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Observing Perceptions of Successful Second Language Learners of their Sources of  
Motivation and their Learning Strategies

by

Mehrnaz Memar-Sadeghi

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
Through Faculty of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Education at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2012

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research on motivation in second language learners has used teacher-centered theories to formulate ways to improve motivation through pedagogy. This current research explores the strategies that language learners use to keep themselves motivated during the task of learning a second language. Multiple methods are used including interviews, auto ethnography, Five Lenses, and writing as inquiry. Shared and unique learning strategies are found and are categorized under four major categories: media, culture, society, and academia. Some results support findings of previous research by Gardner and Dornyei. Themes that emerged include English imperialism, acculturation, second language identity, career enhancement, social status, family dynamics (including gender), and the importance of environment in acquiring a second language.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents for spending their youth on me and showing me the joyful path of knowledge. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Mohammad for being there for me and for sacrificing for my sake and to my daughter, Sophie for patiently accepting my absence while I had to work on my thesis and more importantly for coming to my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Learning languages has long been a staple of my professional and personal experiences. I am the youngest of four siblings born and raised in Iran, in a family and culture in which higher education is highly valued. I finished elementary and high school in Iran in Farsi, the official language, and I obtained my Bachelors of Arts in English language and literature from a government-run university in Tehran. We were taught English grammar and vocabulary from grade 6 to grade 12, and my family had enrolled me in out-of-school language institutes to study English after school and during the summer from grade 6. As an Iranian having lived in Iran until the age of 24, I have realized that if I know other languages, especially English, I am perceived intelligent and will receive high-status in social circles. It may be for this reason that many Iranian families send their children to these language institutes early on.

Although I was sent to extra language classes while in elementary school, I started to learn other languages seriously as an adult. The experience of acquiring other languages in adulthood has been so profound, and at times so difficult, that it has pulled me in many directions. It has influenced my sense of identity, as I see myself as belonging to a variety of different groups, Iranian, Canadian, and so on. I have always wanted to know if others have gone through the same struggles, setbacks and euphoria while on the task of learning other languages to see how they mesh with mine. One source of inspiration and cathartic emotion for me has been the connection that I feel with other language learners. As a language teacher in China, I was taken aback when my

English as a Second Language (ESL) students showed little desire to learn, despite their interest in continuing their education abroad. In observing other individuals engaged in the highs and lows of learning to speak English, I became increasingly curious about how the process of learning a second language unfolds. I came to believe that my own social, cultural, and personal entanglements with learning and teaching English could lead to a more robust understanding of the dynamics of the ESL phenomenon with empirical inquiry. This is why I chose to focus on curriculum studies at the master's level and to carry out this research project. Within this research journey, one particular theme that stands out among the rest, is the extreme focus, concentrated effort, and determination that is exhibited by the participants as a staple of adult language learning.

Critical period theorists believe that there is a stage during which we need to learn our first language, namely between childhood and before puberty (Chomsky, 1965, 1981; Lenneburg, 1967; Penfield & Roberts, 1959). Another commentator on language acquisition, Brown (2007) says that the critical period could also apply to learning languages other than our mother tongue. After puberty, learning languages becomes a long, laborious endeavour and chances are that we get adrift occasionally and gradually lose our interest. I repeatedly had this experience of losing a will for learning English or French and have struggled many times to push myself back on track. Now that I look back at my journey of learning additional languages, I am in awe at the amount of energy, perseverance and persistence I devoted to the task. I ask myself where did this urge and desire to continue learning despite the bluntly difficult mission stem from? What was it that made me look up the meaning of twenty words per page from a dictionary and still enjoy reading English novels? Or travel two hours back and forth to another city to attend

private French classes for three hours every weekend while in China? What did make me feel so elated after these trips that I did not feel the exhaustion for several weeks to come? Are there other language learners experiencing similar experiences? Are they feeling the urge to be heard or to hear the same shared stories?

Research on motivation takes a significant part of research on language learning processes and pedagogy (Bemause & Gardner, 2008; Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Green, 1999; Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008; Matsuoka, 2004; Noels, 2001, 2003). I do not specifically recall times when my language teachers could significantly motivate me to learn or continue to learn different languages. My experience with language learning as a novice in the classroom was limited to learning some vocabulary and grammar, and a very narrow window for language usage. I wondered if other language learners used personal motivational tactics that helped them remain motivated to learn other languages.

A review of the literature reveals a gap. Much research is conducted through language authorities, such as researchers and teachers regarding the ways students could be encouraged to continue learning in this area (Bemause & Gardner, 2008; Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Green, 1999; Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008; Matsuoka, 2004; Noels, 2001, 2003). There are not many studies on secondary language learners themselves (e.g., the way they perceive their drives and their motivational dynamics). Being a language student all my adult life, I am in an ideal place to do this research on language learners. I am in fact a legitimate *insider* exploring shared experiences (Acker, 2001). As a language teacher and later researcher of second language learning, I might also be considered an *outsider* to the field; someone who has *assimilated into* the

scientific *culture* to observe other language learners from her new vantage point. Acker describes the term in this quote:

“The Indigenous-Outsider was socialized within the indigenous community but has been assimilated into a different culture so becomes seen as an outsider if s/he studies the community of origin.” (p. 6)

I can be an *indigenous-outsider*, an expert on a subject that has been part of my living experience for quite a long time.

### Research Problem

Motivation is recognized as the most salient component of successful second language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The lack of motivation that I observed in ESL classes in China could be due to various underlying causes, ranging from different educational systems to having various cultural values and goals (Minichiello, 2002).

There is extensive research on ways to improve motivation through pedagogy (Bemause & Gardner, 2008; Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Green, 1999; Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008; Matsuoka, 2004; Noels, 2001; Noels, 2003). One top example is the list of one hundred motivational strategies for classroom teaching developed by Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008). The significance of their research is that they actually produced a substantial and practical tool for motivating students in the classroom and for prolonged periods of time while the language course lasts.

As a second and third language learner, I came to believe that knowing how to maintain your level of interest through using practical motivational strategies is central to success in learning additional languages. When I use the terms ‘motivational strategies’ throughout this thesis paper, I mean ‘learning strategies’ that feed into variety of internal

or external motivations. I will define different kinds of motivation, namely ‘intrinsic vs. extrinsic’ motivations in the following chapter. Reflecting on my own experiences of travel, immigration, acculturation, and acquiring a new language, I wanted to know what other people’s stories of struggle and success are; what other language learners have to say about motivating themselves along the way and about their paths to success. On a more personal level, I would like to look for a more in-depth understanding of my motives and myself as a language learner than I currently possess (Bateson, 1989). I formed the following research questions and I set research goals for myself to be able to satisfy my probing mind: Have other students used unique learning tactics that helped them remain motivated while acquiring other languages? What are those strategies? How might researchers and teachers move away from short-term motivators to persuade learners to self-motivate?

By gathering other language learners’ stories of success and struggle as well as writing that of my own, I intend to accomplish these two goals:

1. Identify successful learning strategies used by students of other languages; and
2. Develop an in-depth understanding of myself as a language learner.

To achieve the objectives above, I set out to discover the stories of those who learned an additional language and are now working or studying at a high level in that language. I questioned and interviewed four participants. Through exploring and analysing the stories of my participants as well as my own, I identified some successful motivational strategies used by other language learners. Our stories provide a qualitative knowledge base from which various themes and understandings emerge.

Qualitative research, of the kind I propose, about the secondary language learning process is important because it provides several perspectives. In my experience, success at learning additional languages only occurred after substantial drawbacks. Therefore, other language learners and I, for that matter, could be viewed as survivors of a daunting task (Chase, 2005). This research has potentially multiple benefits. The voices of language learners (including my own) may be of value to the language research area. These stories could become available to other language learners, motivating, influencing, and enhancing their language learning experience. Additionally, motivational strategies of successful language learners could be presented in the curriculum of language studies or manifest itself in the future pedagogy of language teachers. Such research could add to the body of research in the field of second language learning. The purpose of this study, then, is to extend previous research about second language learners; specifically, I wish to see what strategies they use to maintain and improve their second language acquisition.

I include myself in this study and provide my motivational strategies through narrative autobiography of my language learning experience (Richardson, 2008). I recruited four other individuals with experience in learning one or more additional languages as adults. I hope that by telling our stories, we can provide other language learners with strategies for learning languages, and encourage them to feel connected to a group of people with common purposes and sensitivities. Additionally, I attempted to valorize the voice of language learners and thereby shift the power dynamics of current research, in which teachers and researchers are seen as the authorities in language learning.

These individuals all had different language learning experiences and relied on a variety of motivators for their linguistic endeavours. I discovered through this research

that my participants have used many common and unique learning strategies that have driven them either internally or externally to continue learning despite the difficulties. Some of their motives can be categorized under certain major influences in motivation initiated by research. I attempted to explain their perseverance in language learning through some of the theories discussed in the literature review in chapter 2 and through methods discussed in chapter 3.

I analysed my raw data carefully to identify my participants' motivational strategies. I also included my own experiences of language learning through writing an interpretive autobiography. Both of these analysis sometimes overlapped in themes, and interestingly, one story would sometimes fill in the voids in other stories. Through listening actively to my recorded interviews and reading the transcripts, I gained more insight into the learning styles of my participants and what caused them to continue their pursuits. I came across the unexpected themes (e.g., Language learning as a business, English imperialism, language and politics, etc.) and understandings around and beyond the language learning process. I listened and searched for differences as well as similarities among my participants' responses and strived to demonstrate what made them unique in this journey. I included my story as another language learner in the analysis section of this project.

Using a survey questionnaire with both close-ended and open-ended questions, I gathered primary data and some initial narratives. I used the data from the questionnaires to ask more about my participants' value systems on language learning through a follow-up interview. The process of obtaining data through interviews in my research is closely comparable with the one introduced by Kvale (1996). In Chapter 3, I will write an

evaluative comparison of my interview design and process to “the quality criteria for an interview” instigated by Kvale.

Reviewing my basic data from questionnaires, interview transcripts and my autobiography on language learning experiences, I noticed that despite many other overriding themes, one common thread is the volitional involvement of all of us in the language learning. There is significant amount of research on self-regulated learning manifested through self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991); drive theory (Ausbel, 1968); self-control theory; and flow theory (Brown, 2007). On an underlying level is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and his reference to self-actualization as an encompassing drive manifested when all other needs are met. I will generate an analytical framework where my participants, their desires and their value structures in language learning are placed against the backdrop of these theories mentioned above. Comparative stories of each of my participants and those of my own demonstrate the manifestation of these theories in a group of language learners who used some techniques that helped them in the process.

In an attempt to expand on human experience and pointing to the possible, I strived to listen to the particularity of voices, discover and display what makes my participants unique in their quest for language learning. Considering the “immature” nature of my study subject area according to Morse (1991), this research can be categorized as a qualitative phenomenological one. Through writing, I have investigated my role in the research both as a language learner and researcher.

In this study, I am the researcher, the teacher, and the learner. I share my experiences with language learning along side those of my participants in a personal

story. I include my researcher's voice in between my participants' stories to describe and interpret their stories. In the end, with a teacher's outlook, I strive to draw on these shared experiences to propose a feasible suggestions for future studies in Education. Adding depth and sophistication to this qualitative study, I am hoping to provide insights into the second language learning process through a layered method of analysis which in turn is designed to impart several perspectives to generically similar experiences.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Motivation, as an affective factor in Successful Second Language Learning (SSLL), first received substantial attention from the beginning of the 1900s. Before this period, researchers believed that intelligence and verbal ability were the main factors in SSLL. In the beginning, motivation was seen as relating to only two orientations: integrative and instrumental (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Clément, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Integrative motivation refers to the social reasons of learning a language to integrate with a cultural group, while instrumental motivation refers to wanting to learn a language in order to use it for a purpose, such as in a profession or for studies in that language.

Brown (2007) offers us a definition of motivation that he terms the “dictionary definition”: motivation is the “extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit” (p. 85). Gardner (2001) identifies four major influences in establishing motivation in individuals: *external influences*, *individual differences*, *language acquisition contexts*, and *language outcomes*. He demonstrated through his research that these four categories are the main sources of motivation. In the category *individual differences*, the subcategory *attitudes to learning a second language* describes individuals who expend effort, set proximate and distal goals to achieve and enjoy learning. Gardner concludes that these individuals display high levels of motivation.

External influences include socio-cultural or family background domains (Gardner, 2001). In some countries like Iran, learning particular foreign languages, such

as English or French, is prestigious. In Iran people think highly of those who know western languages, and it affects their treatment of these people with much respect. People knowing more than one language are considered smart and therefore their comments on educational issues are considered highly reliable. This by itself may be a source of motivation to learn other languages. In some countries, job opportunities increase for people who learn a second language. For example, in Canada, civil service jobs require applicants to be fluent in French and English. There are families that value learning foreign languages; therefore, the chances are that individuals within such families find themselves more motivated to learn languages than in families which such preference does not exist. Gardner (2001) characterizes willingness in some people for emotional identification with another culture group or willingness in making something foreign a part of oneself as 'integrativeness'. People with a high level of integrativeness are believed to be more inspired to learn another language.

