conversation. If you can keep up, good for you, if not, sorry.

My gestures were probably very off in Spanish. But they use their hands so much, that maybe I didn't use them enough. And they're off, like they use gestures we don't use, like touching their face. We don't really do that, but they've always got the, I don't know, touching their face. Or eye.

Y: Ojo!

C: Yeah. Which we don't do, so maybe I didn't use them correctly.

I was very easily distracted, especially in my Hispanic America class, because I didn't know what was going on. So I would start writing something, and then suddenly I missed, like a whole section. Like wait, what did she just say? I don't know!

Daydreaming a little bit with that. Like, Oh what am I doing later? Um, that kind of stuff.

I think it was more difficult to stay on task, because you have to focus, like even watching Spanish television. I loved watching Spanish television, but it hurt, like afterwards. Like my brain hurt from thinking so much while watching TV. So if one thing was uninteresting, or something got me distracted, I wouldn't be able to keep up with the program I was watching or the movie I was watching. It was very easy to get lost if you missed one little part, then suddenly something else is going on. Like, Well this isn't interesting anymore!

I probably appeared confused to my host mom every day because she never seemed to know what I was saying, and she'd ask me something, and that would be one of those, "commenting inappropriately." I'd say something back, and she'd like "I asked you what you wanted for dinner! You just told me you'd take out the trash! That's not the same thing." So I think I probably seemed confused a lot, and that would, it lowers your intelligence level to those people.

Y: At least how it appears.

C: Yeah. So I would say a lot of these applied to me!

Y: Yeah, definitely. So when you were living with your host mother, did you have a lot of daily interactions with her? Or how often do you think you talked to her on a scale 1, never, to 5, like many times every day.

C: Um, probably only a 2. We did not talk very often. It was more, she was my cook and my cleaning lady and when I would try to interact with her more, she would encourage me to go out and spend time with my friends. Um, we were on different schedules, so a lot of times I would eat by myself. It was a lot of routine, maintenance conversations. Like once and a while we'd sit together for lunch and talk about things, but then something interesting would come on television, because she always wanted to watch TV while we ate. And she'd focus on that and we'd be done. So I would say we didn't talk that often- as often- we should have spoke a whole lot more.

Y: So about how long do you think you would talk each time you would talk?

C: Um, I think it depended. Like during lunch, if we had a good conversation going, it might go for a half hour or so. Or at night once in a while we'd have tea together and we would talk for awhile. But day-to-day life, it was probably a 5 minute conversation. Like "How are you doing? How was your day at school? Did you learn anything new?" So 5-10 minutes I guess. "Oh ok, that's good. I'm going to go take a nap!" So, I would say daily, like 5-10 minutes, maybe 2-3 times a week, 20 minutes to a half hour.

Y: And how did you feel during those conversations? Like were you just comfortable, or kind of stressed or just awkward?

C: It was definitely awkward being that I come from a big family, and I'm living with one woman, who is in her 50's or 60's. We didn't have a whole lot in common and she didn't have anyone else around for us to be interacting with. Um, but I think it was awkward because of our lack of topics and it was difficult to keep a conversation going when you're like, "Oh how was your day?" "Good, how was yours?" "Good." I think it would have been a lot easier if we had more to talk about. Also she has had 13 exchange students, so this is like run-of-the-mill for her, whereas in the beginning, she was probably much more eager to get the students to talk. And with me, I didn't talk a whole lot, and she would just, Ok, she doesn't want to talk. Like she wouldn't push me to talk. And I think that's important that an exchange person, like a host family, does is push the student, because if not, they're not going to learn as much. So I think it was awkward at times, it was forced at times. Like, Ok we're living together, I guess we should talk! Very rarely was it just a natural conversation. Sometimes, we'd be sitting at lunch and something on television would capture both of us and we would talk about that, but most of the time it was more forced conversation.

Y: So do you think that was because of the language barrier? Or just the situation?

C: Um, I think it's partially environmental reasons. Like just our situation was different. I was out of my element there. But I think a big part of it was the language, because I'm a person that can talk a lot all the time to anyone. I can talk to strangers, anyone. So I think I would've found more things for us to talk about, had I understood the language better. Yeah.

Y: It's interesting to think, I don't know if it's cultural or if it is language. Like what if you did both speak the same language fluently. Would it be different or...?

C: Well, I mean like some of the other students got really close to their host parents, but at the same time, I think those are people that were more advanced in Spanish. Like, for example Liz and Aubrey, both speak Spanish proficiently and loved their host moms. Like maybe Liz not while we were there, but afterwards. And so for them, it's hard to tell, because they didn't have as much of that barrier for their language, and they did get closer to their host moms. So it could be all, probably both, but I would say language is a big part of it, because if you don't have anything to talk about, what do you do? Like, I don't know, that's an interesting, yeah. But it's both, it's really both. Like the culture is totally different than what you're used to, so that's part of it. But I think that after time, that would subside. Like you get used to it and that becomes your norm, so it must be language that's really holding you back.

Y: I was going to also ask, do you think the quality or amount of these interactions changed from the beginning to the end? Of your semester.

C: Not a whole lot. I think they would have if both of us put more effort into it, but because that was established from the beginning that, "Ok, you're kind of just where I live, that you're the lady that cooks for me." Um, and she kind of looked at it as, "You're company in my house, so now I'm alone, and you're a paycheck". Like I know that wasn't a big part of it, but I think to her it was more she hates being alone. So she looked at me as someone to keep her company so she's not in her house alone, and to me she was the lady I was staying with that cooked for me and did my laundry. I think if from the beginning we would have talked more, or tried to talk more by the end we would have been talking all the time and having regular conversations. And I know that's how it was for some other students. I think my situation was somewhat unique in that we were not compatible. So that was more difficult.

Y: Were there ever any serious/embarrassing miscommunications between you and your host family or professors?

C: Um, I'm sure. I just need to think of an example of one. I had a situation where I was explaining to my host mom-I can't remember the details of it, but we were talking about something on the news and then I brought up the fact that my best friend back in Pennsylvania had been in a car accident and- there had been a car accident on the TV or something- and the miscommunication was that my best friend died. So my host mom freaked out and was trying to console me and eventually, I realized it, like, she's not understanding why I'm not devastated by it. Because I was really upset about the accident, but she was thinking, "What's wrong with this girl? Why is she not hysterical that her best friend died?" Finally, I realized, "No, No! She's not- she's alive! She's in the hospital!" So I guess that would be one example, but there were many times where just one word, or one sentence wrong, or missed, will change a whole

meaning of what you're talking about, and it's gets really embarrassing. I can't think of any other, I have funny ones I know. I just can't think of them.

Y: We can come back to it to. What kind of feelings did you experience when interacting with people in public? Like stores, or the movie theaters or anything.

C: I think sometimes it was scarier because these people don't realize-like some did- but most don't realize you're an exchange student and Spanish isn't your first language. This isn't a big city like Madrid or Barcelona where they encounter tourists every day. This is a place where this is their daily life, everyone speaks Spanish. So I think it was intimidating knowing, Ok these people are going to be stunned that we don't understand them. And some knew that we were Americans, but I think it was intimidating, but at the same time it was fun to get to play that role for a little while of not being the exchange student that everyone else knows you as. And if you could trick them, that was really good! If you spoke to them in Spanish and without hesitating they responded in Spanish, you did a good job with the language. But what would most of the time happen is either you said something wrong, or most of the time they could just tell by how slow you're speaking or whatever that you were not a native Spanish speaker. And so then they would either switch to English if they knew English, or they would slow down or get stressed out and go find an English speaker to come talk to you. So I guess a lot of times it was intimidating, sometimes it was fun to interact with new people, but I don't know, it was a lot scarier at the beginning then it was at the end. Like by the end I was approaching store employees, whereas in the beginning they'd approach me and I was like, "Let me hide behind this! I don't want to deal with answering your questions!"

Y: That's what I was kind of going to ask next, did you ever try to avoid these situations?

C: Yeah. In the beginning they would ask "How are you?" "Oh, good." And then you'd just like walk away. Or you'd see them walking towards you and you'd avoid them. But by the end, if I needed a different size of a shirt, I'd go ask. If I needed to know where the candy shop was, I'd ask someone on the street. But in the beginning, I definitely avoided those interactions. But I think as time went on, I became more comfortable and didn't have a problem doing that.

Y: Were there any specific cultural differences that were difficult to adapt to in conversation? Like some of my examples I thought of were eye contact, gestures, greeting, or time.