Language outcomes, Gardner (2001) says, can be linguistic or non-linguistic. Linguistic outcomes refer to the language learners' perceptions of their proficiency level in any of the four main areas of a language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The more they perceive themselves as proficient in one or more of these areas, the more motivated they become to continue learning the language. Wu (2003) introduced effective ways to enhance young learners' perceptions of the second language competence. These included a predictable learning environment, moderately challenging tasks, necessary instructional support, and evaluation that emphasized self-improvement. Non-linguistic outcomes refer to attitudes toward learning another language like language anxiety and willingness to use the language. These attitudes were first investigated

through the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) that was created by Gardner (1985) and was subsequently further developed (Gardner & Clément, 1990; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

### Motivation and Approaches to Second Language Acquisition

Along with major schools of thought in language acquisition, motivation has received different interpretations and is identified with several sources. Initially teachers familiar with the behaviouristic view of language acquisition adopted the carrot-and-stick approach in their teaching. They would rely on tangible rewards and punishment as the only source of motivation in the classroom. In the cognitive domain, Ausubel (1968) first introduced the Drive Theory which placed emphasis on the personal drives like exploration, manipulation, stimulation, activity, knowledge, and ego-enhancement as the sources of motivation for learning.

Maslow (1970) later elaborated this through his famous Hierarchy of Needs where self-actualization, encompassing the above drives, would become a source of motivation when all the other needs like physical, safety and communal were met. Self-control theory, enhancing autonomy of learning through student-led choices in short and long-term context, is a manifestation of all these theories in pedagogy. Wu (2003) concluded that students' freedom in choosing the content, methods and performance outcomes of the learning, and integrative strategy training led to a promotion of perceived autonomy. Based on Maslow's (1970) needs theory, what is claimed in the constructivist theory is that one's culture and environment affected a learner's motivation. Individuals fulfill their needs through interacting with peers to achieve a personal goal, like that of learning another language.

Each school of thought tends towards one of the two major divisions of motivation, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) define intrinsic motivation as “when a person does an activity in the absence of a reward contingency or control” whereas extrinsic motivation is “behaviour where the reason for doing it is something other than an interest in the activity itself” (pp. 31-35). The behaviourist approach, with its system of reward and punishment, encourages extrinsic motivation whereas the cognitive and constructivist approaches promote intrinsic motivation.

Many researchers have explored the relationships among affective factors or examined the correlation between affective factors and motivation orientations. Chen, Warden and Chang (2005) explored motivation strategies used in China and discovered that expectancy played a large part in terms of motivations and self-evaluated skills. This expectancy led to extrinsic motivation. Once the expectation was met, the motivation disappeared.

Gao (2008) discovered that his participants’ learning strategies were exam-oriented and centered on their goals: to be successful individuals and to gain “social mobility” within their competitive institutions (p. 169). Their competitive environment motivated their learning, and their success was self-perceived based on the end results. In an interview with one of his participants, Gao (2008) learned that, without an end result to strive for, the motivation ceased to exist. This reference indicates the significance of goal-setting in motivating students. However, it also confirms that like any other external influence, the motivation gained is prone to disappearance.

Bloom and his colleagues (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964) introduced a definition of the affective domain that is still widely utilized in the field of motivation. According to Bloom's Taxonomy, at least a minimum amount of willingness needs to exist in an individual to make them perceptible to new information. People move along a hierarchical ladder from the first step of being only receptive to information to the last step of having total motivation and willingness to learn. This system also holds for language learning where the ultimate motivation and self-regulated learning are considered important keys in learning the language successfully.

### Major Shift in Studies on Motivation

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a major shift in the studies about motivation. The importance of the learning environment in shaping situated aspects of the learners' motivational disposition in second language has become the focus of researchers' attention. From the four major motivational influences introduced by Gardner (2001), the language acquisition contexts and more specifically the formal ESL classroom started to receive a dramatically increased consideration. Researchers focused on producing classroom strategies that could motivate ESL students in participating and completing class activities.

Dornyei (2001) introduced a practical system of four main motivational strategies: creating basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. Creating basic motivational conditions refers to creating a classroom environment that is welcoming due to a warm and friendly teacher who is always seeking to accommodate his/her students' physical and emotional needs.

Initial motivation for learning another language can appear in different forms. My personal experience as a language learner ranges from peer influences, to immersion or

introduction to the culture of the languages I have acquired. Preserving motivation which is the most important aspect of motivation, requires substantial strategies and sustaining actions. It could be because of this importance that programs such as the Accelerative Integrated Method (AIM) exist in language classrooms (“AIM Language Overview”, n.d.). AIM is a research-based method of teaching French as a second language that exceeds the curriculum expectations of this subject in public schools. The purpose of AIM is to reinforce learning of the language through visual support (the use of gestures), story-based lessons, inductive grammar, creative writing, scaffold reading, music, drama and dance.

AIM ingrains in students the seven hundred essential words needed in order to function in the language. Some of the gestures are based on American Sign Language (ASL). The teaching of the grammar is inductive and is based on using complete sentences. The first lessons, introducing only the singular pronouns, have a simple structure and are mostly verb-based. The AIM classes are lively and motivational. Almost all students are involved in the process of learning. There are less behavioural problems in these classes, and students generally enjoy learning French (“AIM Language Overview”, n.d.). The next step for students, whose level of motivation is sustained through classroom activities, is to learn how to keep themselves motivated in various levels of their learning process.

Guilloteaux and Dornyei (2008) broke those macro-strategies further down into specific motivational techniques (see Appendix A). Various scholars published slightly different lists of recommended motivational techniques (Alison, 1993; Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). These techniques, although explicit, necessitate that teachers’ supplementary lessons are designed to address them. Not all teachers could necessarily cover these strategies properly in their limited day-to-day preparation periods. Considering the effect

such techniques could have on students' motivation, and consequently their learning, it is evident that detailed, predesigned units of study are needed to guarantee such an outcome. For example, one strategy is to provide students with "intellectual challenge" (see Appendix A). Although there are some specific examples, they are out of context of a lesson and therefore not tangible enough for every teacher. Some other techniques, though generally practical, do not apply to all situations and contexts. For instance, the technique of promoting integrative values does not automatically apply to an EFL setting or countries where accessibility to foreign people and products are limited.

Despite these limitations, researchers have made great progress in motivational studies and in implementing motivational techniques in the classroom. A step further, perhaps for the educators in the Ministry of Education, is to develop specific exemplars that adhere to these strategies in the form of detailed lesson plans. Also, there should be room for other educators to suggest modifications and accommodations in different teaching conditions.

In the beginning motivation was perceived as an isolated entity with limited corresponding attributes like willingness to learn or verbal ability. With more studies completed, motivation gradually gained some orientations, which led to research on affective factors involved in learning (Chen, Warden & Chang, 2005; Dornyei, 2001; Gao, 2008; Gardner, 2001; Noels, 2003; Wu, 2003). At a certain point, the focus of the research on motivation turned towards one of these affective factors, the formal acquisition context more commonly known as a language classroom.

Most research thus far has explored the researchers' hypothetical solutions, and in some rare cases, the teachers' opinion on classroom motivational strategies that work. For example, Bemaus and Gardner (2008) investigated the teaching strategies reported by teachers and

students and their effect on students' motivation and achievement. Many of such strategies are context-oriented and are limited to the formal environment of a classroom. In other words, most of these motivational strategies have short-term effects that would last while a certain activity is performed. There is little research conducted on strategies that could generate intrinsic motivation inside the language learners (LLs). They must keep themselves motivated in other contexts than the language classroom and for longer periods while they learn a second language.

Review of the literature reveals some attempt to replicate previous research on motivational orientations and factors involved in accidental motivation of the students (Benjamin & Chen, 2003 ; Cluck & Hess, 2003; Heller & Sottile, 1996; Hubenthal, 2004; Noels, 1999). For example Chen et al. (2005) showed that extrinsic motivation, in the form of aiming to get good marks and pass certain courses successfully, plays a central role in Chinese students' achievement. They also demonstrated how such external sources of motivation stop functioning once a course of study is finished or a desired mark is achieved. Gao's (2008) study indicated the same results, as the competitive environment provided an extrinsic motivation to students to obtain successful end results. The abstract effects of external factors or internal factors such as anxiety, self-esteem, and effort on motivational levels of language learners are repeatedly investigated in different studies (Bemause & Gardner, 2008; Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Green, 1999; Matsuoka, 2004; Noels, 2001; Noels, 2003). For example, Noels' (2001) research on French Canadians replicates the result of previous studies on motivating factors in learning English. Matsuoka (2004) reclaimed that integrativeness, anxiety, instrumentality, self-confidence, and motivational intensity/effort are among the factors involved in Japanese students' intrinsic motivation.

Apart from Dornyei and Gardner who have contributed immensely to the practical aspects of motivation studies, other researchers have frequently investigated the same issues. For example, Noels (1999) confirmed that students' perceptions of teachers' communicative style affected students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, and consecutively, their learning outcomes such as effort, anxiety, and language competence. Most of such research is conducted through questionnaires, while few have ventured to conduct interviews or use observation methods. For instance, to detect the motivational drives of Hong Kong College students, Green (1999) designed a questionnaire which categorized these drives into external, interjected, identified or integrated characteristics.

Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002) have examined motivations of secondary students in England to learn foreign languages. Their study results are still limited to extrinsic motivations or biological factors involved such as age and gender. A qualitative research study in which students can demonstrate their personal motivational strategies through in-depth interviewing would possibly reveal more useful data than a limited questionnaire.

Therefore, a gap remains in such motivation-related studies where language learners are given an opportunity to share their self-invested motivational strategies through an open-ended questionnaire. Few attempts have been employed, but they have displayed the same results as before and are not enough to fill the gap. Lamb (2004) briefly refers to few individuals who had overcome difficulties in learning other languages, demonstrating a personal investment in learning, autonomy, and resourcefulness to pursue their goals independently. Lamb conducted his triangulated research through the use of questionnaires, interview, and observation of adolescents in Indonesia. His research has demonstrated the effectiveness of learner autonomy in successful language learning. Researchers have not yet investigated successful motivational

strategies used by language learners. Such research would address the gap in studies on motivational strategies that could work beyond the classroom setting.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

I designed this study using a postmodern approach. Postmodernism, as either a detour from modernism or its continuation, is no more about theorising immense ideas of society and the self (Best & Kellner, 1991; Dickens & Fontana, 1994). Postmodern method according to Silverman (1997) is focused on smaller, more fragmented parts of knowledge. Postmodernism informs the three structures of my research design: narrative inquiry, interviewing, and writing. As a researcher using narrative inquiry, I should begin by knowing about who I am. By writing about my experiences learning other languages and comparing my narrative with those of my participants, I hope to learn about my attitudes and myself (Bateson, 1989). Using narrative inquiry as a research method, I employed participants' written and oral responses, and my own story, all of which had their own reciprocal effects. The narrative inquiry is postmodern in that, real life situations and stories of real people become sources of interpretive knowledge (Mishler, 1999). Postmodern interviewing methods advocate unstructured, conversational interviews in which the power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee of traditional modern methods changes dramatically. The interviewees become co-researchers and researcher could assist participants to articulate their opinions rather than interpreting them as the sole authority. The interviewee is no more a faceless participant and they become center stage (Fontana, 2002). In postmodernism, according to Guba and Lincoln (1985), the modernist approach to scientific inquiry is challenged. In modern scientific inquiry, the voice of certain groups, namely that of researchers and professionals, takes precedence. Postmodernists, instead, advocate giving a voice to marginalized groups as a new authority in producing authentic research (Chase, 2005).

The way the information from these interviews is presented can also be influenced by postmodernism. For example, they could be presented in the form of drama, poem, or visual arts. I chose McCormack (2001) method of *storying stories* in which I used the narrative from the in-depth interviews to create my participants' stories using their own voices. I framed these stories with my interpretive voice as the researcher and the facilitator of the meaning. MacCromack's method of composing participants' stories is a postmodern approach to presenting data as opposed to traditional report like staging of facts.

I attempted to give appropriate influential and practical voice to successful language learners. I am not suggesting that these learners are a marginalized group in the exact sense supported by postmodernists. Adopting a fragment of postmodernist views on challenging the voice of authority, I would like to suggest a new endorsement on the language pedagogy. So far, language practitioners and researchers have suggested ways to improve second language pedagogy (Bemause & Gardner, 2008; Dornyei, 2001; Gardner, 2001; Green, 1999; Guilloteaux & Dornyei, 2008; Matsuoka, 2004; Noels, 2001, 2003). Part of my research, explicitly the choice of language learners as participants, suggest a new balance of power. In other words, people who know a phenomenon first hand should be able to share their knowledge as a valid source of information.

Through writing, a postmodern method of inquiry in itself, I investigated my role in the study both as a researcher and as a language learner. This insider outlook, namely the auto-ethnography, facilitated the process of knowledge making and added to the value of the research findings. Since writing as a method of inquiry is a method that lends itself to these inseparable processes of data collection and data analysis (Ricahrdson, 2008), my writing appears in a

rhizomatic fashion where interpretations are woven throughout the piece finding their ways into my literature review, methodology, participant selection and data analysis.

The participants in this research come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is not the intention of this research to generalize findings, but rather to develop a comparative framework with variability replacing universality (Creswell, 2009; Mishler, 1999). Through participants' stories as well as mine, I give my readers an opportunity to compare the different language identities each individual learner developed out of their background experiences and during their language learning progression.

In analysing data, a researcher can assume the role of an insider or outsider of the ethnic community they are studying (Acker, 2001; Banks, 1991; Collins, 1991; Merton, 1972). An insider of an ethnic community spends some time *socializing* with members of that society and therefore can claim that they have a special vantage point for commenting about that people. An outsider on the other hand is not in close contact with members of that community and does not experience the same events as other people inside that neighbourhood. I consider myself as an "indigenous-outsider" as coined by Banks (1991). As a language learner, I have indigenous knowledge of the language learning process, and as a teacher and researcher of second language learning, I become an outsider, authoritative voice. Introducing *Black female intellectuals* as having an *outsider-within* status for producing Black feminist thought, Collins (1991) proposes that other sociologists could trust the creative potential of their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge. Claiming an outsider-within status, as a language learner, and bestowing it on my participants, I use my experiences as well as

those of my participants to theorise how languages are learned or to possibly question the old assumptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I chose the Creative Analytical Processes (CAP) proposed by Richardson (2008) for my *insider ethnography* to shape part of my methodological framework in this study (Hayano, 1979). In fact, Richardson includes auto-ethnography as one of the many forms of presenting CAP research. In this kind of research, the researcher is both the knower and the teller and writing is done as a process as well as a product. Similar to other research outcomes of postmodern era, CAP lends itself to presenting a part of reality and not the whole and the researcher's self that otherwise would not be incarcerated through other traditional analytical procedures. In fact, crystallization, an outcome of CAP text, manifests the validity of these other sides of reality by which researcher could approach the world. I discuss the materialization of crystallization in my research further ahead.

I asked myself many times why I have chosen writing as a method of inquiry, knowing that as a second language learner I have to spend more time and energy to form, refine and produce meaning than a native speaker of the language would do. I could choose to generate meaning using one of these innovative visual, audio or kinaesthetic means. Why did I opt for a method that challenges me more in many different ways including the writing itself? As Richardson (2008) in *Writing A Method of Inquiry* says:

Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration, struggle. (p. 476)

Why did I prefer the struggle of writing? Do I genetically like to be challenged, or is it a spin-off of all the challenges I faced in language learning that shaped me into a

challenge-loving personality? Or is it an omnipresent quality of human intellect? I remember one time in elementary school when I chose to draw an airplane with passenger faces beaming from the oval-shaped windows for our final art exam; a choice to do the hard task, despite the looming prospects of failure; a task which was rewarded by an A+. A niggling voice inside my head asks me why I am relating this childhood anecdote and it is silenced when I read St. Pierre's (2008) reference to the other uses of writing as a method of inquiry. She describes how using different innovative writing experiments, she had surprisingly and decently produced *out-of-category*, rebellious, brief pieces of writing that otherwise would be missed out on. The data presented in this manner as evaluated by Richardson (2008) could act as a manifestation of self-awareness and self-exposure of the researcher which in turn can help the reader to make their own judgements about the researcher's point of view. Throughout this research project, I interject some fleeting, uncategorised, and short anecdotal pieces for the same purposes mentioned above.

Including other language learner's voices with different cultural and social backgrounds as well as my own voice as a researcher, and therefore writing in context facilitates the connection of reality and the self. I make myself the center of my stories, and by telling my stories, I give my readers-possibly other language learners- the opportunity to hear their own untold stories. The different voices in this qualitative research are therefore aimed to produce stronger, more interesting qualitative community (Richardson, 2008). Richardson's reference to the emergence of writing as a method of inquiry as a means to produce the kind of qualitative research that is not only simply

interesting but also viable, reminds me instantly of one of my participants' interview answers. Richardson says:

But I did not like writing that way. I felt constrained and bored. ...I realized that they (writing instructions) cohered with mechanistic scientism and quantitative research. (p. 167)

One participant's answer is surprisingly an echo of Richardson's sentiments about the homogenized voice of science in the convoy of qualitative writing:

*Academic English writing, I don't think that this is the only way that people have to write, just because I'm interested in creative writing, I think it's beautiful and I think there must be many ways that people can express themselves on paper and not only academic English writing, and the rules and where they teach you the words that you should use in conclusion and the words you should use in the meat part of the essay... and you know I don't want to use these words; I want use them in 'my' words.*

Presenting participants in their own words can redress the power balance between participants and researcher by allowing participants to claim their own theories (Chase, 2005). I present my participants' opinions verbatim to give them an opportunity to voice their ideas that might even be in stark contrast with my own research question or ideas.

By choosing writing as a method of inquiry, I strive to nurture my learner, teacher and researcher voices and to escape "the censorious hold of science writing" and contribute to the validity of research as a method of knowing (Richardson, 2008, p. 477). postmodernist stance according to Richardson allows us to know *something* without claiming to know everything (p. 476). Additionally, by writing about my experiences I

venture on the path of deepening my knowledge of self and of deconstructing what has shaped me into what I have become so far. In this process I explore the different folds of personality and experience and look at them as different subjective folds that need to be unfold through my self-awareness and self-exposure of the processes involved (Richardson, 2008; St. Pierre, 1996).

### Research Design

In the first phase of data collection, I designed and distributed a questionnaire among a convenience sample of language learners. The survey questionnaire included both close-ended and open-ended questions to gather primary data on successful motivational strategies of language learners. The open-ended questions expectantly allowed for some narrative and storytelling to take place. A rich, qualitative data from these narratives was anticipated to emerge as a result. The first two sections of the survey questionnaire consisted of demographic questions including gender, age, country of birth, educational level, mother language, the number of additional languages learned, the year they first started learning, where they have learned and for what purposes they use their other languages. The third section included several open-ended questions on learning additional languages varying from expressive to specific and storytelling ones to encourage participants to write about their experiences of learning other languages, the strategies they have used to continue learning; what inspires them. I adopted some questions from Tran Hoang's (2009) study on "Learning Strategies used by Successful Second Language Learners."

One might argue that there is no guarantee that the respondent may remember every single technique they have used during all the years they have been learning a second language. Only a persistent interviewer could probe for more depth and provide memory hints to obtain

additional information. My anticipation was that by providing a survey questionnaire, I would give my participants ample time to reflect on their previous experiences of learning. Other than seeking motivational strategies each participant used while learning a second language that contributed to their success, this survey consists of questions that revolve around the participants' general and specific attitudes toward language learning phenomenon. The questionnaire is designed as a guide to investigate emerging themes and identify common or unique motivational strategies used by a convenience sample of second language learners.

Working with the constructivist views *on dialogical meaning making* and *diversities of truths*, I chose to include interview sessions as a consecutive part of my research project in the second phase (Smith, 1999). In this way, participants contribute to the authenticity of the findings (Smith, 1999; Stanley, 2006; Van der Wey, 2007). The interviews contribute to a more in-depth understanding of issues covered through the questionnaire and issues that emerge. Interviews with voluntary participants allow for a dialogue between myself as both a researcher and a second language learner, and my participants. This dialogical aspect of the research is expected to produce richer data and add to the value of this qualitative research (Hostein & Gubrium, 1995). The dialogues are presented as quotes in each story and are followed by explanations, theorizing, and epiphanies. The use of both questionnaires and follow-up interviews is intended to produce reliable data through triangulation (Lichtman, 2006). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation and member checking are two strategies of interviewing and contribute to the verification or extension of the information whether through other sources or the researchers themselves. Richardson (2008) proposes crystallization as a flexible, multidimensional, and research validating prism, that depending on the angles of approach reflect or refract many shapes and patterns. He believes that crystallization and not

triangulation is the ultimate validating invention in postmodernist texts. Crystallization decodes the traditional idea of validity by introducing diversities of truth and by letting text validating themselves through engaging in partial realities and leaving space for doubt and an urge to know more. Crystallization in this research manifests itself through the use of multiple lenses approach to analysing data, writing as a method of inquiry, and finally influences of my three identities as researcher, teacher and learner as well as those of my participants.

The participants are all professional adults and use one or more additional languages at work or for higher education. I gave participants two weeks to fill the questionnaire at their convenience and e-mail it back to me. With the oral consent of my participants at the beginning of each interview session, I recorded the interviews for the purpose of this analysis.

Mishler (1991) proposes an alternative outlook to the problem of anonymity, claiming that participants might consciously seek to name their world and inform us of their own theories (p. 124). I gave my participants the choice to be identified by their names in order to theorise their opinions and to enhance the power balance with participants as collaborators of research. This identification is especially important if we want language learners to become our future authoritative voices in research or pedagogy of motivation. Mishler also maintains that by identifying our participants we can preserve their cultural identity in the research. My participants' cultural background definitely has its own impact on the process of data collection and the findings themselves.

In adding my autobiography to the body of research, I am also inspired by Windle, Hamilton, Zeng, and Yang (2008), and St. Pierre (1997). Windle et al. wrote an autobiographical reflection paper explaining the cultural and personal differences that could affect their data and interpretation. St. Pierre coalesced reminisces of her lost

autobiographical writing with the accounts of her subjects, perceiving herself as one of them. By putting my story in between my participants' stories, I give my potential readers, and other language learners, an opportunity to identify with them and see the parallel experiences of language learning with those of their own (St. Pierre, 2008). Through my participants' stories I explore as well as discovered language learners' voices and strive to showcase them side by side other research on second language education mostly presenting the voices of authorities (e.g. teachers and researchers). I give my participants the opportunity to voice their own theories and to share their moments of triumph as well as struggle on the long language learning expedition with others by presenting their own stories through their own voice.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

#### A Tapestry of Voices

In analysing and presenting the data in this research project, I used McCormack's (2001) five lenses approach and her method of *storying stories* of participants using their *in-depth interview conversations*. I also storied my language learning experience in a separate autobiographical narrative which I added at the end of all the other accounts (Bateson, 1989; Denzin, 1989; Mishler, 1999). I composed my participants' narratives based upon the interviews conducted. Using McCormack's method of constructing stories, I strived to lessen the potential power imbalance existent in researcher/participant relationship through letting the voices of participants dominate (McCormack, 2001).

By the first lens of the five lenses method I immersed myself in the transcript through a process of *active listening*. Through the second lens I identified the *narrative processes* used by my participants in both surveys and interviews. With the third lens I paid attention to the *language* of the interview transcripts. I used the fourth lens to acknowledge the *context* in which the interviews were produced. I applied the fifth lens to identify *moments* in the process of the interviews where something unexpected was happening.

I started each story by providing some background information on each participant's views of language learning experiences, their parents' supporting approach to education, career and language learning as well as their country of origin's policies of foreign language learning. My participants' background provides the *cultural context* which McCormack refers to as the fourth lens. I wanted to give the readers the

opportunity to see my participants' story of language learning in the light of their thoughts and mind-set. Then their stories take a chronological path from when the participants first started to learn their dominant additional language (English) until the time of the interview with a brief touch of their possible future experiences with languages. Sequential storyline gives my participants' narrative a legitimate story-look: a beginning, a middle and an end. With their stories, my participants explain their sources of energy to move on with learning despite difficulties. I use italics to showcase my participants' voice in contrast with my researcher's voice. Each story is given a title intended to guide the reader to the main point. The titles, therefore, are chosen either from the participants' words or the researcher's. Some participants have one story and some have more.

The framework I am using for presenting my results is a tapestry of layered texts. I call my writing of this research layered because it consists of different kinds of texts drawn from verbatim transcriptions of participants' interviews. I borrowed the terms tapestry and layered text from St. Pierre's portion of the essay called: *Writing, a Method of Inquiry* by Richardson and St. Pierre (2008). This framework based on tapestry of voices and narratives is meant to present knowledge differently than the traditional linear methods of presenting results as well as showcasing a different kind of knowledge which is a rich qualitative one.

Each section consists of a biographical account of each participant, followed by a story of the participant in her voice. The participant's story is constructed from interviews and survey questionnaires using the lens of *narrative processes* (McCormack 2000). I constructed my participants' stories by stitching together themed-pieces of each

participant's speech which included *descriptions* and their *augmentations*. Then, I added *theorizations* or *argumentations* around each theme to the body of my participants' stories. Each participant's voice dominates each section and is framed with researcher's interpretive voice. An epilogue marks the end of each story and reveals the researcher's final understanding of the participants motives and views on language learning phenomenon. I used three of the five lenses, namely, the lenses of active listening, language and moments for the analysis and the final conclusions.

Using the lens of active listening, I paid close attention to the kind of questions I have asked my participants during the interviews. I realized that I was consciously or unconsciously looking for common experiences of autonomy and self-determination as they have fashioned a great part of my language learning experience. Some researchers underline the importance of self-determination on the successful learning processes (Ausbel, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991). Brown (2007) emphasizes the importance of "intense focus" and "involvement" in the process of language learning (p. 173).

Therefore, I asked from my all 4 participants to tell me more about the option of "self-taught" in question 4 of section one (see Appendix A). In a way, I see myself as a self-disciplined, self-regulated learner and believe that the fact that all of us have attended classes here and there, does not understate the effects of self-attempt at learning languages. In fact, if you are not disciplined enough to teach yourself what is needed, all the other outside forces namely classes, environment or tutors may help.

Each participant represents an aspect of my language learning experience. Despite my attempt to write separate stories for each individual, sometimes it becomes inevitable to compare two or more participants' experiences against each other. These sections of

comparative analysis are outcomes of the language lens and exploring what is said as well as what is unsaid.

I used the lens of moments throughout my interpretive process as well as the epilogue section of each participant's story. Through this lens, I discuss any epiphanies, shared or unique experiences of my participants.

My three identities as a researcher, language learner, and language teacher had their reciprocal influences on my participants as well as the kind of questions I asked them. As a researcher, I tried to clarify answers, show my sympathies and probe for more in depth answers. Additionally, I allowed my participants to theorize their experiences asking guided questions. Sometimes I introduced a theory to them and inquired if they found it ring true in their situation. As language learners, sometimes we shared our views on how to learn other languages better; in these cases the power balance is even and we both collaborate like language partners or learners. I realized that as a teacher, I generally acted as a facilitator of our conversation, explaining, clarifying, and guiding through different concepts. That is how my teaching philosophy works especially for teaching languages. A language teacher is more of a facilitator of learning than the one who teaches a concept or two.

I tried to sound like a conversational partner by showing emotions (Mishler, 1999). At the end of each interview, I asked my participants if they would like to add any additional comments about the process of learning or doing the survey. One of them, a researcher and university professor herself was curious to see if her written English in the survey was good enough to me for academic writing. She was also inquisitive about the design of my questionnaire and whether it was original or inspired by other researchers.