C: I think at first the besos, the kisses, that was different because in America we like our personal space and we shake hands. There," Alright, I'm going to give you a kiss on the cheek even though I've never met you before!" So at first that was intimidating and they use their hands a lot more. So at first it seems almost like almost they're angry because they're using their hands so much or gestures. But you get used to that. I liked some of the differences, and honestly I thought the kisses have more of a like kindness to them, like a caring, rather than like, "oh, hi" and shake hands, or don't even shake hands. In Spain everyone introduces one another. Like when I had a German person here, he got very offended when I would not introduce him to all of my friends. Even if there were like seven people sitting at a table, he wanted to be introduced to all of them because that was proper. So I think that was a big difference. The ones I liked though would be like for us in America, we say "Hey!" when we run into someone. There they say "See you later!" So that was cute because it's like you're ensuring you're going to see that person again or like, I don't know. It's because you don't have time to stop in the middle of the street and

have a conversation with someone. And with us, sometimes it's "Hi" sometimes it's "Hi! How are you?" And then that's it. Where with them it's like, "I'll see you later! So we'll have a conversation later!" And so that was different and took time getting used to. Saying "pardon me" rather than "sorry" when you bump into someone. They were all adjustments that, I didn't really have a problem with any of them, it was just adjusting and getting used to them.

Y: What kind of strategies did you use to make up for a lack of understanding or communication ability? Like pretending you understand or getting cues from expressions or tone or using context, guessing.

C: I did some guessing. A lot of times I'd say "ok, ok" and then they'd ask a question, like "I wasn't actually listening! I was just nodding politely!" Yeah, I did that a lot. Where like I would try- and sometimes at the beginning the way I would try to rectify it would be asking questions or just listening really intently, but if I asked like three questions and the conversation was still going on, I would usually just say "Oh, yeah, yeah! Uh-huh!" But then a question would be asked, "Well, I really didn't understand what you were saying." Like professors might ask, "Does everyone understand what I just said?" And I can't think of a question for the content, so I'm like "Yep! I understood!" And then I turn to the person next to me, "What did they just say? Can someone help me here?" Yeah, so I guess a lot of asking questions at first, pretending, and then like getting a third party to help. So like someone more experienced in Spanish. "Hey! You know what they said! What did they say?"

Y: That's funny. What do you think best helped to improve your language skills?

C: Immersion, being forced into it, hanging out with Spaniards that weren't just there one-on-one with me. Like if I was with my conversation partner, and they just wanted to speak in English and Spanish. But if you were with them, in a group of friends, they're feeling natural they're going to speak in Spanish to each other. And you want to be a part of the conversation, so you jump in. That's what I did. I would just listen, I would try really hard to pick up on things. Reading helped. Reading Spanish stories, watching- I guess actually the biggest thing for me was watching American shows in Spanish. I did it almost every day and it was shows I was already familiar with, so I knew the storyline and then I was just watching it in Spanish. So I understood what was going on, so it made it easier to absorb those words. Yeah, reading, watching TV, and just immersion. Talking with the Americans, all of us speaking in English, I think that kind of had the opposite effect, and that would pull us backward, whereas just listening was good. Like television is normally not a good thing all the time, but for me it was exhausting because it was teaching me so much.

Y: So did you kind of feel more comfortable- I don't know, just the whole- it sounds like the feelings could be maybe scary going into a whole group of Spaniards and they're going to speak...

C: It was scary, but I think like, at least for me, I was hanging out with a group that I had like one person, close person, like with my conversation partner, he invited me to go out with his friends. So him and I already had a bond, so he made sure that like, he was still having his conversation, but I wouldn't get left behind, I was included, so that made it a lot easier. They were all really willing to let me just sit there and listen to them and they were nice, so they weren't just looking at me like, "Why are you just staring at me? Why are you not speaking?" They understood, I'm an American, I don't speak Spanish very well, so they were good about it. Hanging out with the people at La Lila, all the exchange students from around Europe, they are all in the same situation and they all speak different languages, so the common language

was Spanish. And all of us struggled with it so I think that helped a lot because we were all comfortable being uncomfortable with Spanish. So I think going into a normal group of Spaniards is not-is very intimidating, not really helpful, but if they somewhat understand your circumstance or you have someone there who is inviting you to this group, I guess then it's easier. It's very situational.

Y: Yeah definitely. Are there any things that people could have done to make you feel more comfortable when speaking?

C: I think maybe asking me questions or elaborating, not just saying something assuming I understand and continuing. I mean, I liked that they weren't constantly stopping for me, but I think that would be helpful. Like, "Ok Kayla, we're talking about this!" or "Do you have an opinion on that?" or "Do you know what we're saying?" I think that would have been helpful. Or I guess talking to each person in the group one-on-one. But I think for the most part they were pretty accommodating. They would check in with me. If they were really wanting to be accommodating, it'd be nice to have them speaking slower, using lighter vocabulary, but they're not going to do that with their friends, so I guess like, it was a really good way to learn, but a way for comprehension would be more one-on-one. Like groups, you're just absorbing and with an individual you can say "What is this word? How do you say this?" Like you can stop them and say, "Hey, what does that mean?" And in a group you can't really do that.

Y: Did you have any other miscommunication or language stories you wanted to tell? If not, that's fine.

C: Um, miscommunications in Spain...

Y: I guess as far as maybe trying to buy something, like a ticket or do an assignment or...

C: Yeah. I know conveying to the train people what you were trying to get was difficult. I never had any experiences where I actually got to the train station with the wrong ticket. I guess telling- trying to tell them, these are the dates- numbers are difficult. And understanding what they're telling you in regard to return policies and exchange policies. Was it-? I think this was when I was in Germany, not when I was in Spain, but we were on a train going to- I think we were going to Belgium, and the ticket taker didn't speak English, he spoke French. Maybe some other languages, but he was speaking to us in French. And he said all this stuff to us, and we're like "Um, ok?" And we got off the train- the train stopped so we were like, "Ok, he told us we're here! We're in Belgium, we're good!" So we get off the train and it leaves back the way it came, so we're like "Ok, this is the last stop, we're where we need to be, we're in Brussels." Well, luckily we had someone who spoke English on the train, there weren't many of us on the train. So everyone's going to the stairs and we went down the stairs to the exit, not really knowing what we were doing and this guy said to us "Do you understand where you need to go?" And we're like, "Yeah! We're going to go find our hotel!" Or something like that. And he's like, "Oh, ok, but if you were on the train to Brussels, you need to switch to the train- or to the four or something." And we're like, "Oh my gosh! Ok!" And he said, "Yeah, we're in Luxembourg right now." We're like, "Oh my gosh!" So what the guy had been telling us was "This train is broken down, we have to go take it into the shop, we're going to have to put you on another train that will take you to Brussels." So we wouldn't have understood that and we probably would have been walking around Luxemburg and missed our train to Brussels, having no idea how to get there if we hadn't lucked out and found an English speaker telling us what to do.

Y: That would have been bad.

C: I had times like that traveling on the trains.

Y: They're kind of inevitable traveling on trains in foreign countries.

C: And I guess miscommunication as to directions was a big thing too. Um, trying to go to a dance show, which the newspaper says is a show. So we don't really know what it is, and we don't really know where it is, so we go and we couldn't find it, so we ask a bunch of people. No one's giving us directions we understand, and we luck out and find an old dude that took us. And so we get there and realize it's like a high school recital, which is actually awesome, but not what we were expecting. And then that was a whole slew of miscommunications: miscommunicating what the event was, where it was. And it was probably very obvious to a Spanish speaker, or a local I guess. But to us, we thought we knew what we were doing and we misunderstood. SO I think that happened a lot. But nothing ever so bad that I was lost, or SOL or I don't know. I made it back alive!

Y: I guess my last question, in order to keep this anonymous, I was going to use Spanish names, or a Spanish name for you. SO do you have a preference for a Spanish name? Concha? Conchita?

C: Conchita! Sure! Use that.

Y: Ok, sounds good. Well muchas gracias!

Gomez Interview-Transcription

Yo: Ok, so. Where did you study abroad?

Gomez: In Oviedo, Spain.

Y: And for how long for how long were you in Oviedo, Spain?

G: For one spring semester.

Y: And what language were you learning while you were there?

G: Spanish.

Y: Had you taken many classes in Spanish before you left?

G: Yeah I would say so. About four years in high school and I think three at the college level.

Y: So on a scale of 1-5, like 1 being very insecure and 5 being very confident, how confident did you feel in your abilities?

G: How about a 3.

Y: And is that more speaking or reading and writing too?

G: Definitely more, I felt my strengths were more in the reading and less so in the speaking and comprehension of oral speech.

Y: What was your living situation while you were there?

G: I lived with a host family, mother, father, and their dog.

Y: Did you enjoy the classes in Spain that you were studying on a scale of 1-5? Being 1, you hated them or 5, you absolutely loved going to them.

G: Um, I would say pretty close to 5. I'd say as close as you can get to loving your classes. Yeah, a 5.

Y: And were there some classes that you liked and some that you didn't like? Which ones?

G: I'd say more my favorites were translation, and art was pretty interesting, and then literature- well yeah they were all really good. I guess four were in the good category. The one that was in the not as good was maybe Hispanoamerica. Yeah, I'd say that one is in a category of its own. A little less, not as good.