Although this research is about motivation in learning additional languages, by telling my story along with my participants', I only attempt to provide my readers; who are ideally other language learners themselves, with an opportunity to examine the individual and collective aspects of these experiences and search for commonalities and differences in the experiences of the storyteller (McCormack, 2000).

Influenced by Mishler's (1991) notions of contextual meaning and respondents' empowerment, I discovered the interviews I conducted to be powerful tools of communication and meaning making, giving my participants ultimate power to not only own their stories but also to present them as their own theories. Through these interviews, my respondents could discover for themselves who they are in more ways than language learning alone would do for them as Tanya acknowledges at the end of her interview:

*But this was great, I loved reflecting on it and now I understand why people were, thankful to answer my questions [laughter] Because I feel the same way now, thank you for giving me the chance to kind of think back on my experiences and share them with you.*

I strived to elicit meaning and facilitate this processes of self-realization through probing and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996). The kind of questions I asked in all the interviews show how my participants and I came to common understandings after a string of questions and answers (Mishler 1991). This process, repeatedly occurring in all the interviews, is an indication of meaning construction and shared understanding in postmodern research.

Applying postmodernism on this qualitative research, I initially interpreted my interview transcripts through what MacCormack (2000) calls multiple lenses. First, I

drew on active listening and reading by highlighting, colour coding and note-taking on parts of the dialogues that sprang to my attention. Then, I focused upon the narrative processes in my participants stories and compared them to parallel stories from my own language learning experience. Next, I focused on the language of my participants in describing their experiences, identifying words that are powerful in the process of meaning making. I also discussed the context in which the interviews were happening, revealing any situation that had an impact on the construction of the meaning in my research. As a contribution to the possible expansion of human experiences, I also included parts of the interviews that surprised me as an unexpected turn of response from my participants. At the end and by the means of all these lenses I retell my participants' stories of struggle and success around the common theme of motivational strategies comparing the commonalities with and disjunction from my own personal story in one level, connecting all the stories through the same theme like the beads of one rosary.

In examining the transcripts, although I read and listened to the interviews individually and took notes and highlighted bits and pieces, in writing the report I did not choose a traditional orderly comparison of texts or questions. Instead, I started by what caught my attention as a researcher and language learner. I wove my participants stories into those of my own. I tell our stories in an attempt to construct a coherent account of language learning through which each individual's personal journey is examined and re-examined, compared and contrasted with those of others. In this sense my writing is rhizomatic consisting of multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points (St. Pierre, 2008).

While Denzin (1989) discusses the inadequacy of text in producing lived experiences and therefore representing reality, Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) refer to a shift from representing objects to subjectivity. As a researcher writing about my participants' experiences, I am only aware of the role I am playing in presenting their lives through my own subjective lens. To get as close to the actual experiences as possible as suggested by Denzin, I have adopted several techniques from qualitative researchers (Chase, 2005; Denzin, 1989; Richardson & St. Pierre 2008). Using verbatim transcriptions along with my interpretations will give my readers an extra vantage point to construct their own meaning. Discussing each participant's cultural, educational, professional and family background will provide a reliable provenance on which other understanding and knowledge could be built. This is what Denzin (1989) calls "the cultural locus of the stories" and believes to bring the reader closer to reality (p. 73).

There are some limitations to the use of narrative in this research. Other than the fact that the interpretations might be biased, the tellers of the stories may not disclose everything. Moreover, the stories told are not the stories heard.

My research participants come from different cultural and educational backgrounds, China, Macedonia, Yugoslavia and Iran. I realized that each person had some similar language experiences to those of mine. I tried to choose my participants without bias. But it is sometimes the inevitable outcome of qualitative research in which the researcher is looking for specific shared experiences and ideas. That is why I am using convenience sampling of my participants from among my fellow graduate students and former university classmates. I assume that Richardson's (2008) take on maintaining inseparability of self and what interests one from the ethnographic narratives, allows me to select my participants on the basis of personal interest. I

chose two of them because they had the closest language experiences to mine. Two others volunteered to participate in this research as a sign of friendship and to return a favour because I had participated in their thesis projects.

For some reason, the idea of having enough enthusiasm and interest to teach a language to oneself became the center of my attention to the point I asked all my participants to talk about this experience. These four individuals were, like me, in their thirties and had acquired the language for the most part in their home countries. It was really exciting to interview all these people with their interesting backgrounds and perspectives. I could see part of my own experiences with the language from among bits and pieces of their information on their experiences. They helped me acquire a clearer picture of my own experiences with the language.

During my research with these individuals I realized how complicated and elusive the issue of motivational strategies could be. Initially, one participant experienced some problem figuring out what *motivational strategies* might mean. Another interviewee, a teacher herself, had some idea of what the motivational strategies might have meant. Two others had the closest understanding of what I meant by motivational strategies. In my interviews, I explained for each individual with clear examples of my own experience what I meant by motivational strategies. I tried to be consistent with each participant explaining, how I would lose interest every once in a while during my language learning process, and how I would persuade myself to continue learning using various strategies. I encouraged each participant to reflect on their own experience of withholding their language learning due to their life circumstances and what they did to bring themselves back on track.

One participant surprised me with her answers both in the survey and in the interview in different ways. With her, I almost came up with a counter-narrative about how motivation works

for learners of additional languages. She had only the remotest idea of encouraging oneself to continue learning a language despite adversity and instead was almost obsessed with the idea of authorities forcing language learners to go through unwanted classes and tests. She was opposed to the idea of forcing oneself to learn anything and had consciously or unconsciously chosen to replace the word encouraging with forcing oneself. Maybe I have become too much of an outsider in the language learning domain, that neither I nor her could appreciate each other's views. We were almost polarized-or that is what I felt-on the issue of needing a constant personal or non-personal compulsion to continue learning. She mentioned, at one point, that *she does not need to be motivated anymore in the same sense that a 12 year old child needs the encouragement to learn or continue to learn the language to perfection*. She knows that her English cannot achieve the same fluency of native speakers, and therefore, she is not motivated to improve. Instead, she accepts the idea of inevitable learning happening everyday through her interactions with English people and in an English environment. Later, when I release myself from the spell of a tunnel vision, I learn about her different approach to language learning phenomenon.

I interviewed local participants using Skype and a recorder, from the convenience of our homes in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. The comfort factor is especially important for second language learners when they are using their skills in the additional languages they have learned in order to produce the most authentic meaning (Brown, 1994). While visiting Iran for a summer vacation, I interviewed an Iranian participant on the phone.

I had previously conducted a pilot study on the same subject by interviewing one participant as part of a graduate course assignment. This pilot study had prepared me for conducting a better research project this time around. Initially, I became wary of getting

carried away and asking questions that were not related to the topic, but satisfied my interest as a language learner, teacher or researcher. I would worry that my participant would not respond directly to my questions and instead would depart on telling other stories. Later on, as a result of more readings in qualitative research and gaining more confidence and knowledge, I realized that in postmodern research the emphasis is on conversation-like interviews and emergent themes (Chase, 2005; Mishler, 1997). This time, conducting semi-structured interviews, I allocated a portion of my research to demonstrate the possible expansion of human experiences by being open to my participants' stories and including their discontinuities with my own experiences. Doing so, I have provided my research with the particularity of voices.

### Participants' Stories

In my search to find out about the successful motivational strategies of second language learners, I came a long way. I lived, learned and grew. I started to know myself, just as Mary Bateson (1989) claims, a researcher needs to start by knowing themselves first. My views on language learning expanded by interactions with other people's experiences. I now acknowledge to a better extent, the truth and validity in other people's paths, views, and life experiences.

I obtained a variety of understandings about the language learning phenomenon and of the world that surrounds it from each of the individuals in this research project. I attempted to showcase these insights through interpreting my participants' stories and mine. These experiences range from the importance of the hard work and perseverance, to second language identity formation, to English imperialism and the process of

acculturation, to combining motivation for learning languages with our passion for a career.

I included my story to fulfill several goals. Postmodernist scholars have indicated their concern about the importance of a power balance between the participants and the researcher (Chase, 2005; Hostein & Gubrium, 1995; Mischler, 1991). In an attempt to enhance the equilibrium of voices in my research, I included my story of language learning. My voice both as a researcher and participant adds an extra fold/dimension to my research which can serve as an additional interpretive lens in turn contributing to the richness of the qualitative data obtained (Chase, 2005; St. Pierre, 1997). Additionally, by including my story alongside those of my participants' letting the readers to compare and contrast our accounts, I strived to treat my participants as co-researchers and not merely data (Hostein & Gubrium, 1995). So my recommendation to readers of this thesis is to take the role of an active reader and transform the presented data into meaningful information comparing these individuals' personal experiences with language learning with one another, mine and yours (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). Become co-researchers of this research; start writing about your own experiences, interpret them and present them in your story and share it with other readers.

I have used Richardson's (1994) "Writing as a method of Inquiry" by including my story in this research project. I have paid attention to both the process of writing and the product of my work. In the process of writing my story, I have been inspired by my participants' stories as they have helped me to remember bits and pieces of my own journey in language learning from the past. I attempted to critically analyse my own writing and examine my experiences with languages in relation to the research question.

Similar to the case of my participants, I adopted a chronological frame for my story so that it becomes more similar to a story with its fundamental elements of a beginning, a middle and an end. In creating, presenting and interpreting my story, I am also inspired by McCormack (2000) and her work in constructing her own story as both the researcher and participant of her own research project. I corresponded with her through e-mail. She was very diligent and practical in explaining her research and providing me with her published papers. Like her, I write about my views on presenting my private life in public.

When I paid attention to the process of writing my story as part of my research project, I came up with some interpretive comparison of the challenges involved in learning a second language and the ones in writing about oneself. I added the challenge of balancing my personal life with completing this research project.

In the following paragraphs, I tried to sketch my participants' portraits by describing their backgrounds, their relationships with me and the impact they have had on the process of interpreting data. These participants' immigrant status and their language experiences are sources of inspiration for my study.

Aurora has gone through the Chinese educational system up to university. She has obtained her BA in English Language and Literature while in China. She came to Canada two years ago to continue her education at master's level in curriculum studies at the University of Windsor. Tanya is born and raised in Macedonia until the age of 10 and later immigrated to Canada with family. Then, she went through the public education system in Canada and received her BA in History and Comparative Literature and Civilizations and later on MEd in Curriculum Studies. Tanya's mother tongue is

Macedonian but she also understands Serbian, which comes from the Slavic language group. Biljana is a native of former Yugoslavia and has spent her childhood and some part of her adulthood in her native country. She then immigrated to Canada and continued her higher education in fine arts up to masters level in Canada. Her mother tongue is Serbian. Elaheh is from Iran and like me, has gone through the public schooling there. I had gone to the same English language and literature program with Elaheh back in 1995. She has lived all her life in Iran, studied English Language and Literature to Master's level and has become a university instructor.

Each of these individuals inspires a different memory of the journey of language learning. Aurora reminds me of all the hard work and perseverance while learning English and later French, learning twenty words a day or taking two-hour bus rides back and forth to French private classes while in China. Tanya, a graduate classmate talking about having curiosity about everything around her and wanting to know more in other languages reminds me of my own curiosity about the language itself, the unknown interesting-looking words and structures for which I would spend hours to discover and learn. Biljana, an art student, mentions the business aspect of the language classes, and I remember my first serious classes in English as an adult in Iran. They had placed me in a very beginner's class despite my moderate knowledge of the language. So the teachings were too easy for me, but I remember I was so willing to learn more, and as soon as possible from the very first class. I began to make everything relevant to my learning and looked for words that I did not know in English, from the pictures of the book or the foot notes, to the furniture of the class and the words and gestures the teacher made, trying to find their equivalents in English. Biljana, on the other hand, is put off after four years of

emersion in Canadian culture by the business approach of the University she attended to ESL students. She lost her interest in learning English in classes. Elaheh, a former classmate and now an English professor, reminds me of enjoying reading Reader's Digest in the anti-Western culture of Iran and quenching the thirst for everyday language words and expressions.

For these people, the lure to learn languages comes from various sources, some of which so familiar to my own experiences and some very remote from them. Aurora is inspired by her *weakness* in different aspects of the language she is learning to improve. For Tanya, one big push for becoming fluent in English, according to her own words is to avoid *appearing stupid*. Brown (2006) elaborates on the embarrassment factor as a staple in adult learners of a second language and its effect in inhibiting learning. Although appearing unintelligent was an issue in the beginning, as I gained more knowledge and consequently more confidence in language use, I tried to ignore such labels. Elaheh also recalls the fear of appearing intellectually inferior, in the advice she gives to her language students to make them feel comfortable in her classes. Biljana is interested in knowing about other cultures and people and in sharing her political views with other people around the world. That is why she needs to learn the language beside the reason to survive in an English speaking country. Like me, Elaheh had to put her two children to sleep and later to let them watch television in order to be able to attend this interview. Other than honouring the times that we had spent together before and our relation as friends, her attempt to do this interview despite difficulties indicates a personal interest in the subject of second language learning. Although I could identify signs of interest and

dedication in my other participants' contributions to this research, Elaheh is in fact unique in her passionate tone talking about her experiences of the past and present.

Now that I have introduced my participants in three different ways central to this research project: their educational background, their inspirational impact on my views in language learning, and their personal reasons in learning languages; I think the scene is set for their stories to speak for themselves. Inspired by McCormack (2001), I would like to once more encourage my readers to become actively involved in the process of meaning making. Ask yourself in what ways their stories are similar to yours? How their stories might have changed your views on language learning processes or even life itself? What can you learn from their ways and inspirations in learning other languages?

#### Aurora's Story:

##### A Self-disciplined, Competitive Hard Worker

Aurora is a young graduate student from Chinese descent who came to Canada to continue her education more than a year ago. She is in her mid twenties. Her father is a manager and electrical engineer and her mother is a sales representative with a high school diploma. According to Aurora, her parents value education, career and additional languages.

When I listen to Aurora speak in English, I can sense the effort she is making to speak as authentically in English as her very different first language would allow her. She states that she has had difficulty with her graduate courses and especially doing final projects. As her graduate classmate, I have often looked up to her. She is not only hardworking but also smart. She answers my questions with precision and even tries to guess what my next questions would be and replies accordingly. We did our

conversation-like interview from the comforts of our apartments and through skype. The comfort factor is especially important for the fluency in second language production (Brown, 1994). The conversational interview is a way to reduce the *alienating* factor involved in serious standard interviews and let the interviewee(s) to *own and name their own worlds* (Mishler, 1991, pp. 120, 124). It seems to me she is prepared for this interview and has rehearsed what she wants to say as she takes control of the conversation immediately. I had interviewed her several months ago on the same subject of motivational strategies, for a pilot research project I was doing for a course. This time around, I am more prepared as a result of the courses I have taken and the research I had done on methods of interviewing. I was ready to hear Aurora with fresh ears as I was hoping to hear more of her story of language learning and her theories.

Most of my questions are short and are either clarifying or probing questions as a follow-up expansion to the survey questionnaire (Kvale, 1996). There are no interruptions, as both of us appear to have a mutual understanding as where the interview should lead us to next. Aurora is certain about her answers and knows what she is saying or wants to convey. The following excerpt from the interview demonstrates Aurora's readiness to control the path of the interview right from the beginning as a *performance of identity* (Mishler, 1999). Mishler believes that interview participants perform a specific identity which she calls *sub-identity* through their answers in a certain way. They form and perform these identities like a *stage model* throughout their interview question and answer part.

My first question is very direct and seems she is taken off guard and tries to take control by directing where the conversation should go next. I quote her answer to a

question from the survey where she says: I told myself to continuously learn new things every day and I told myself there were always more things to learn.” And I ask:

So my Question is that telling yourself to learn every day; has that always worked for you or you had to do other things to motivate yourself?

*Uh...I think for now it works for me, it is very hard, in China I don't have English speaking environment, so you want to know my strategies? In China how I motivate myself?*

Maybe I should have posed my question differently, gentler and less direct. As it is now, it sounds like she has been inadequate in motivating herself. Especially, right after this brief response she redirects the focus or somehow manages the conversation by directing it to what she thinks is my intention of the interview. She asks whether I want to know how she motivated herself when she was in China. Here her voice has taken control and manages the direction of the conversation.

When I asked her:

Did you like the content that you were hearing in English or did you like the English language that you learned? Which one?

I am surprised of her answer:

*I think that I am more interested in the content, that's one of the criteria that I choose the programs, not only the language itself because they all speak perfect English, and I'm more interested in if there is a music channel or they talk about an interesting English movie.*

This was interesting to me as a literature major I was fascinated with the language itself, interesting-looking words, awe-inspiring sentences as well as the content: Western culture and ways of life, (etc.). Moreover, I was initially surprised that she was not interested in the fact that these channels speak “perfect English” as it could help her improve her English, what I had been dying for while in Iran-listening to perfect English for improvement and learning new words and expressions. But I did not talk about it in the interview. I somehow failed to show my surprise. I think that is part of my personality even with my native language that I do not show my negative feelings. I think this trait has penetrated also in my second identity with English. According to Brown (2007) second identity is at the heart of culture learning or what some call *acculturation* (p.182). As I listened actively to Aurora’s interview and considered Mishler’s (1999) reference to owning one’s world, I realized what Aurora may have tried to convey through her answer. She might have attempted to show that the English language itself and the process of learning the language does not define her entirely in her language learning identity formation. She is trying to show that her identity as a language learner is not limited to learning words and phrases. She likes the culture, music and movies, too.

*Knowing a new language can help me learn about another culture. And I am always interested in getting to know people from diversified cultures. I am always fascinated by the thought of learning a new language. In addition, knowing more languages can make one more competitive in the job market. One can’t learn a new language well in one day. So, I believe the most important factor in successfully learning a language is studying perseveringly. [I think] learning a new language is exciting, learning English is a fun activity. [One] can do a lot of*

*things with English, including travelling to English speaking countries and watching English movies. Learning English is not very hard and learning it well is just a matter of putting your efforts into it.*

When asked about the value of education in her family and preserving or enhancing her native language, she says:

*[They] highly value education in my family. It is good to learn as many additional languages as one can. They held very positive attitudes towards additional language learning. Honestly, I haven't really talked about this with my parents. My mother holds the idea that one's native language level influences his/her second language skills. It is very important for one to have their own career. They want me to be a professional woman for sure.*

*Knowing other languages (especially English) is highly valued in my country. Many employers take your foreign language skills into consideration in making hiring decisions. Foreign language (English or Japanese in some high schools) is a required subject in our education system. English is definitely very popular in the past 20-30 years. However, more and more employers expect the new hires have knowledge of other foreign languages as well. I would say Japanese is the second popular language in China, many people choose that major in college or learn it by themselves. (Since there is a significant amount of Japanese companies in China and due to geographic reasons.) Nowadays, Korean, French, Spanish, and Arabic languages [rapid development of middle eastern countries] also become quite popular.*

Through the lenses of active listening, narrative processes and language I have noticed that most of Aurora's stimulating forces to continue learning are from external influences such as winning *a competition, high marks or role models*. Gardner (2001) refers to socio-cultural external influences as one of the four major powers in motivation.

At one point Aurora says:

*I constantly encourage myself to achieve higher scores on exams, and I always feel proud of myself when I got academic achievement in my English learning and I have also learned that learning languages is a long journey so I told myself to continuously learn new things every day and I told myself that [there] were always more things to learn. My English is never perfect. I think for now it [telling myself to learn] works for me; it is very hard.*

In the survey she says that she started learning English from high school. What surprised me from Aurora's story, was her reference to the role her English teacher in high school had in persuading them to do the hard task and not waver from studying grammar books since it was an inevitable part of the language learning process. She then theorises that teachers have an important role in provoking their students to move forward. My experience with teachers was quite different. I had not only hardly received much consequential encouragement from my English teachers, but I had chosen with my participants to introduce a new source of influence. I did this introduction to other influential forces through the lens of narrative processes.

*In high school, I wasn't very motivated to learn English and it is normally because of the way English was taught in the Chinese high schools, it's all about grammar, and about the higher score and to be honest with you I wasn't very*

*good at that in that stage of learning. I messed up with the English grammar and before that I was excellent English student but I needed help. So at that time I really lost my interest to learn.*

*I think that my teachers were very important at that stage because she said that most girl students had difficulty at that stage, and she counselled and encouraged us saying that there is not really a shortcut to learn grammar well, I mean you really need to do the exercises because maybe English and Chinese is so different. So you have to like, learn more and exercise more to get used to grammar and then once you achieve more knowledge you will get over this stage and you will become better. So I was just following her instructions and I did many exercises. I was [a] very self disciplined person, learner and I really want to be an excellent student. I don't want to always be bad at English grammar.*

*Also influenced by most of the Chinese students. Because I was studying like literally in one of the best high schools in my city, so my classmates were hard working, and if I didn't work hard myself, my scores would drop so that my rank in my class would drop, so...also there was competition so I wanted to be good at specially at English because I was always kind of good at it.... In China, I didn't have English-speaking environment. I didn't have so many books to read in English, but I encouraged myself to look at T.V. News in English every day, and also listen to English or radio programs. I think that's what I can do for myself; I need(ed) to be exposed to a certain environment. [I needed] to force myself to learn it every day...not force, but I encouraged myself, because most channels were in Chinese. I turn on my TV and there would be learning Chinese again, so I*

*kind of forced myself or encouraged myself to find an English channel to learn. They (the Chinese national TV station) had a variety of programs, they also have programs that teach you English but only word by word, or like a more traditional way to teach you English and I don't really like that, I would rather take a class if I want to learn English through that. And I would not watch just any English channel. I am more interested in the content; that's one of the criteria that I choose the programs, not only the language itself, because they all speak perfect English, I'm more interested in a music Channel or if they talk about an interesting English movie; or like news all over the world, I think at the same time I can enjoy learning about new things about different countries, and cultures; I like that.*

It is interesting how she tries to divert the focus of my question when I ask her if she won any competition by mentioning that it was a group work. She reveals her attempt at redirecting the question when she chuckles while confessing that she didn't win any competition.

*When I was studying at university I also participated in a different kind of English competition. Like competitions that are related to English like there are a variety of competitions. ...academic activities in my university, and I really got engaged, and I participated in competitions and I could see my weakness, but also I really found role models in those competitions, because they are excellent language learners, and when the difference between myself and them, I felt it just motivated me, to learn more. There was an English speech contest and our class won an*

*award as a whole group. It got me involved and also working as a team, my whole class won an award and yeah it motivated me to learn more.*

Aurora has barely mentioned any experience where she has consciously tried any strategy to motivate herself. It might be that she has not had any such experiences or that she had other dominant experiences with language.

*For other things...uh... because when I was in university, I was working at the student union, so I was not one of the competitors but I was in the organization team. I was part of the organizers of two English knowledge contests. So I got involved in a lot of activities, which included the English debating, contest and also more like the storytelling contest.*

*So it was not only about English speaking but also about English language and knowledge, also English speaking country's culture and knowledge; that is really interesting. A departmental contest, so each class would choose their competitors, and their candidates and we would have, I think, several kinds of competitions and finals. There would be 4-5 teams and there are questions like multiple-choice questions, or you need to act or imitate one of the dialogues from an English movie, so more like engaging your skills in all different aspects.*

*I was an organizer so I really liked the concept and I think it encouraged all the students to become interested in the English culture and also to motivate themselves.*

What drives Aurora to learn more and makes her unique in her quest is her desire to overcome her *weakness* in the language she is learning. Maslow has duly introduced the idea of human desire to become competent as a manifestation of self-actualization.

The drive theory mentioned by Brown (2007) refers to some innate predispositions in humans to compel them to learn, explore, enhance the self-esteem and so forth. It can be an underlying theory in Aurora's case.

*I think that what motivated me more to learn was that after that in (graduate) classes I found that my English wasn't perfect, but I feel like I couldn't understand some of the lectures and I experienced difficulties especially with finals, so that motivated me to learn more, because at that stage I was really excited and very happy to know another language.*

*I felt very special when I first traveled to English speaking country and found that although I had never been there before I didn't feel totally lost because I could understand the language I could read the signs and talk to people in the airport to find a connecting flight, I think the whole experience of traveling to a foreign country and being able to function in the local language made me feel that knowing a foreign language is wonderful. That experience at the airport, just motivated me to learn more languages, not only English.*

By analysing Aurora's interview through the lenses of language, moments, and narrative processes and comparing the analysis with my own autobiography of language learning, I realize that my characteristics are most like to those of Aurora in terms of self-discipline, competitiveness, and being hard-working. Aurora calls herself a "self-disciplined learner" who strives to be the best and learn the grammar well. Like me, she is extrinsically driven by marks and academic ranking. We both have a reputation of hard work and perseverance. The following conversation from our interview indicates the value of this analysis:

But like in Question 4 you said that you did some stuff to learn grammar, but where did the motivation come from to read the grammar books by yourself?

*I think I was very self disciplined person; learner and I really want to be an excellent student I don't want to always be bad at English grammar.*

Do you think it's you or most Chinese students?

*Yes, also influenced by most of the Chinese students. Because I was studying like literally in one of the best high schools in my city, so my classmates are hard working, and if I don't work hard myself my scores will drop so that my rank in my class will drop, so...also there is competition; so I want to be good specially at English because I was always kind of good at it.*

For Aurora, the language learning quest seem to be an ongoing one. She continues to improve on the languages she knows and strives to obtain inspiration from her weaknesses by trying to overcome them. Similar to any other language learner, she has come up with quite a few theories on how a language is best learned or how motivation is maintained. She also appears to be competitive in other areas of life. When asked if she would ever want to learn other languages, Aurora writes “*Yes, knowing a new language can help me learn about another culture. And I am always interested in getting to know people from diversified cultures. In addition, knowing more languages can make one more competitive in the job market.*”

## Tanya's Story:

### Second Identity-Formation

I have constructed two titled stories out of Tanya's interview speech using the *lens of narrative processes*. For each story I followed the construction method introduced by McCormack (2000) where I identified *the orientation, the abstract, the evaluation and the coda*. These features helped me compose Tanya's main story parts namely the beginning, the middle and the end. The dominant theme throughout both stories was the struggle Tanya was facing at each stage of her journey in learning other languages with identity. That's why I have used the above title for Tanya's story using *the lens of language* and more specifically focusing on *what is not said* in her words.

The following is a prologue to her stories which in turn is created by *the lens of context (situation)*. I have used the context of my memory and her use of language namely show of feelings while speaking, to demonstrate my observation of Tanya. This attention to the way my participants use the languages they have learned is only natural to the subject of this research. A brief background has helped to set the scene for her story.

#### **First Encounter with Language Learning: *It's a Double-Edged Sword!***

Tanya reminds me of my other friend Elaheh whose story is also included in my research. Maybe it is the way she talks. Her tone of voice which becomes passionate when she talks about something that is close to her heart. She is born and raised in Macedonia until age 10 and then has immigrated with family to Canada and has remained here since then. She has obtained her B.A. in History and Comparative Literature and Civilizations with Honors and later her B.Ed and M.Ed. She calls herself a *visual person*

who is initially gravitated towards *western media*, wanting to know their *humour and culture*.