Y: Do you feel like you learned a lot from your classes on a scale of 1-5?

G: Hmm, um yeah I'd probably say- how about a 4 on that one.

Y: Sounds good. What were some of the common language errors that you noticed yourself making or what did you struggle with the most?

G: I'd say for me, just in general, fluency was probably- I mean probably the biggest issue. My experiences earlier on stressed more of the grammatical aspect of language and not so much- you know, we just kind of speak and it's ok to fumble your words, but you just kind of try and communicate and get your message across. And so because I don't think that was focused as much, that was where my weakness was and so I felt pretty uncomfortable, just saying something. But if a classmate asked me, "Is this how you say it?" I'd be able to point out, "Well, no, you need to use the subjunctive here." Or "you need to do yadda-yadda."

Y: So you felt pretty good about your grammar skills?

G: Yeah, pretty good for the most part.

Y: What about vocabulary? Or was it mostly just getting it out?

G: Yeah, vocabulary is the other issue that I, in my mind, tie in with it because I haven't mastered the art of circumlocution yet. So sometimes I feel like, if I don't know the word exactly, then I'm not able to skirt around it and describe it in another way. So yeah, vocabulary is another area where I definitely want to improve.

Y: Did you ever find yourself code switching? Or just throwing English words or phrases into the middle of Spanish conversations?

G: Yeah, definitely. Probably at those circumstances when I didn't know the word in Spanish, I would just use the English equivalent. And only with native English speakers or people that spoke English because I knew doing that with a native Spanish speaker isn't going to help me.

Y: Did you notice a change in the amount of code switching from the beginning of the semester towards the end?

G: You know, not that I can say I recall distinctly. Unfortunately, so you would think that it'd be less, but I can't say that as a matter of fact.

Y: Ok. Was it ever difficult to understand or comprehend what native speakers were saying to you?

G: Yeah it was unfortunately. I think-

Y: Oh, on a scale of 1-5. 1 being always difficult and 5 being never had any problems.

G: See, for that it depends on which context in which we're talking to. I mean, because I've had several years of academic Spanish that I can understand the teacher talk. And the professors knew who they were speaking to and perhaps they changed the way they spoke to make it more understandable for second language learners. And so for them I'd say it was almost 100% of the time comprehension, whereas if you're on the street, or with the friends you've made, the Spaniards you've come to know, there the

speech was natural, as if it was another Spaniard they were speaking with. So, those moments it was more difficult to understand and I'd have to ask for repetition or clarification fairly often.

Y: Pretty much like my next question, in what situations was it most difficult and it what was it easiest?

G: Sorry I guess I know too much about languages, saw that one coming.

Y: It's all good. But yeah, so mostly in the school situation was where it was easier and then out with native people was more difficult?

G: Yeah. Sometimes, I don't know if it's psychological, or with my ears in general, but I feel that I need to hear the language at a certain level. You know, like if I can't- if the volume's not loud on my computer, it's not like- I'd have no clue what they're saying. But then if I can turn it on or put my headphones on, then it becomes more comprehensible to me.

Y: So just the clarity I guess? The professors would make more effort?

G: Yeah.

Y: Um, this is a list of defining characteristics of a person with a communication disorder. Do you feel like you showed some of these same characteristics during your time there? And if you can think of any examples, feel free to share them. And take your time, because there is a long list.

G: So, when I'm reading these, do I have the inability to produce these phonemes?

Y: Yeah, while you were studying abroad, do you feel like when you were trying to speak Spanish, sometimes you couldn't produce certain phonemes? Or other characteristics.

G: Feeling pretty good on the phonemes, especially the /rr/, the double r in Spanish. Well, not very good. Good enough. Good enough. I'd probably have somewhat a distortion of sounds. It wasn't until I got back that I realized I made incorrect diphthong pronunciation of the "-ue."

I do use incorrect word order I'm sure. Probably more from grammatical aspect, not knowing what the correct grammatical structure of a sentence was.

I would say, yeah for "Use," topic maintenance was at times difficult. The same thing with the perseverance on a topic. And one thing, just for the heck of it, one thing we've talked about here in a class of mine is intonation is a prominence in English language, and I was thinking how we've- I've never been explicitly taught these things in Spanish. And so it just makes me wonder if I come off as rude. Like, I've never, you know, thought about how my intonation sounds to native speakers. So that would have been an interesting thing to learn about either in class or something I can hopefully I can teach myself. So, I wonder how that has added to difficulty to judgement or difficulty in being understood, what I was really trying to get across. I think usually with me, I can just be quiet and nod my head, and so people think I'm- "Oh, you're just a nice guy!" You know he just agrees, he's very agreeable.

Let's see what else here. Yep, there's some difficulty in retelling stories or narrating personal experiences, unfortunately. And I'd say the behaviors don't seem to match my experience so much, but other ones I mentioned, I guess. Perhaps I appeared confused. I don't know.

Y: So do you think that poor topic maintenance or perseverating on a topic or difficulty with retelling stories, what do you think made it difficult? So like, the situations, or the conjugating or the vocabulary? Fluency, again?

G: I'd say- yeah, yeah, mostly with probably the vocabulary. I think that- I feel I know the principles of conjugation and then there's not too many irregulars, so most of the standard ones I know. SO yeah, it'd just be vocabulary and somewhat of my effective filter probably raised a little bit. You know, I didn't want to- didn't want to make a mistake, didn't want to look unknowledgeable or incompetent, especially with a native speaker. And so, those factors limited my use of the language.

Y: So since you were living with a host family, did you have many daily interactions with them or how often would you talk to them? On a scale of 1, being never, to 5, many times, every day.

G: My experience was about a 2 on that scale. We didn't talk that much. My madre would- the most we would talk was when it was meal time, when she was bringing the meal to my table, I ate alone. And so she would talk to me for a couple minutes while she was preparing it, and then she would leave the room and I would just eat the meal on my own. And, but yeah, I'd say maybe just once or twice a day, I would say around two.

Y: Did they eat at different times?

G: Yes, they did eat after me. She would make- usually even my own meal, I would eat something different than them at times.

Y: How did you feel during these conversations? Like were you ever uncomfortable, or awkward or nervous or embarrassed or anything? Or was it just kind of easy?

G: I would say, I mean after the first week or two of feeling things out, they became more comfortable. I know I would ask her questions, on you know, "How do you say this? Am I saying this right? What's the word for this?" So I'd say after a couple weeks I grew comfortable with my madre in particular. And so yeah, I was able to speak more freely with her. Although like I said, we didn't talk a tremendous amount, but we would talk on little things here and there.

Y: So do think that the lack of communication or interaction at first was because of language or just personality, or just the situation of you just moving in with someone, or the reason why you didn't talk as much? Schedules?

G: Now is that for the whole semester or just the beginning?

Y: Um, both. I guess beginning and then whole semester.

G: I would say at the beginning there's this urge or, invisible pressure to communicate somewhat because you're like "I can't just not say anything with these strangers now." So you're trying to say some things, but at the same time, that's when I was most nervous and "I don't know how to say this." You know. So I would say the amount we spoke was probably about the same the whole time with maybe even a little more at the beginning. Less questions at the beginning, but maybe more overall talk, trying to communicate because I wasn't comfortable at the beginning. But then probably overall, the amount was probably pretty level because of our schedules or just how they chose to interact. I mean, it was a small kitchen, maybe they felt like- maybe they wanted to give me my freedom to eat, or maybe they didn't think we would all fit or maybe they just really wanted to use that time to watch TV. I never really asked what those reasons were. But just kind of the schedule and personality of them and how they did things.

Y: Yeah, cultural expectations can sometimes just be different. Um, were there ever any serious or embarrassing miscommunications between you and your host family or teachers? This is one of those, it's hard to think of right off the bat, so you can think about it, or we can come back to it.

G: Better answer it now, because I won't think about it when you're speaking... I remember one. Their daughter was over, not that it impacts the conversation, but the madre said something to me like, "Oh, he's smart." Or- I think it was "smart." It was a compliment of some sort, either smart or nice-looking you know. And I said "No sé!" (I don't know!), but my madre thought I said "Yo sé!" (I know!). But the daughter heard me say "No sé." And so, I mean it wasn't serious, although the madre kind of laughed, she thought I was like, "Sí, yo sé!" But the daughter clarified that it wasn't a "yo sé," it was a "no sé."

That was the first one that comes to mind. I don't think there was- you know I think there was another one, I'm trying to think of what I said. Oh man, how time plays with your mind. I can't remember if I just made it up for a class, I think it really happened though and maybe I used it in class.

Y: Well let's hear it anyway.