Through the lenses of *narrative processes and language usage* I have observed that Tanya has several opinions on language and language learning. She theorises that *language is culture* that she immerses herself in, enjoys, and lives out.

*I think that learning a language can be very exciting on the one hand because it really opens the door to new ways of expression, like new cultures, like new ways of thinking and being in the world but at the same time it can be very tedious.*

*There's all those words to learn and spellings and grammar and these things are difficult for me, and I really don't care too much for them at all. In fact, I could skip them entirely, if I could; but unfortunately I can't, so it's a double edged sword. I can't skip them, and definitely I think language is a door to a new culture I think that is probably my motivation, because I think I'm a curious person and I like new things. I just like finding out new things. So you have to just grin and bear it.*

*I think that language is culture, it communicates a lot of different things, like you are a second language speaker yourself; so you know this like when you try and translate a joke it's not because you cannot translate the words, it's because you cannot translate the culture and that part right there is a huge signal of how in your language you're using; you're communicating everything, you're communicating your morals, your ethics, the things that you find important. Even the way and the style of how you speak is very culture based, so for me I can't separate language and culture. I think they are like woven in together.*

I have also found that Tanya has some political sentiments when she talks how languages have become *ridiculous politically* when two same languages of Serbian and Croatian are identified as two different languages by the Macedonian government.

*Yugoslavia was a collection of different I guess Slavic groups of language and in addition to Macedonian , it's not terribly different it's still very easy to understand but I also can use Serbian. At Least I understood it so that's what I mean by a second language so that's now officially recognized as a language of its own but for Macedonian.*

*I mean it gets kind of ridiculous politically, because actually now there is Serbian, there's Croatian which is basically the same language; but for political reasons are recognized as two different languages, but they are all both Serbians so even though officially I hope you know what I mean.*

Tanya's first encounter with second language learning is a bitter-sweet event. On the one hand the age at which she is exposed to a new language, allows her to feel elated and willing to absorb all that is offered to her as knowledge to fulfill her *curiosity*. On the other hand she is still emotionally vulnerable because of the age factor. At the end, the age has become a winning factor for her both intellectually and emotionally. She was ten at the time.

*When I first arrived, when I came here I think it was in June, in 1989 and my parents right away put me in summer school. So, you know, so the first experience that I have of school was summer school and it was awesome. I got to play around and in that first environment I learned right away in a classroom setting, because I was learning English as an immigrant student and then those English*

*courses continued and I would get pulled out of my regular English class and I would get pulled out or I think I got pulled out of French and they put me in English class, like you know ESL Classes with this really nice lady teaching me English, but what I meant by “self taught” is that I was very curious about everything that was happening around me, and I was always very interested in everything particularly in the western media. I think I’m a very visual person, so I immediately gravitated towards television, and I remember all of these funny shows, shows that were funny at the time, and I wanted so badly to understand what it meant and what they were talking about and what the jokes were and so as the days went on and on I was slowly building a better vocabulary, like I would learn what one thing meant and it would literally imprint itself on my mind and I’m not sure how to explain that I would just soak it up like a sponge, like I remember, I remember remembering if that makes any sense so I think I really pushed myself. I really did.*

After this initial positive experience with the new language and the environment, Tanya is hit by the harsh reality of *children as mini adults* and the fact that if she remains speechless in the new language she is going to suffer. So she decides to overcome this weakness by *making friends* and learning the new tongue. Using the lens of narrative processes I have composed this part of her language life story.

*I think children are mini adults and in this particular situation, I didn’t speak any English. I couldn’t really communicate with my fellow peers at that time. They were probably about 10 or 11 at the time, and nobody really played with me and I was all by myself, and I would see my brother during recess and I remember one*

*time they started to like make fun of him but I didn't really understand what they were saying. So I hit one of the kids, unfortunately for that particular kid, or that particular group of bullies, they didn't know that I was quite the tomboy back home and that I used to regularly beat up boys who made fun of my little brother. So I kind of beat them up and I came home and my dad said congratulations you are such a good girl for defending your brother! [laugh] I remember that motivated me strongly, to try and understand what the insults were on the playground and after that I made friends with this amazing person [...]and she became my friend and she invited me to her house, and she would help me out with stuff and she would just be with me and I think I learned a lot with her, I learned a lot of things that I wouldn't necessarily learn in the classroom like expressions and how to be friends in Canada because sometimes it was different it was definitely different, people were different.*

**When the reality hits: language and racism/** *there's me and there's the norm; I want to blend*

But later on as Tanya grows older and becomes more aware of herself and her social surrounding. She now faces a different kind of reality, but this is new and at times harsh truths do not discourage her from learning new things. Instead, she is now energised to learn the norms of the society by *infiltrating some secret culture or language* namely that of the west.

*I wasn't inhibited by: "oh! no one is going to hire me! I have to learn perfect English, I was thinking ey [talking with passion] I want to read my books, I want to read a book. I want to watch television and understand on my own. Those were*

*my motivators, not so much the pressure. But later on the pressure came, and I started to learn. I remember at age 15-16, I realized I better lose this accent, or I better try to lose as much of the accent as I can, because I want to blend. I purposefully seek out people who are well-versed and I watch how they speak, and I observe the words that they use, and I particularly pay attention to the cultural context of the language, things like humour, and where emphasis is placed and the kinds of morals or ethics that are communicated through the language, because very often I feel kind of disconnected from that, I mean as the years continue on in my life I feel less and less [disconnected] because I'm becoming more like my environment but it's always there in my mind you know to observe how is it done here because I feel always this connection, there's me and there's the norm, the standard mainstream way of doing things. Not that I'm that different from it, I don't feel that different from it, but I still feel somehow disconnected. Not so much to become the norm, but more like, it motivates me because I feel like I'm infiltrating some secret thing, [laugh] you know some secret culture or language. If that makes sense?*

*[ . . . ] I think my biggest fear is that I appear [meaningful pause] stupid, and I try to do a lot of things to kind of prevent that but I don't think it's necessarily always the language. [ . . . ]*

*I honestly didn't think that I had an accent till I went to university, I assumed I must have had one when I was younger, 15-16, because I could hear my father and I could hear my mom and they obviously had one and no one ever really mentioned it to me. I always figured that Toronto was such a multicultural city*

*that there were a lot worse. But when I went to university in London Ontario, I lived in my 2nd year with these two girls; my two friends and they both told me that, they told me two very hurtful things; I was very hurt at that time. They told me, number 1, that I have a noticeable accent, and the 2nd thing they told me is that I wasn't white, so I had a mini crisis for a day, and thought: "oh my god what color am I"? they were very white, like they were very white, and it was sad, it's ok though it fuelled my fire. So from that point on , I thought ok so maybe I'm not white, maybe I'm not free of an accent but that doesn't mean I'm just going to lie down and stop, so I think it was almost necessary for me because that's when I decided: "so what"? My answer to that question was 'so what'?*

Tanya is *impatient for laborious tasks* like reading a book to learn a language. One reason might be the age she was exposed to the second language. According to the lateralization theory the left hemisphere designed for learning languages closes its facility after puberty (Brown, 2007). She came to Canada as a child and as she says she was *absorbing everything like a sponge*.

*I feel that I'm very impatient for things like this (reading books). The best way that I have learned a language in addition to English is by literally living there, and I'll give you an example. I participated twice, two summers I went to Quebec, once I stayed in a small town called [unfathomable], and the second summer I stayed in an even smaller town called Chicoutimi and when I was there it was complete and total French immersion, I mean nobody in the town spoke English and if they did, then they were not telling us and so wherever you went to the schools to anywhere you had to speak French, and if you wanted to order a drink*

*or scrambled eggs or sunny side up you had to learn the French equivalent to that and the second biggest thing with that program and what it did for me , it kind of squashed my shyness because as with English, in French I also started to worry right away am I pronouncing it correctly, and eventually after me being there a couple of weeks of being shy I got to the point that I really don't care anymore I just want what I want and can I please have it. And that was probably the best way, you know as soon as I was outside of that very quickly , once the program finished and I returned home, I started to kind of , not lose the language, because I'm sure I could very easily go back to it, but with you know some practice, but definitely I stopped practicing and I stopped having an interest, it takes a lot of effort to go someplace and to find someone to speak French with and to keep some kind of a regular schedule just so you don't lose whatever skills you have gained and so I always hoped that one day we go to Montreal because I really want to be surrounded by people who speak French and I want people to be rude to me for not speaking in French so that I'm forced to learn this language and I want to learn it. I feel that it would be only of benefit to me.*

I have created the following epilogue to Tanya's story using the lenses of active listening, language, context and moments.

Tanya's initial encounter with language learning is both a negative and a positive event. On the one hand, she experiences *summer school* where she can play and satisfy her curiosity about everything around her. On the other hand, she has this experience with bullying, that energizes her to make new friends and to learn the new language effectively. These early experiences though, might have made her vulnerable in her

second identity as a Canadian. At times, she seems to be apprehensive about the idea of becoming *different from the norm* and she talks of her desire to *blend* with the rest of the society in which she lives in. She has a fun-loving, adventurous and headstrong spirit that makes her *impatient for the laborious task* of learning a new language. Instead, as she has proven with her learning of French, she prefers to live the language/*culture* as she names it in order to learn it and use it.

### Biljana's Story:

#### A Different Outlook to Language Learning Phenomenon

To set the scene for the readers so they explore Biljana's story more closely I am providing the following prologue.

Focusing too much on "motivation" and its significance in my participants' lives I almost lost vision on other possible themes and understandings emerging from their language learning experiences. The case of Biljana is one such example of a researcher's vision blurred by bias. Talking to Biljana for the first interview, I was shocked to find her different views about language learning in stark contrast with my mostly positive outlook. My initial impression from the first interview was that she was totally unmotivated, negative, and distracted. Since I had this tunnel vision of looking only for motivation in Biljana's answers, I missed out on the possibility of a new understanding of the language learning phenomenon. Therefore, the first time around I did not probe for more explanation of her ideas.

I first met Biljana at an art exhibition where she had demonstrated her politically-charged art. Soon after, I approached her to see whether she would be interested in participating in my study. I was surprised that I did not realize, during the first interview,

how her views on language learning were also political in nature. Our second interview provided a rich conversation in which I was able to analyze her views in many varied areas, such as politics, English language, and people. I utilized the five different lenses, mentioned previously, to gain a deeper understanding of her interesting perspectives.

The following is Biljana's story from two interviews.

***It Was a Really Mechanical Process.***

Biljana is born and raised in former Yugoslavia. She has immigrated to Canada to study art after graduation from high school in her home country. Whenever Biljana spoke in English my impression was that she is dispassionate about the subject; but according to herself, people speaking Serbian only use one tone of voice; *it is pretty flat* as she puts it. She thinks that English people speak as if they are *singing*.

*I didn't know any languages at all but, because I lived in Bosnia for 8 years, when I moved to Serbia they were already learning French from second grade I think; and I came in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and that's when they got additional English. So I had to learn both [English and French] at the same time. I was learning automatically; learning it [English] like mathematics, word by word, and [with] grammar, I was having my own formula how to connect it .... It wasn't, how can I say, it wasn't just a natural process, it was a really mechanical process. I learned everyday this many words and then I see how grammar is supposed to work, so I connect them like the dots. I was not interested to do it on my own. I was always doing it in classes. I wasn't really learning it in Serbia because I didn't need it and here I was learning it because I needed it to function. That's all.*

Through the lens of active listening I observed that she contradicts herself when she says:

*I was open and excited to speak another language, and actually I could meet people from other countries and talk to them, which never happened to me before.*

In response to my probing whether the excitement to speak other languages inspired her enough to see a movie or grab a book to read in English she says:

*Movie yes, but book; I don't know about it! I was young and was riding all over the place for me it was more interesting to talk [to] other people, but not reading as much.*

Biljana continues to be *excited and open* about learning English when she first come to Canada and attends government-run immigrant English classes but her source of interest in learning English changes color.

*But when I was learning ESL as a program through immigration, that was another thing, that was helping people to integrate in a culture, and finding a job and doing fine and that was amazing, there was nothing behind it.*

She is satisfied with government classes because there are no political or business purposes to them. In a way she sees government on her side, acclimatizing to a new culture, looking for jobs and surviving in a new environment. Whereas later, she has a totally different experience with institutes where their main goal seems to be about profiting from other people's dependability on survival tools like language and caring less what is going to happen to them in the future.

### ***That Cherry on the Cake!***

Using the tools of augmentation and description to the parts of her interview about her experience with ESL classes in Canada, I have created Biljana's story on the business aspect of some English institutes. Having become disinterested in English classes at the university, she had intended to get her Bachelor of Fine Arts , but refused to take the exit writing test to receive her diploma.

*I was really proud when I didn't have to write an English writing test at Concordia and when I won over the system. They asked me to do it, and were in fact insistent but I was informed so well about the system that I went against them. It went back and forth with the dean of Concordia in fine arts, and finally she realized that exposing them would cost so much more than letting one student go without English writing test.*

*It's very political. I don't think that they were so worried about my life and how I am going to live, find a job for my career. They were concerned about getting money, and recruiting one more foolish immigrant and correspond in a way that they want me. To be part of the system, and if I am not part of the system it doesn't matter if I finish my university in three years and in English, it really didn't matter if I didn't pass the final test, it's like that cherry on the cake. My diploma was supposed to be for all the work I had done before that, not for the exit English writing test. They were going that far to restrain me from my diploma if I didn't do it.*

Although, I failed to ask Biljana what she meant by the expression I used as the title for the story above, I could still deduce some meaning from it. She might have meant that *the cherry on the cake* was her diploma, but in order to have it, she had to have passed a

writing test. It also could symbolize the fight over it as everyone wants to have that cherry on the cake to themselves. For Biljana that cherry could be her diploma and for that institution that cherry could be the money they receive for the last writing test she takes.