G: I think I said something like, I think I made the accident of interchanging "mejor" (better) and "mayor" (older), or something like that. And so, I either said she was oldest, or the dude was the oldest or something, was like the best. I mean, she didn't make any fuss about it if I made this mistake. But I think looking back on it, I was like "Oh shoot, I think I said the wrong thing there." But she- if I did make that mistake, she was at least graceful in dealing with it, in my presence at least.

Y: That's funny. Well, what kind of feelings did you experience when interacting with people in public? Like at restaurants or stores? As far as like anxiety or calm or excitement or however you felt?

G: I was a little surprised that they don't seem as, what we would say here, customer-oriented. You know here you've got Hy-Vee where there's a smile in every aisle and they seem- you go up and down an aisle and you see someone and they ask "How are you doing?" Or whatever, whereas in Spain, I would go to Alimerka, which was basically next door to our piso and you know, recognize the same girl or two working there frequently, but I would try to start a little conversation and she didn't seem to want to have any part of it. I don't know if it's just her personality, or just bad days- I caught her on bad days, or she didn't want to go through the difficulties of interacting with a non-native speaker, I don't know. But yeah, so it was at that point feeling more, more distant. Slightly more uncomfortable, just get in, get out, get

what you need, don't ask questions. Just give her a five or a twenty so you don't have to ask how much it was, so you don't have to mess with change or anything. Just get in, get out.

Y: So did you ever try and avoid those situations or avoid talking to people in public or avoid going to those places?

G: Yeah, I mean I don't know if I avoided public places, but I'm sure there's plenty of times where I would go somewhere and interact little, you know, minimally with the native public. I don't know if that's just my personality type or- but I can get by doing it.

Y: Did you feel like- this is kind of an offshoot, but it's something else I was reading about- did you feel like you were a different person or acted- your personality kind of changed a little bit when you were speaking in Spanish? I don't know, trying to adapt more aspects of the culture, or just maybe the insecurity of not speaking your native language or- did you ever feel kind of different?

G: You know, I would have to say no. I think- I mean, I kind of did my experience maybe a couple years- at an older age, maybe by a couple years than maybe most people do and so I was pretty- maybe more firm in who I was, or who I am, at the time. And so, and I don't know if it's personality here again, but I wore sweatpants, I wore tennis shoes, I went running through the city if I wanted to. I did the things that perhaps some would say aren't culturally appropriate, doing American things in Spain. And maybe it's wrong, but the things I like to do that are perhaps only American, I didn't really change to appease the natives, I guess. I mean, I don't think dressing down, wearing sweatpants is offensive. Perhaps there are some things that Americans do that are offensive, but ones that I thought were innocent, I continued overseas. And so I don't think I change my persona, I felt like I was pretty sure of who I was, who I am and the second language wasn't going to change that, or the second culture.

Y: That's cool. Let's see, were there any specific cultural differences that were difficult to adapt to in conversations or interactions? Some examples I had thought of were the amount of eye contact, or gestures, or greeting each other, respect to time.

G: Yeah, greeting each other is obviously quite the contrast from the US. At times I wasn't comfortable with it, but I don't know, I think I kind of miss it here, just because it is somewhat more endearing. I thought about it, like how close you get- maybe it's only physically, but how friendly and intimate you seem with a complete stranger. Like a woman you've never met before in your life, and now you're going to give her kisses on the cheek, whereas here, you know, there's people you might have been best friends with them all throughout high school and you'll see them on the street and maybe you would- "hi!" So just, contrasting those- the showing of affection, it makes America seem pretty lonely and distant people. So I liked the- at times it was uncomfortable, but I think if I would go back and be there for a bit- for that amount of time again, I would be more comfortable with it. And I think the only thing that made it uncomfortable for me- if I grew up in it, it's perfectly fine, it's both assumed we're going to do this, but as a foreigner, I'm like "Ok, do I do this? Are you expecting me to do this?" So it was just, thinking too much. And respect to time, they do things later than us, but I think I quickly adjusted to the meal times. They go out on the weekends much later than here, but I wasn't really one of those types, so I never did a walk home after sunrise kind of thing. I was in bed! I slept the best I ever have in Spain. What were the ones I didn't hit?

Y: I guess I said eye contact and gestures.

G: Perhaps they are a bit more- they use gestures a bit more than here, which I like. Eye contact I'd say is probably about the same.

Y: What kind of strategies did you use to make up for a lack of understanding or communication ability? Like maybe pretending you understand, guessing, trying to take cues from expression or tone of voice.

G: Yeah, pretending, definitely did that. Did the nod the head. I would at times, ask "Slower, please? Can you say that again?" Or "I don't know this word." And I would try to use the nonverbal cues or context.

Y: Did you ever have to do that when it was important? Or during class or anything?

G: And that's the thing. Because I think the class gives you such a context that for the most part, you know where you are. And for the level of Spanish I had at that time, I had a pretty good feeling- a pretty good grasp of what we were doing and where we were going with the classroom. So, most of the problems I'm mentioning are in the cafés with the natives, just- they're telling you their day, or they're telling you a story. They went to some city and you don't- you think you know what the norms are for going somewhere, but because cultural differences are so great, you're not sure which context to work from. So it's almost like you're not working from within one.

Y: What do you think best helped to improve your language skills while you were there?

G: I tried to practice on my own, but learning the vocabulary. Just trying to find those words that I thought I lacked. One thing I started to do, but didn't follow through with was- it would be beneficial to write out what you- kind of like a journal, but in the second language because you're using language that is individualized. You know, these are things you've done, these aren't abstract vocabulary words because I know plenty of those that I never use, so why do I know these words, when I don't know real life words? That would be- that's a great aid I think, a great tool. I didn't use it to the maximum. I had a TV in my room, which was rare, so I would watch that. I got hooked on a Spanish show that I'm still hooked on. I watch it every year, fortunately I can watch it.

Y: What's it called?

G: Aguila roja!! Did you ever watch that?

Y: No.

G: It was kind of like a ninja and- it's actually in the setting of, I think it's Rey Carlos IV, the king during the time of las Meninas?

Y: Oh, I don't know. Hasn't Juan Carlos been the king forever? I don't know.

G: So it's like medieval, it's like ninjan time of the 1400's. And so, I like it's a fun show, but- so there's that show. And I got hooked on fútbol when I was over there, so I try to watch those or listen to them on the radio here. So I'm not sure if that was the question, but...

Y: Yeah, those are all like really helpful way, just by listening and writing and forcing yourself to use it. Are there any things that other people could have done that would have made you feel more comfortable speaking or made it easier?

G: Well thinking of what we here do in America for others. At least I think I do and I think others do as well. I think we don't speak in the same manner as we would to our friends as we do to foreigners. We speak slower, we- if we are excited about something, we don't let that increase our pace in speech. And if there are words that we think we want to know in that language, we ask. We even take the initiative to ask if they understand that word. And for me myself, I know that I would just pretend like I know and so I go the extra step and ask "Do you really know what I'm talking about?" Instead of just nodding or pretending like you do. So I think those things would have helped. To go at a slower pace. I don't know if Crashin's I-plus-one theory is legit, but you know something like that where they make the input a bit more comprehensible for me, you know, slow it down a bit so then I can distinguish those words and those thought groups and find out "ok, I know what you're saying here, but this word I don't know, so what's that word?" But you're saying it all at native pace, I get caught up in one word and then you're two sentences down the road before I'm like "Oh forget it." And try and catch up with the story. So, I would say pacing, slow that down a bit, more realistic, more accountable in their comprehension checks. And perhaps rephrasing, other vocabulary that might be more simple, yeah more juvenile.

Y: Did you hang out with a lot of Spaniards while you were there? I know it seems like you've talk a little bit about it.

G: Not that much actually. We had classes at night and so I- like I said, I slept more than I imagined I would. So unfortunately- and I lived a fairly good distance from campus. So my morning schedule would be wake up late, like 10:00, 11:00, and I didn't go to bed that late, so I just don't know why. So I wake up that late, have a sobao (?) and some orange juice, usually march off to school, 20 minutes there, 20 minutes back. And I'd just go to school to maybe get on the internet, you know, do some vacation planning or check on America, culture and sports, or people back here. And then march back for lunch, and then usually it was time to go back to school, and then either to the malls or through the city for a little bit and then come back home for dinner again. So usually, I interacted with people from church more often than anybody else. So I would go to worship nights and sometimes hang out afterwards, but I had this weird financial limitation I put on myself, unfortunately. It is what it was, but I didn't want to spend too much so- I wish I could go back and go to more cafés and restaurants and try these things. But usually they were going to get a coffee, and I don't drink coffee and I don't want to spend two Euros or whatever on a tea and coffee or tea and a coke each night because I'd go broke. So, yeah it's a small regret now that I didn't interact more- and they had their own lives too so it's not like they're homeless or without work and just wasting the day away and can spend all day talking to me.

Y: Well that's cool, I didn't know you were involved in the church there. I know when I was there some people were involved in the church. So would you go there pretty often?