*I lost interest in attending ESL classes that are forcing me to express myself in a certain way. They said to me, this is the way how we do it. That means that they did not only force me to express myself in English in a certain way, but they also forced me to change my mentality, to change my being (silence; I sigh). They change my personality basically because like once you express yourself in English you have to sing. They have a certain way of telling things. I find it is a singing. That if you are speaking in Serbian, it is pretty flat. you have to use words in order to express yourself and you don't need to sing. So like if you say in English 'why' you sing 'Why' (she says this word with a rise in her voice) or you say 'why' (she uses a different intonation) it means different thing. In Serbian we just have 'why'.*

I can attest to Biljna's observation of how speaking in English is like *singing* and how it is different from other languages spoken. In fact, part of the popularity of English language among Iranians might be that the spoken English has a flare and vivacity about it that is lacked in Farsi, their native language. I have witnessed my Iranian classmates on many occasions displaying discomfort and shyness in imitating that flash of intonation and energy while speaking English. On one hand, the ups and downs of the spoken English could be a source of prestige and show-off for people whose native language lacks that vigour like most Iranians I have met. On the other hand, it could be frustrating

and intimidating for people like Biljana with the same one tone language background to have to sound like singing when they are least prepared.

***Language is Technology. That's My Theory.***

Through active listening, I observed that Biljana is actually introducing a theory about the nature of a language and how a language is supposed to be used. She theorizes that *language is technology* and one can only use it as a tool to communicate meaning, but one cannot change and should not *change one's mentality* if they learn a second language. She is a poet and writes creative poems in English. She claims that she uses English as a tool to write with her Serbian mentality and that is what has made her special in creative writing.

*I know that my English never will be perfect for a long time. I will never ever be able to be English. I have to be English in order to speak English. I cannot imagine someone Canadian coming and learning Serbian and understanding all the jokes and me understanding all their jokes. We can communicate perfectly, but there is always going to be this gap. So I mean I'm not even thinking anymore that I'm going to master it to the point. There is no point. I mean maybe my kids, if I have one. Unfortunately, I don't know, I would love to beat the demons, and you know, but it doesn't work like that. I'm not going to stop speaking or learning or doing things, but I mean I'm not 12 years old and someone has to motivate me and tell me a story about how my English is going to be perfect, because I know it's not going to be. It's just up to me and up to people around me to integrate into each other's lives and communicate and it's a good will you know.*

*Language is technology actually. And if we cannot, we have to adapt it. And for me, I was 21 when I came here and it was very hard to adapt to some things. I was always translating from Serbian to English. Even when I'm speaking now; I'm thinking in English and translating into Serbian. It is very, very hard and frustrating and I realize that this is going to stay like this for the rest of my life, because I was not less than 14 when I came. So this is a line people say you can transform in doing the other mentality.*

She finds it very frustrating not being able to think in English without translating into Serbian every sentence she wants to say and the fact that it is going to stay with her for the rest of her life. She comforts herself by theorizing that language can be used as *a tool, a technology* and therefore, she does not wish to change her identity as a Serbian to speak fluent English. Instead, she uses English to showcase her Serbian mentality in her creative writing.

*I am using language as a tool, but I am not using the language's mentality as a tool. I am using Slavic mentality and just expressing it in a language. Language is a technology, and I've been forced to change my mentality and my thoughts and my feelings to put it together. If the language is coming from England, then I should become English in order to be perfect. Well I am sorry, I'm never going to be English, I don't want to be. I am Serbian, and I am connecting just with the technology of the language that comes from England. That's my theory.*

***The Envelope is More Important than Inside.***

The title of this story summarises the way Biljana sees English Imperialism penetrating into teaching English as a second language; how *it is not anymore about language in English*; but about *training* English students to write like English people do. And the way English people write according to Biljana is more about having a beautiful wrapping than what you really want to say. So as soon as Biljana fathoms this reality, she loses motivation and the struggle begins. She is no more interested in passing one last writing test to obtain her diploma. Instead, she forges a fight to bypass the test to show to the authority that she has a brain of her own and deserves the diploma without having to pass the writing test.

*Well, about these English tests, or the way I've been taught English from day one since I came to Canada, at first I was very enthusiastic and then later on at the university in order to get diploma I have to express myself in a certain way. So they were teaching the most ridiculous things in the world, like somebody who is going to tell me and numbers of other students, how we are supposed to start a paragraph. How they're supposed to write middle, start middle and then the last part of summary how they are supposed to start and end it. **Basically** there is a formula for everything, and they tell us which kind of words we are going to use. For example, they tell you...hum.. 'Finally, however, ...' I don't know these group of seven to ten words that we're supposed to... **Basically** they want you to use those words to make it beautiful. It doesn't matter what you say, just make it beautiful. So **basically**, I'm exposed to the mentality, I am exposed to ...It's a brainwash. Like become English. Become what we want you to become and think*

*like this, and we are going to give you your diploma. It is not anymore about language in English, it is about how I am supposed to answer, how I am supposed to write in order to have this good package so they're proud of me, they're not embarrassed of me, if I express and formulate the page in a way that 'I' want to.*

Through the lens of language, I am drawn to the repetitive use of the word *basically* by Biljana, as if she is referring to the heart of the matter, in this case, being brainwashed by English mentality. She is using the word (*basically*) to trivialize any other possible assumptions.

*In some countries it's very polite to burp and people even fart, I am very sorry and eat with the fingers, that's very polite. So are you going to bring these people and teach them how people in England eat? It reminds me [of] people in 14 century eating with their fingers and we ate with a fork and a golden fork. I don't think that me, coming from that culture should be taught by English who ate with their fingers. Yes it is [English imperialism]. And it is very expanded to colonies, there is Canada, so and it's expanded in many ways and people just don't see it they just swallow it, because they wanna work, they wanna have a job, they wanna eat , because they wanna be accepted.*

Biljana is furious at the fact that she has to act in a certain way to be *accepted* by English people. It almost sounds demeaning to her to have to comply to English rules, be it the language or social ones. She attempts to rise above that unbecoming feeling by attacking the English people's culture. Her overall response to English Imperialism, though has some bearings to reality, can in fact be a manifestation of a culture shock. Her

reaction to this culture shock is comparable to my Star Bucks mental monologue accounted in *My Story* section.

*Who am I gonna be accepted by? Natives? Whose country is this? Because there is English colony still, that's why we are swallowing it. We have no choice. I know it's harsh Mehrnaz, but I am fighting with it for so long and I don't think someone who has a brain to get diploma, doesn't have the ability to express themselves the way they want. So they have to fucking teach me , sorry to use, how to put it together in one page. So my brain is good enough to get all these, but my brain is not good enough to get this great envelop so they are going to train me at the end. You know, the wrap up. So I was against it, I wasn't ready to do this [writing test].*

Although Biljana seems uninterested in learning English, she has strong views, negative ones, about promoting it to accrue profits for institutes that teach ESL and British imperialism, where it became the lingua franca of the empire's colonies.

### Elaheh's Story:

#### Passion for Literature

Elaheh is a former classmate of mine from when I was studying English language and literature in Iran more than ten years ago. We have kept in touch since then, started our own families, continued our education, became mothers and pursued careers; she in her hometown in Iran and I as an immigrant in Canada. Before I interview Elaheh, I knew first hand that she is passionate about learning English, literature and her profession which is teaching at university. I was assuming that her passion to learn English and to teach it must have helped her to master the language. When I interviewed her, I was not

as sure as before. Brown (2007) declares that it is a simplistic idea to assume that motivation alone is enough for mastering a second language. I have not edited her words from the survey or the interview to remain faithful to her original voice, but I am all the same concerned that as the researcher of this thesis I can have the opportunity to edit and refine my voice.

Elaheh comes from a traditional family from a traditional city in Iran, Kerman. Her parents have valued the education of their children to the extent that they have spent money on sending them away to other cities to go to prestigious universities around Iran. In her own words from a follow-up questionnaire she declares that her parents education is *necessary and had to be done perfectly*. Additional languages were also *necessary along side education*. The supportive attitude of Elaheh's parents towards learning other languages is in contrast to her views about how it is perceived in the society of Iran:

*Knowing other languages is not only ignored, but also rejected highly by the educational system [in Iran]. The only appreciated foreign language is Arabic , which is the language of the formal religion [of Islam] in Iran. However, the private sectors , knowing the significance of learning other languages, encourage the establishment of various language institutes.*

In the interview she continues elaborating on language learning experience in Iran:

*It depends on the country you are living, in Iran. We don't have too much English atmosphere around, so you know, the foreigners, the tourists to come, these are the speakers of English or the other languages, that can be available in the country in one way but we do not have them, you know the country is not the*

*multicultural or multilingual language, most of all the people speak Farsi; the different dialects and so we didn't have the people from other languages or other countries that speak English around a lot.*

In the following passage I have created Elaheh's story of language learning from the interview questions/answers regarding the ways she has maintained the passion for learning. Initially, it was the language and the want to talk in the language that motivated Elaheh and then later on literature and the love of managing a group of people and teaching was added to her motivational arsenal. She also theorises that you need to be an adult and well-versed enough in order to teach yourself a language. She agrees with this brief summary of her experience with me in the interview. These are her words that explain her journey.

***My Personal Interest, Something Within Me***

*I started to learn English, when I was very young, and you know the self-teaching I think it can mostly be helpful when the individual has come to the age to understand how to manage things for himself or herself and to choose the proper books, and to know the ways of self-reading. These are not suitable for a child, for example 7 or 8. Of course it's [self teaching of a second language] very important. Yes, first the language school and then when I learned something about English and then I went to self reading, and self-practicing at home.*

She tells her story of how she combined her leadership zeal to her love for literature and how these two passions fuelled her fire of wanting to learn English as a second language. In fact, these fervours completed a circle.

*Maybe it refers to my personal nature, you know, or maybe my personal interest, something within me. I'm a teacher now, and there had always been [She giggles] an inner want, an inner will, to manage a group. When I was a child and it wasn't a matter of speaking English or learning another language, I always had some children around, and I just kept sitting them down and speaking for them and maybe on the blackboard, I taught them something and I tried to be the center in the group and talk for them and they listen or they write something and then I lead them. So when I went to the English learning institute and I couldn't talk in the class with the people from the different ages... we had a housewife, who had the children the same age as mine in the class and so it was very difficult for me to speak English or to participate in the class discussions in such a mixed class. So in loneliness I could compensate for it. I could not be silent, I could not better to say repress [sigh] this desire within myself again to be a leader [giggles] in a group, so I tried to do it in loneliness. So the mirror can help me and I could imagine, that this is a class and the people are all sitting here from different ages, and now I'm talking, the inner desire within me. So this continued even into the university days from the first years when I saw myself a little weaker than others. I tried to talk and I gave many lectures in loneliness Mehrnaz, so maybe this is something very personal within me.*

*For the beginning, it was only English and then the teaching could be teaching everything. You know I was a child and I loved it and I didn't know anything about the other languages. I think that if I was a teacher, a mathematics teacher again I felt the same happiness and I could feel myself a successful one*

*and as successful as I feel myself now. You know that from the time I taught and I talked with a tourist and I was very happy or I went to the English institute again I was enjoying English. [At the time]it was not literature at all. I love literature but I used to read in Farsi, from the university days the love of literature and then after that the love of teaching came and maybe a motivating factor, but in the beginning it was only English.*

Later she tells of her initial interest in English as a child and a young adult and how it is comparable to the experience of her daughters with the new language.

*[Sighs] What motivated me in English? [pause] The ability to talk, in another language was, and of course with other people. And even for my family, I was ten years old and then you come from school home...it is what is happening for my daughters now. They go to the English class every day and they come home, in the afternoon and they are happy. They are just practicing, because they enjoy, and I feel very proud, and after the meal they say 'water please', instead of say (same sentence ) in Farsi, so that's sort of I'm feeling ...hum... a demanding person, even at a young age you can talk in another language. At that time, I could not feel that 'well I'm learning the language and now I can continue it in the university and it can be a profession for me', not at all, just one word one sentence and you come home and then you show it to others and the people go to the parties and talk over there, and this little by little became a matter of self confidence even for me, and I think it's the motivating factor if you are talking about the beginning.*

*You know, I studied English at university, and so during the summer time we were away from the classes and as far as we are living in a society where language English does not exist on the street, and the house or in your public life, so everything is in Farsi. So then you are out of the class and if you do not try to self practice, so you are far away from it. It happens usually that in the summer after exams I was tired. So there was sort of a repulsion towards English for me, for maybe one month I didn't have any practice. I was interested in literature. So I read novels in Farsi as a self-interest, you know, but then again, at the beginning I had to come back to the journey as you use the word. So I remember exactly that, reading, and from listening to the news in English. It helped me again because I was interested in the news. I listened to the news every day in Farsi, and also I read them in the newspaper. So I knew what was happening in the world whenever I listened to BBC world news. I knew that they were talking about for example, the United States of America, and maybe it's from the White House. I knew exactly what was happening over there, because I know the news from some other sources, from other Persian sources. So it was very good for me and I could just find the equivalent words that I read them just the morning in the news from the paper in Iran and I'm listening to the exact same news from original source, so I could just make parallels, finding the equivalent of the word and I find it interesting for me so again words sort of pushing me back into the area of learning English.*

You could hear the enthusiasm in Elaheh's voice, a possible indication of interest in the tasks she had chosen to follow, of her motivation and enjoyment. Using *the lens of*

*language*, I noticed that Elaheh uses the words *you know* quite often; an indication that she trusts me as someone having the same knowledge and experience as a language teacher or learner; this is what McCormack (2001) calls *common knowledge*. She continues:

*As far as I'm remembering from the time I started learning English, by going to these English language institutes. So it was a continuous time, and then reading magazines, yes [a sparkle of interest flashes through her tone] the time that even much more before going to university, from the time I went to university as far as I continued in the English, then in MA in English literature, and then teaching in university English literature. I was always in contact with English all day long, you know, and there was not even one day interruption, but I'm now just going back into the school days when I was 16 or maybe 15. That was because of the entrance exam for the university. I stopped going to English school, the English institute. So after the entrance exam, I felt myself really far from the English field and do you know what attracted me again? It's really interesting and I'm reviewing my memories it's the Reader's Digest magazine [she says that with a rise in her voice, a chuckle showing eagerness], and so I had an older sister and she had these magazines, someone brought them for her, from abroad, and [sudden rise of voice showing enthusiasm] so I loved the pictures and I loved the stories, and just talking to you I can visualize even all the copies and all the pictures in them, and it was a wonderful time.*

### ***The Students are Feeling a Real Obstacle, the Anxieties***

And when Elaheh mastered English and established a career for herself as an English literature professor, she decided to assist her students by encouraging them to set aside their apprehensiveness and establishing a friendly environment in her classes.