G: Yeah if I was there on the weekend and stuff on Wednesday I'd go to. I mean, yeah I'm sure there's only two Evangelical churches there in Oviedo.

Y: Was that hard to understand or be involved in ever? As far as saying the words or reading or singing the songs, talking to people.

G: It was nice- they had the words up for the songs and the music most of the time, which is good, because if not I would have been totally lost. I think the Biblical language was somewhere in the middle between street language and academic language because knowing the context in my L1 made it easier for me to pick up the concepts in the target language. And those words are kind of- they're more cyclical and you see them more often. So I would rate it, most comfortable in class, slightly less so with church language, and then the least being the street language. I didn't have too much of a problem.

Y: Cool. Well, to keep this anonymous, I'm giving everyone Spanish names, so what would you like yours to be?

G: Gomez.

Omar Interview-Transcription

Yo: Alright, so today I'm going to ask you some questions about your experience studying abroad and for some responses I'll ask you to use a rating scale of 1-5, with 1 being the worst and 5 being the best, but I can explain that more for specific questions. First of all, where did you study abroad?

Omar: In Oviedo, Spain.

Y: And how long were you there?

O: About 5 months.

Y: OK. And were you learning Spanish?

O: Yes.

Y: Ok. How many classes had you taken of the language before you left? Or how confident did you feel?

O: I had taken four years in high school and then I had taken probably about three semesters at UNI. So I felt fairly confident, but still-

Y: On like a scale of 1-5?

O: On a scale of 1-5, probably about a 3. Somewhere in the middle.

Y: And was that more in you speaking? Or reading and writing? Was there a difference?

O: Definitely in speaking. Reading and writing I was definitely a little more iffy on.

Y: Ok. What was your living situation while you were there?

O: I lived with a host stay family. I had a host stay madre and a host stay padre and the two host stay hermanos so...

Y: How old were they?

O: They were 20 and 22.

Y: Oh, that's same age-ish. So did you enjoy the classes you were taking there?

O: Very much so.

Y: On a scale of 1-5, from 1, hated them, or 5, absolutely loved them.

O: I would say 5. I absolutely loved all of my classes.

Y: Good. Do you feel like you learned a lot from them then? On a scale of 1-5.

O: I did learn a lot. Definitely a 5 on that scale. I learned quite a bit.

Y: Any of them more so than others?

O: I would say in my grammar class and my vocabulary class I learned the most. And then I took a literature and Hispanic America class, and that one was a little bit different just because it was more history. But definitely the vocab and the grammar. They were very practical and I learned a lot from those.

Y: Definitely. What were some common language errors you noticed yourself making or what did you struggle with the most?

O: Uh, the thing I struggled with the most was definitely the subjunctive. But then I was very glad to hear that from my grammar professor, that even native speakers in Spain will avoid it, so it kind of made me feel better that even though I was struggling with it, that they don't actually use it as much as they stress here that they use it. So that was definitely the thing that I struggled with though, was just grasping it and getting my mind wrapped around the subjunctive.

Y: And was it more so that grammar side than the vocabulary? Or how was it different?

O: It was more so the grammar side. Vocabulary, normally I'm pretty good with.

Y: Did you ever find yourself code switching? Or slipping English words or phrases into the middle of Spanish?

O: Yeah. I definitely found myself doing that and sometimes actually I just slipped back into English for some reason. Like I'd be somewhere where that I'd know I was supposed to be speaking Spanish and then I'd just say like, "thank you" in English. And then whoever the person was would- one time it was at a café. And I was Skypeing with my family and then the waiter came over and he asked me a question and then I started answering in Spanish, and then all of a sudden I switched to English and then he was really confused. So I did code switch occasionally.

Y: That's funny. Did you see a difference from the beginning of your semester to the end?

O: Definitely at the end I didn't code switch as much. It was definitely more 100% Spanish. But at the beginning it was definitely rocky and there were times I would switch in and out.

Y: Was it ever difficult to comprehend or understand what native speakers were saying to you? On a scale of 1, always, to 5, never.

O: I'd say probably a 3. And it definitely depended on where the native speaker was from because I traveled a little bit and then if I'd go to places, like Andalucía, just their different dialect, just understanding them and comprehending some of the things they would say because they just speak a little bit differently, was a bit more difficult. But in Oviedo for the most part I could understand the majority of the people. There was only one person in Oviedo that I had a really hard time understanding and that was my friend Bethany's host stay mom. Because she had a- she was from Galicia, and she had a Gallego accent. And it was really thick and she was the one person I had quite a hard time understanding.

Y: How does it sound different?

O: It's just very like, it's almost like German-ish. Yeah, it's like Spanish kind of with a German accent. It's different.

Y: Sounds difficult. In what situations was it most difficult to understand people and it what was it easiest?

O: I think some of the situations that were most difficult were when it was a native speaker and you were doing something that they thought should take really quick, like to explain. And then they were talking really fast and then you just wanted them- and then you'd be like "Ok, slow down! Just repeat it, I can get it if you just slow it down." So, but that were some of the most difficult things when native speakers just would still go really fast, but for the most part, people that I would talk with, would accommodate a little bit. Not a lot, but they would slow down their speech a little bit just because they knew I'm not a native speaker and that I'm trying to learn the target language.

Y: And so was it easiest when you were talking to certain people or in certain situations? Or where do you think it was easier to understand?

O: Um, yeah it was definitely easier for certain people in certain situations. Like one of my other friend's host stay moms, she was really, really good about always slowing it down. But then there were some people that I'd find at department stores and stuff like that that you could tell that they were just irritated that they had to slow down just a little bit for you. But it's not like they had to slow down a lot, it was just irritating, I mean, yeah.

Y: it was just usually a pace kind of thing?

O: Mmm-hmm.

Y: This is a list of some defining characteristics of someone who has a communication disorder. Do you feel like you showed some of these characteristics during your time studying abroad? And if you have any examples feel free to share them. And take your time, there are a lot of them.

O: Uh, definitely uses incorrect word order. I'd find myself doing that occasionally and my host stay family was always really good about correcting me on that, but I definitely would find myself using incorrect word order.

And then word retrieval difficulties. Sometimes there'd just be a word and I couldn't think how to say it, so I would have to use negotiation of meaning and try to explain my way around it. Which just take a little bit longer of trying to say what you want to say and you can't say what you want to say in the most efficient way.

And I think that's about it.

Y: That's good. So, since you lived with a host family, how many daily interactions did you have or how often would you talk on a scale of 1, never to 5, all the time, multiple times, every day?

O: Um, probably about 4. We talked quite a bit, but they were very busy so we didn't get to talk all the time. Both my host stay parents had jobs and my host stay brothers were both going to school so... But things that we interacted with would be like eating, and then we'd always, always just sit and the salón and just watch TV and just kind of talk in there and talk about whatever we were watching or whatever was happening. Yeah, so we interacted quite a bit.

Y: And so for about how long do you think each interaction would be?

O: Um, eating, like if I was eating lunch or dinner or something like that, that would probably be about an hour and a half. And then if we were in the salón, that could be like 3 or 4 hours that we'd sit there and talk, watch TV.

Y: And how did you usually feel during these conversations? Like did you feel uncomfortable, or stressed, or nervous ever?

O: Definitely at first I felt uncomfortable and was very nervous to just strike up a conversation, but then, towards the middle of my stay there, I definitely just got more comfortable with them. I got more comfortable being around them and more comfortable being able to express myself and use my language with them. So definitely then it was just like- honestly like they were my family and I could just talk to them about anything.

Y: So at the beginning do you think it was just a language barrier? Or do you think it was ever a cultural, personality type thing?

O: I think that the beginning it might have been a little of both. A little bit of the language barrier because it is a little bit intimidating to be thrown into someone else's home who speaks the language you're trying to learn fluently. And then there's definitely that cultural barrier too because it's a little bit different than what you're used to.

Y: How did the quality or amount of these interactions change from the beginning to the end of your time there?

O: Definitely at the beginning they were sporadic and I didn't really have a lot of interactions, it would just be a few things. But then towards the end, like I said, they did become my family and we talked a lot and we'd talk quite frequently.

Y: Good. Were there ever any serious or embarrassing miscommunications between you and your host family or professors?

O: Not that I can think of. I'm sure there probably were, just not that I can recall. Oh, there was one time where they explained to me- they got a new lock on the door and they explained to me this one is a little different and they explained to me how to do it, and then I couldn't get it open. And so like through the door, my host stay padre was like yelling at me- not yelling at me- but yelling through the door trying to explain to me how to do it because he was like, "You have to do it yourself!" So that was kind of embarrassing. But they told me and then I couldn't do it. But I got in eventually.

Y: That's funny. What kind of feelings did you experience when you interacted with people in public? Like in stores or at the movie theater.

O: People in public for the most part, I didn't really have any bad feelings or anything like that towards them. It was mainly- that was almost easier to talk to them because it was vocab that I was pretty confident in. You just asking them- it's very short interactions, especially if you're at like a restaurant or a department store or movie theater. And then- but if it was other people that you just randomly talked to,

which would happen because there's just such nice Spaniards in Oviedo, then like I said, I'd ask them to slow down if I didn't quite grasp what they were saying or they were talking a little bit too fast.

Y: So did you ever try to avoid those situations?

O: Well it depended on whether the person seemed nice or- because there's some crazy Spaniards too.

Y: Yeah, that's funny. Were there any cultural differences that were difficult to adapt to in conversation? Like eye contact, gestures, greeting, respect to time.

O: Not that I can think of.

Y: Ok. What kind of strategies did you use to make up for a lack of understanding? Like did you try to guess or take cues from facial expressions?

O: Yeah, I definitely would take cues from facial expressions, but then, like I said before, if I couldn't understand something, I tried to negotiate the meaning and I'd ask a whole bunch of questions and try to figure out what they were trying to say to me and then if like I said, I couldn't think of a word, I'd try to explain my way around and ask them what the word was that I'm trying to think of. And yeah, so just a lot of negotiation meaning and a lot of asking questions.

Y: That's good. What do you think best helped to improve your language skills while you were there?

O: I definitely think the fact that I was living with a host stay family helped. Just being with that language everyday and having to use it every day to do kind of things that you normally wouldn't do because if I were here, and I wanted to go get a coffee or something or eat my lunch or have my host stay family eat lunch, I'd get to use my native language, but I had to use my target language and I was just kind of forced into doing it and I really enjoyed that a lot. And then also the classes that I took. The grammar and the vocab definitely just really helped. And just being able to be in the target language culture and interact with those target language people.

Y: That makes it a lot easier to learn. Are there any things that other people could have done to make you feel more comfortable speaking or make it easier?

O: I don't know. For the most part everyone was- they were really nice and like they totally understood if you made a mistake. And if you made a mistake, especially if it was someone you were close to like a host stay family, they'd let you know that it was a mistake in a way that wasn't like degrading to you, or made you- in a way that wasn't negative, they'd let you know a better way to say it and say something like "Oh, we don't say that, we say this."

Y: So do you think your environment was pretty impactful on your experience as far as being able to learn the language?

O: I would definitely say yes, it was very impactful. My effective filter was definitely lowered because of my environment. Normally you would say it was going to be raised in that type of environment, but for me, just how I interacted with those people, it made me very less anxious than I thought I would be when I first went into it.

Y: Do you think part of it was your personality? Like you seem like you have a really outgoing personality and it's not really difficult-

O: I think part of it is definitely my personality. I'm kind of an extrovert, but I think if you were an introvert, it might be a little more difficult because you're not going to be as willing to take those chances. And I don't really get embarrassed very easily, but for someone who gets embarrassed easily, I think it would be a little nerve-wracking to be in that situation with a native speaker.

Y: Do you feel like you were more introverted when you spoke Spanish or do you feel like your personality changed at all? Or do you feel like you were pretty much the same?

O: I feel like my personality is pretty much the same and my host stay mom attests to that. She was telling me that I'm always outgoing and a fun guy and that's pretty much what I get told here too, that I'm really nice and outgoing and just a fun guy. So I feel like it didn't change, I mean it probably changed a little bit because there was a little bit of that apprehension there, but I still for the most part think that I portrayed my personality pretty much the exact same.

Y: Good, well that went really quickly! So to keep this anonymous, I'm going to use Spanish names for my interviewees. Do you have a preference of what your Spanish name is?

O: I want to be Omar.

Y: Ok. Muchas gracias!

Josefina Interview-Transcription

Yo: So today I'm going to ask you some questions about your experience studying abroad and for some of the responses I'll ask you to use a rating scale of 1-5, with one being the worst and 5 being the best, but I'll explain that more later for specific questions. First of all, where did you study abroad?

Josefina: I studied in Oviedo, Spain.

Y: And for how long were you there?

J: From the beginning of January until the end of May, so almost five months.

Y: And what language were you studying there?

J: I was studying Spanish.

Y: Had you taken many classes of that language before you left?

J: I had. I had taken Spanish classes ever since- technically since the 6th grade, and then got college credit when I was in high school for it and then was taking college level Spanish classes here at UNI for the 3 semesters prior to going over there. So, yes.

Y: So how confident would you say you felt in the language? 1 being very insecure to 5 being completely confident.

J: I would say a 3. I remember having to call to make a reservation at that hotel over by Parque San Francisco, and just getting really nervous. And it was the December before I left and I remember just- my dad was in there and he was like, laughing because I kept stuttering and the guy was just- on the other end in Spain was just talking super-fast and just more swiftly.

Y: That's funny, so is that rating more for your confidence in your speaking ability? Or what do you think about your reading and writing skills?

J: I feel like reading or writing, oh shucks, would either be a 3 or a 4. I'm not really sure if you have to tabulate all this if you want a real answer, but I feel like speaking is the last thing that comes to any language learner or I guess a second language learner. So, I mean I could read Spanish well and write it relatively well. Listening to people was ok and speaking was pretty terrifying at first.

Y: What was your living situation while you were there?

J: I lived with a host family and they had hosted for about 10 years prior to me coming there, so they were used to Americans and used to- I don't know, us making grammatical mistakes and just kind of knowing what our culture is like and just liking to eat a lot and stuff.

Y: I'm glad they knew that.

J: Yeah, exactly. I remember, yeah the first day just trying to feel everyone out and I asked the grandma if my host mom had hosted before and that was a big relief. So I had a mom and a dad and an 11-year old I guess, brother and at that time, 2-year old sister.

Y: Did you enjoy the classes in Spain that you were studying? From a scale of 1-5, 1 being you hated them, dreaded them or 5 being you absolutely loved them.

J: I would say they would be a four. Some of them were a 5, like my art class. The professor just knew a lot and spoke pretty clearly and was entertaining. I didn't really go there to- academics was just a part of it. Usually in all my schooling, academics was the number one priority and something that was just super important and I'd spend a lot of time on, but I knew that I needed to also take time to be with people and learn how to speak and just go shopping and out for coffee and things like that. So, the classes were very enjoyable though. I was in the advanced level and with other people from UNI, which was nice, and the teachers were really smart and I learned a lot for sure.

Y: So were there some classes, like art, that you enjoyed more and some that you enjoyed less? Which ones were those?

J: I enjoyed art and even though I wasn't good at it at the time, I liked translation and I knew that would be a good skill just to have. I actually almost failed that class and I had to do remedial work and I brought my grade up and it still transferred as an A so that's all good, but- like I had to go see him during office hours, like no one else does that!

Y: I didn't even know they had office hours.

J: And so I had- I guess I had a literature class that the tests were just awful. It was all essay and it was just- you would just dread it because you would just say "Ok, go!" You have an hour to write and everyone would be in there for the entire hour just like trying to remember all the details to get all the points. And was a- like he also taught Spaniards at the same time so we were just nervous about him judging us. And then Silvia, I don't know if you know her, she had kind of a strange accent and she was a quieter person and so we couldn't really understand her all the time. And then with our strong personalities being Americans, we would just get frustrated because we had no idea- it was like Hispanoamerica, so Latin American history and we were like, "we have no idea!" So it was challenging and I didn't really look forward to that class.

Y: So do you feel like you learned a lot from your classes on a scale of 1-5?

J: Now two years later I'll say that, you know, retention rates were a little bit low just because it was a lot of random stuff that I learned. Like in my vocab class learning how to say all the different styles of goatees and mustaches, I didn't really use a lot. But I think it was valuable, I would say a 4.

Y: What were some common language errors you noticed yourself making or what did you struggle with the most?

J: Especially when I first got there, there was a lot of vocabulary that I didn't know or a lot of kitchen vocabulary, you know around the house vocab that I just didn't know and still struggle remembering. Like, just really simple words that I should have learned back in sixth grade, but just didn't. Um, using the imperfect for the past tense, because English only really has- I don't know, do they have more tenses, I feel like?

Y: They have imperfect and preterite, yeah.

J: I don't know. That's really difficult for me still to know when to use one or the other, because then I'll hear other people, like native speakers, using the imperfect when I had convinced myself you're not supposed to use it in that situation. So, that was kind of strange. And getting a hang of the accent was difficult to. Just to- yeah, to stop sounding like an Iowan who's speaking Spanish and just start sounding like a Spaniard. Um, it took some time, but I worked at it a lot.

Y: So you'd say like, grammar and vocab were pretty equal as far as difficulty?