*You know, my career, as an English instructor, well professionally happened after finishing university; becoming a university instructor; also before that, I had some experiences of being a tutor, you know, teaching privately at home. They are not very serious; so in the first, I'm remembering even now, I'm just repeating it every term, and every day with my students, the students are feeling a real obstacle. It's a psychological one, the anxieties, and it's very important because in our society the girls and boys are separated from each other from the time that they go to school. Only in the kindergarten they are in mixed classes, so they are separated in the teaching atmosphere and then they go to university and now they are sitting in these classes and so they feel the anxiety when they are opposed the opposite gender, and not only the girls. The boys are the same, only some of them are very confident and have a good English. They can talk without fear of anything. But just suppose that a girl coming from a small town, you know, these are even not in English, she cannot talk in even Farsi in the class. And the boys are similar with that and now I'm asking her to give her lecture in English and to participate in the class in English and she is in the very primary levels and she is not good at English and she is just learning it in the class, so I think that the important thing for me and I always feel it very necessary to take away these obstacles to take away these anxieties, by creating a very*

*peaceful atmosphere so that the students would feel at ease. Maybe you ask how? By creating that atmosphere; for example you call them by their first name instead of by their family name. It is maybe very usual for you but in Iran it is not something that is common and usually the teachers call them by their last name. And I try to tell them to be at ease and we're all the same and so you've got to talk as if... it's a common expression here...[as if] 'I take their hand step by step' and try to treat them as a little child when he or she wants to learn the alphabet, in his own language. So in this way, it is important to try and take away the anxiety within themselves. I make an evaluation for my class and I will ask them about the positive or negative points. Most of the students account this friendly feeling in my class a very positive one and most of them, even always after they are graduated and they see me somewhere on the street they say that 'we really felt at home in your class and it helps us a lot to learn English', so yes. It shows that.*

Elaheh is passionate about her career. Her passion is contagious to her students as they have turned a mere class presentation of some drama into a university wide play where other students and professors are invited to watch. Elaheh's students have set up a university blog by which they regulate different language discussion groups and language learning classes. Elaheh has used the language she has learned to fulfill her competence in other areas such as leadership and literature. She has developed literary courses, translated literary works from English, has published some work in national magazines and has attended international conferences to enhance her skills and share her knowledge.

## My Story

Talking about myself has been relatively easy for me, especially since I started to write in my Persian blog and then in my English and French one. I have no fear of sharing my experiences and opinions about life with others, perhaps as a way to practice my social skills in a cyberspace. Ironically my cultural background has a role. Historically people of Iran have been under constant invasion by outside enemies and in order to preserve their identities they have had to remain silent for long periods of time. They have also had to resort to dishonesty about themselves or their true intentions as a result of having dictatorial regimes as governments. Since coming to Canada, I along with many other immigrants to free western countries, coupled with ready access to social media, have become much more vocal . Although, still many Iranians write anonymously on the web, I have less worries about disclosing my identity (Milani, 1992; Nafisi, 2003).

While I was doing research for this master's thesis, reading and analysing my participants' utterances, I found myself remembering my own experiences with language learning. Each participant sparked a memory of the past relevant to their own experiences. Using writing as part of my methodology, I started writing down these memories as soon as they came to me.

In the following pages, I have woven my narrative as another participant in this research project to the accounts that have inspired me to write my story. I have created stories within stories. I have used a chronological order for my story so that it has a traditional narrative structure (McCormack, 2001).

## **From Disappointment to Competition**

One of my earliest drives for learning English was to be able to continue in the BA program. I remember when I first got into university to study English language and literature, how I was expected to know the language fluently so I could function in class. I was really disappointed at the level of my English. I always had high marks in English in high school, but still could not speak the language fluently. I remember clearly my first feelings of disappointment and apprehensiveness while learning to speak English.

Unfortunately the entrance examination to universities in Iran, Konkoor, is not necessarily designed to test the knowledge of candidates for the program in which they are interested. Like many other students, I was not able to function in English, let alone studying heavy literary texts. Many students would take a semester or two off, and would focus on learning English, before continuing with their studies. Since it was hard enough to get into universities, and I had already stayed behind my fellow high school graduates for one year, I was advised by my brother not to take the semester off and instead, reduce the course load so I can focus more on the English part. So the impulse to continue came from the goal of staying in the competition and to move with the flow. Then I worked to get high marks to continue to show others as well as myself that I am a competent and intelligent person.

At some point this effort to upgrade my knowledge changed into a game of finding ways to improve my English the fastest way possible. For this, I would go to extra English classes and would consult with any language learner I could, to see what strategies they have used for learning. Now I realize that I was accumulating and using a

stash of different strategies from everywhere to learn the language as fast as I possibly could.

### **Baby-Talk, Really?**

My father, a retired army officer who prided himself on once passing his final English exam with an A+, used to encourage me to talk by saying: “It is just like how a baby starts talking. You need to talk like a baby and do not pay attention to whatever mistakes you make!”

With due respect to my father’s good intentions, I have to say that he missed the point that I was a grown up whose sense of self-esteem would resist presenting herself stuttering over words she did not even know correctly. Brown (2007) introduces “task self-esteem” to emphasise that the student’s assignments should be in accordance to their competence to give them proper self-esteem to continue learning (p. 155). I could not talk because I had a small vocabulary.

Tanya’s struggle with *appearing stupid* reminds me of the following story.

In my more advanced classes where the teacher deliberately started the class with small talk, I would have prepared and memorized jokes and anecdotes from my favourite magazine *Reader's Digest*. I did not care if they were amusing or if anybody laughed at the punch lines, which for the most part were culturally different from what we Iranians were used to. I particularly remember an episode when after a couple of such insipid class starter yarns, the teacher very bluntly asked me to not tell any more of these chestnuts, for which I felt disappointed. Instead of losing hope, I started to think of other stories, which had happened to me during my absence from class, and most importantly, I would

prepare for them so I could ask questions about the expressions for which I had not found a corresponding word in English.

Now that I look back at that experience, being exposed to polite Canadian ways, I question my way of ignoring other classmates' interest and only thinking of my progress in learning by only talking about what mainly interested me. This is where I feel I have grown through the process of my research, becoming ethically sensitive to other people's presence.

### **Learning Environment: Cliché or Reality?**

I was living in a non-English speaking country. I remember all the tasks I consciously chose for myself and followed through to make sure that I perfectly learn the languages I liked. Oxford (1990) duly refers to “practicing naturalistically” and “code-switching,” as respectively the two cognitive and compensation strategies in her famous “strategy classification system” (as cited in Brown, 2007. p. 141).

I used to talk to myself, or think in English during otherwise wasted periods journeying back and forth between home and school on bus while in Iran. I often copied words in Farsi-my first language- for which I did not know a translation so that once I got home I looked them up in both my dictionaries, a Farsi-to-English and an English-to-English one. I used commercial books, a recording on tape, and repeated and imitated native speakers' speech. I kept long lists of words and their meanings in English in different notebooks. I strove to provide myself with opportunities to practice my English. I often hired tutors, joined communicative language classes, talked with my friends or with people around the world online.

Brown (2007) introduces “communicative language teaching” (p. 18) as an eclectic mix of the improvements on previous methods into the genuine uses of a second language. His emphasis on the variability of learners and approaches and the uneasy task of learning another language, reminds me of additional strategies I used in my never-ending, and breathtaking journey acquiring different languages.

In different times and circumstances, I have cheered myself on. One very recent example is my experience with learning French. I have been studying French for about 10 years now, some of which have been less intense and focused than the others. I have never had a chance to learn French in an immersion environment. I have used an arsenal of strategies to keep on learning despite a lack of pull from the outside to use the language.

When I think back at the languages I have acquired, or the ones I am going to learn, I see an interesting pattern. I have acquired English in Iran, and mastered French while in China, and I am going to study Chinese or Spanish here in Canada!

There is some research on the role of informal environment and the formal one like language classes in efficient language learning (Krashen & Seliger, 1975, 1976). What these studies suggest is that there are many underlying, interconnected, and disparate factors in second language acquisition in various environments. Overall, it is a simplistic assumption that the best way to learn a language is to attend the country where that language is spoken. The amount of interaction one undertakes in that language, self-study, intense focus and involvement in the process as defined by the “flow theory” are also critical in acquiring a second language (Brown, 2007. p. 174). My personal experience for one is a reliable example of these theories.

## **Language Learning as a Hobby!**

In the following paragraphs is my story of hard work and perseverance whose writing is inspired by Aurora's narrative.

Two years before I come back to Canada to study my master's program, I was studying French intensely in China while teaching in an Ontario off-shore school. I would spend several hours everyday after school, to learn French through commercial books. I would go on two-hour bus trips to another city to study French with a French university professor every weekend for three hours. It had become a hobby for me beside my profession and I enjoyed learning it despite the exhausting trips and after work hours that could have been used to rest and relax. I remember how I was excited and mentally satisfied on my way back from my private classes despite the rough bus ride and the long trip back and forth. My biggest incentive for trips to Beijing on our longer holidays was to visit the French center, read magazines, borrow books and see movies in French.

Suddenly awakened by Tanya's remark on her interest in culture as a motivating factor to learn English, I now see where my impulse for accessing French material might have come from. Although I anticipated using my French to get my qualifications for teaching in French immersion system once back in Canada, I did not see it as a big drive to continue learning despite the lack of resources in French and the huge amount of adversities to find tutors while in China.

In the survey, Aurora mentions that one way she would suggest to other language learners is to read extensively in the new language as a way to build their vocabulary. I realize that has been the way I have improved my French dramatically, by reading the

works of Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, Khalil Gibran and so forth, in French, and building my skill through their authentic language model.

Now that I look back at my experience of learning French in China, I think that the learning in itself was a drive for me. I enjoyed learning something new . So in a way progress and using my new competence in the language I was learning gave me reason to continue.

### **A Fire Fuelled by Culture**

For the title of this section I deliberately wanted to use an expression I learned from Tanya's interview. I have always enjoyed learning how to use the words and expressions I have discovered. It shows to myself that I am still on the learning path and how conscious I am in this process.

When Tanya talked about her passion for the culture represented through books and movies; I suddenly realize that my craze for newly released movies or recently published award-winning books as a means to encourage myself to pick up learning where I last left it, is in fact a thirst for cultural fare for my soul. As I write these lines, I realize how living in Iran, under censorship and thrashing of western culture by government has fuelled my fire to crave for it.

Another interesting epiphany is remembering Elaheh's words talking passionately about the times when her fire would be fuelled by receiving Reader's Digest magazine from her sister's friend living abroad.

Then again I remember my university years in Iran, how happy I was when reading this particular magazine learning everyday English words and expressions and how sad I would become once I realized it is no more coming to our university as a result

of restricting policies of some ignorant government officials. But then it also fuelled my desire to seek out other universities in town with more relaxed policies and request to borrow the magazine for a couple of hours. Although this story might sound strange to people living in progressive countries, it sounds like everyday life to me, at least it used to feel like that. In Iran the high rate of population coupled with political censorship and governmental ignorance in differentiating what is knowledge and what is not makes it hard for people who seek it .

Still to this day, I seek out newly released prize-winning books or movies in the language I have learned feeling pride and joy that I could understand them with my new skills . It is now almost four years since I have started writing in my three blogs each in a language I had known or acquired so that I keep myself enthused. By writing in my English and French blogs I have avoided “language attrition” and therefore avoided forgetting what I have already acquired in these languages. By writing in my Farsi web log, I fight the “subtractive bilingualism” (Brown, 2007, pp. 95-96) and try to keep my native language healthy and live

As a literature major I was interested in the language itself, interesting-looking words, awe-inspiring sentences as well as the content: Western culture and ways of life. I was surprised that Aurora was not interested in the fact that some TV channels have dialogue containing “perfect English” as it could help her improve-- what I have been dying for while in Iran- -listening to English to learn new words and expressions. But I didn't talk about it in the interview. I somehow failed to show my surprise. I think that is part of my personality which has also penetrated in my second identity with English.

According to Brown (2007) second identity is at the heart of culture learning or what some call *acculturation* (p. 182).

### **The