J: I would say so. A lot of the vocabulary would come back to me, but a lot of times- like my host parents, my host mom especially and I would stay up really late a lot and just talk because they eat dinner at 10:30 at night and so we'd eat dinner and then the kids would go to bed and then we'd stay up until like 2:00 in the morning. And so, when you're stuck there, you don't want to go like whip out your dictionary or anything. And so when you're explaining something about your life back here and you just don't know the word, I had to explain the word and kind of talk around it. And she would just try to guess what I was trying to say because I couldn't really communicate sometimes exactly what I was trying to say, which it was hard.

Y: Did you ever find yourself code switching, or substituting an English word or phrase in the middle of a conversation in Spanish?

J: Well that's a good question. Um, maybe on random like vocabulary type stuff. If I had a sense that it was like a cognate where it sounds the same in English and Spanish, I would sometimes just- the English word would slip. I have met people who are very bilingual, like from California, and they code switch all the time and it just messes with my brain and I can't really- I don't know, function at that level, so... I mean, maybe some things would slip- I would usually want to translate things literally, like from English into Spanish and it wouldn't have anything to do with the way they say it in Spanish. And then they wouldn't understand me and I'm like "Uhhhh, ok, whatever," and just kind of drop the subject because I thought it was funny, but they really had no idea what it was. And it was me making a cultural reference and they didn't know so... I don't know, I have a friend that says, "Oh you know, I'm a lot funnier in Spanish!" Which is very true in my case as well, so...

Y: That's funny. So, was it ever difficult to comprehend or understand what other native speakers were saying to you? On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being always or 5, never had any problems.

J: Ooh. I would say, a 3 maybe, 2 or 3. There were some people- ok, so I lived with that family of four and their immediate family lived very close by and so we all hung out a lot. And a lot of those people had pretty strong accents. Even like the grandma and her- my host mom's little brother. And it's- I mean when I went back to visit it was still difficult for me to understand every single word that they were saying and really like, laugh at the appropriate moments and have a good comeback or have, you know, just keep the conversation flowing because- yeah, I would just kind of stare at them and be like "Oh shoot! I need to be really comprehending what this person has to say, but I really don't know." And then you just like, get nervous and then they can tell that you don't understand and then they- they have sympathy in their face, but- and they just try and keep explaining it in different words until you finally catch on. But there were other times too where, like I would be not around English at for a couple of days, and so just completely immersed in Spanish and I didn't have, you know, the option of switching into English and be like, "Oh no, let's just stop." Like, playing in this fake language, like no, this is for real, this is what they speak.

And I remember a couple of times I would just have to zone out because I couldn't- my brain couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't understand what they were saying because they were speaking so fast, and then I felt, like kinda stupid because I would be sitting there and then have like, a delayed reaction because then I would understand what they said. Or they would all just be bantering back and forth and then I wouldn't ever be able to interject or like yeah, just say anything or contribute to the conversation and so I would just kind of space out.

Y: So do you think- what situations were most difficult and what was easiest? It sounds kind of like immersion was most difficult.

J: Yeah the most difficult were definitely the full immersion times. Um, for instance there was one time I was at Diavolo, that pizza place where my host aunt worked, and it was Sunday afternoon and I had been around all those guys the entire weekend. I think we had gone out a couple nights that week and then, like I just was with that family the whole weekend and that was the instance especially that I remember where it just came to a point where, yeah I just couldn't do it anymore. And I just let my- I really- I always tried to take an active part in making conversation with those people, or at least listening and learning from them, but I just felt, like all of a sudden, like too much, I don't know, of an outsider. Like I didn't, just didn't know and they just- they were kind of talking about, like just gossiping and stuff, and using words that I didn't necessarily know and it was difficult. And so, I don't know. And easiest was probably one-on-one, with many people. Probably easiest being my host mom, just because I felt like I talked to her them most and she's obviously used to having Americans around. So she would be patient and realize that I didn't have that full set of vocabulary like a native speaker would or that I was going to make those grammatical errors and that I was nervous about all of it to begin with, so she wouldn't- she would correct me sometimes, but not always and she would just be really sympathetic all the time.

Y: That's good. This is a list of some defining characteristics of a person who has a communication disorder. Do you feel like you showed some of these same characteristics during your time studying abroad? And if you can think of any examples, feel free to share them.

J: Well first of all, with the form, the morpheme. Knowing the masculine and feminine agreement, as far as- I think every noun in Spanish has a masculine or feminine "el" or "la," yeah gender assigned to it. And a lot of them are misleading and so, even to this day, I make that mistake of "el mapa" or something like that.

And with the form, I reversed the order of words- oh wait, that's of sounds, not words, never mind. Here we go, number 5, "uses incorrect word order." Because there, sentence structure is different than ours, and so, especially at the beginning I would basically be translating from English into Spanish in my brain and then say the Spanish thing, but it wasn't necessarily in the right word order. And I look back on that now, where I look at things that I wrote, and I can see that that was a mistake.

Word retrieval difficulties sometimes, especially if a vocabulary word was new, and then I only maybe repeated it like, one or two times, like saying it out loud, I just wouldn't retain that. And that comes with- hopefully that comes with learning any language, but...

Y: Yeah, I'm sure. Even English!

J: Yeah. Really.

Poor vocabulary? Yeah I just talked about that earlier.

Um, in use, poor conversational skills. There were some times where I would be like, being introduced to people, and you do that differently there. Like you don't give a strong handshake, you have to lean in and give the double kisses and say certain things like, I don't know. And I guess we never- we didn't practice that enough in Spanish classes, so I didn't really know how to properly and politely greet somebody new and be introduced to somebody, so I just figured that out a couple months ago. So I'm sure I was pretty awkward to some people.

Um, comments inappropriately, I'm sure that like, some things, like I'd just start laughing or- it would be an appropriate time to laugh in English, but it wouldn't be for them. Or I would try and just be funny and say something that in my mind thought would be funny in Spanish, and they would just laugh at me, not with me because it just sounded dumb. So yeah, that's funny.

Friendships would be limited to low achievers, I mean, I was with Americans who didn't speak Spanish very well either. And I was with those Americans at school and then we would also take weekend trips. And so, we would attempt to speak Spanish together, but eventually we would always just switch back into English, unfortunately.

And yeah, I used gestures a lot. Pointing or just kind of- even like drawing something in the air to explain it, I've done that. And I think that's about it. Appears confused, under behaviors might be one as well. Especially when I just had to like- yeah, zone out and couldn't handle it anymore.

Y: Yeah, that happens. So, when you were living with your host family, did you have a lot of daily interactions with them? Like, how often would you say you talked with them on a scale of 1 being never to 5, many times, everyday?

J: I'd say 5. It was- I would wake up late, and then they would all be at work and school and then I'd go work out and then come home in time for lunch at 2:00. And it would be all five of us around a little coffee table, which doubled as their dining room table and I mean, I remember on the first day- ok so, obviously from that description I just gave they weren't very rich, and on the first day I was already convinced that this was just a dump and that I couldn't be with these people because it was just too old, and just not really in my taste. And then that day, during lunch, we started talking, and it was just a really good conversation, and it really got me talking about- I think it was about their dictator, and kind of what life was like and things. And my host dad was talking a lot, and my host mom was and they even started kind of fighting because they have different viewpoints of the dictatorship. And I had learned about that in my classes so I was able to say some things about it and I walking to school that day I just realized- and later that day talking to my friends and they were like "Oh, it was so awkward, we just ate in silence or they just gave me a sandwich to eat and sent me on my way." And I'm thinking to myself, "Ok, you've already been really lucky to have this conversation and be able to start practicing really great Spanish within your first couple hours here. I mean, how many more opportunities are you going to have throughout the whole semester to have good conversations like that?" And I had a lot of big conversations when I felt really fortunate, so I knew from that point on that I needed to stay with them so I could keep learning. And just knowing that they understood my situation as far as being an American and not maybe always speaking perfectly, but still welcoming me with open arms.

Y: And would you say having that- sounds like there wasn't too big of a language barrier, do you think that helped you get closer to them or just connect with them?

J: I think so, yeah. And with certain people I would get more nervous and then it would be a bigger barrier, but on that first day I was just determined to make it work and just start talking right away because I knew that they were just a more outgoing culture and they like if you talk and it makes them feel like you feel welcome.

Y: So about how long would you say each of your typical conversations or interactions would be?

J: I would go from- anywhere from 10 minutes to a couple of hours to a couple of days. I mean sometimes at night we would speak for four hours at a time, have in depth conversation where it was back and forth and I had to be thinking in Spanish and trying to remember how to say everything correctly.

Y: How did you feel during these conversations, especially at the beginning? Was it a little uncomfortable, or nerve wracking or...

J: Yeah it was uncomfortable, it was nerve wracking. I always liked- just to offset the nerves, I would try to think about what I was going to say or topics that I would want to talk with this person beforehand. And I would kind of have to practice. I would always talk to my host mom about my day and just what I learned in school and things like that. And I remember always walking home from school and rehearsing in my head what I was going to say because I didn't want to mess up, and I wanted to just show to her that I was getting better.

Y: So do you feel the quality or amount of these interactions changed from the beginning of your time there to the end?

J: Yeah, everything improved. The quality improved, I was able to speak for longer amounts of time and I was able to speak with less mistakes. And then the amount of time definitely got longer. My first day there I didn't stay up with them at all and talk after dinner. And then incrementally, it just got longer, longer as I was able to finally communicate with them, I felt more comfortable to stick around and just keep the conversation going.

Y: Were there ever any serious or embarrassing miscommunications between you and your host family or professors?

J: I'm not sure. Nothing comes to mind, to be honest, that was horribly embarrassing, although I don't really get embarrassed too much to being with. There were things that, like I said earlier, that I would have to point to and they would kind of laugh that I just had to point at something just because I didn't know what the word was for it. But usually if I opened my mouth to say something, I had thought about it beforehand and kind of practiced it real quick in my head and then said it out loud. So I was usually fairly confident that I was saying something that was correct.

Y: So they usually didn't have a hard time trying to understand what you were trying to say?

J: No. I don't think so.

Y: That's good. What kind of feelings did you experience when interacting with people in public places? Like stores or the movie theater? Like as far as, were you nervous, or intimidated, or dreading it, or were you excited to?

J: I would usually get nervous and then to calm my nerves I would- I just always thought about what I was going to say and just planned it out. And I would make the mistakes in my head first and then I would recognize that that was wrong and then I'd just say it in a different way. And then I would repeat it in my head over and over until- say I was at the movie theater- up until I got to the ticket window and then would be able to say it, usually correctly. Sometimes in my head I'd be able to say it a lot faster than I would in real time, when it came out I would maybe stutter, or the nerves would take over and I would go just slower. But to combat the nervousness, which I was always nervous, I would just practice it in my head.

Y: So you never really avoided these situations?

J: Um, like for instance if we went to the market, if my host mom was with me, I would have her speak to the people to- and usually they bartered and stuff and I bought something at the market one time and I could tell- they didn't barter with me at all. I tried to and they could just tell by my accent that I wasn't from there and they probably thought I was kind of stupid and they could just cheat me out of getting a good deal. So that's why I started bringing her with me, to communicate for me. And then, otherwise, if I had to interact with somebody I would, it's not like, there wasn't really a ton that I could think of, just store people and people at the movie theater and teachers and other things. Otherwise it was people that I knew, like the friends and family from the neighborhood and I was more comfortable with them and would not really avoid them.

Y: So do you ever think- I mean you were talking about how you planned out what you were going to say and kind of ran it through your head before you said it, do you think that ever made having conversations difficult or slower? Or were you not really able to do that in just a back and forth conversation? Or did that then take away from your focus of listening instead while you were planning?

J: A lot of times it took away from focus of listening because a lot of times we'd be talking about a subject, say our favorite vacations, and I would think about a time that I had had, and I would think about how to say that and just start rehearsing it. And so, yeah, that person would be speaking for two minutes and I wouldn't really retain what they said because I was too busy rehearsing in my head. What was the other part of your question?

Y: Just as far as, did that ever block conversation or make it difficult to have a fluid conversation?

J: I don't really know. Off the top of my head, not really. It would make having conversations like that, especially at first, a little bit more slow because I didn't really have to time think about it beforehand and rehearse it, so I would have to just say it as it came to my head and many times it would be wrong and they would either just let it slip and not correct me, or sometimes they would correct me, which I always appreciated. That way I could learn. But yeah, a lot of the times I would basically only half listen to them because I would be thinking about what I wanted to say in response, in my head. And that made it more fluid and back and forth and I'm sure they thought I was listening a lot and would come back with a good response right away, but that was because I was thinking about the responses the whole time.

Y: Were there any specific cultural differences that were difficult to adjust to in conversation? Like the amount of eye contact, or gestures, or greetings, or respect to time, for example.

J: Well respect to time, they don't really have any, and so usually- I mean luckily I didn't really have anything to do. Here in America, you've got a strict schedule and you always have to run from place to place. So that would have been difficult if I were say, doing business with them, because I would probably have back to back meetings and I'm sure they would run over and I would get frustrated.

They use a lot more hand gestures than we do, and I feel like I picked up on that and now when I speak Spanish I use those gestures, but when I speak English I do not, which is kind of funny. And when they're on the streets they always say "hasta luego" and here we just kind of smile, or maybe just say "hi" and that's it. And that was kind of strange. And then the kissing on both cheeks, when the first person came in to give me two, like came into my personal bubble and I like backed off like, "what are you doing?" Because I had forgotten, but yeah, there's quite a few things that I had to get used to.

Y: And you mentioned how you use more gestures in Spanish then you do in English. There's been some research about how people sometimes act differently when they're speaking another language, like they might take on more of those cultural characteristics or just the language has a different personality to it. Do you notice that in yourself?

J: I absolutely have a different personality. It's more, just, talking with your hands and moving with your body and you're just using stronger words for things. Yeah, both those things you just said, I definitely do. It's funny and I've noticed that I do that, but I just think it's funny and I just go with it. I like it, I don't know.

Y: When did you kind of make that switch? Because I'm assuming that when you first- or has it always been like that for you when you speak Spanish?

J: No. I definitely- when I went over there I picked up on the fact that they would use their hands in different ways and shrug their shoulders. I don't know, like move their head around and things. So I would say I picked up on that about halfway through and really started using it. And then it was funny, because they noticed that I started acting and talking more like them and they thought it was just cute and kind of laughed. And they liked the fact that I was getting into the culture. To the extent that, on the last night, my host aunt told me, "Honey, if you stay here for a couple of months, you'll be full blooded Spanish because you're doing great, so keep it up." I was like, "Oh, I have to leave tomorrow!"

Y: Do you think that kind of made it easier to learn the language or speak it by taking on those characteristics? Or was it just the same?

J: I feel like it came a lot easier to speak it. That way I could take on the characteristics, take on the gestures, take on the attitude, and also take on the accent without feeling too foolish. I feel like a lot of people really feel foolish if they do things like that, and I guess I was just around those people enough where I didn't feel foolish. And I almost felt like I started to fit in more when I acted like that.

Y: What kind of strategies did you use to make up for lack of understanding? Like did you guess or just pretended you understood, take cues from facial expressions or tone of voice, asking a friend?

J: All of the above. I, including in English, if I can't hear somebody or I can't understand, I will mirror their facial expressions or their body language. So if they say something and kind of start to chuckle or laugh afterwards, then I will. Or if they look like they're angry about it, I'll also roll my eyes and just be like, "Uuh! That's ridiculous!" Which I did the same. I found myself reading their lips a lot, which is why it's difficult for me to talk on the phone with them because I can't see what gestures they're using and I can't read their facial expressions or read their lips, which definitely- it wasn't one that you listed, but it made up for lack of understanding because then I would kind of be able to make out what they were saying. And I would say just mirroring their gestures and stuff was the biggest thing I did.

Y: Did that ever backfire on you or anything? Or was it pretty successful?

J: I'd say relatively successful. I mean, if it did backfire, they would have just internalized it I feel like. Just like we would do in English, like "Oh, why is that person laughing when I'm talking about how my cat just died?" And so, they'd be like, "Oh that American girl!" And just kind of brush it off and forgive me for not being able to communicate as well as them.

Y: What do you think best helped you to improve your language skills while you were there?

J: I would say just practicing speaking. Having those conversations, especially those one-on-one conversations late at night. I said earlier how those helped me out a ton and it totally did. I mean, I learned how to use expressions or sayings. I learned- that's where I picked up on a lot of the hand gestures and things like that. And it was a low stress situation because I knew they would be understanding and not judge me and just know that I was going to make mistakes, but just still not laugh at me or make me feel humiliated. So that's probably where, and how, I improved the most.

Y: So it kind of sounds like, just the attitude of people really helped, but is there anything else you feel that people could have done to make you feel more comfortable speaking or just make it easier to speak and not be afraid?

J: Something that other people did, like some of the other family members of my host family, they would just tell me straight up, "Listen, I know that you're American, and it's ok to make mistakes." They'd ask if I wanted them to correct me or not, and just depending on my mood I would say yes or no. And that really helped a lot because I feel like you do get stressed out- when you know that you can't communicate well or at a native competency, you feel just stupid or you just feel at a disadvantage. And so when they make you feel just at home and they make you feel more comfortable, it makes you want to be able to open up to them and at least attempt to try and speak. Even if you know and they know it won't be perfect, just having that reassurance that they won't judge you or laugh at you, really makes a world of difference.

Y: Then I guess my last question is, to keep this anonymous I'm using Spanish names for my interviewees, so what would you like yours to be?

J: We'll go with my middle school and high school Spanish name, Josefina.

Y: Josefina. Muchas gracias!!

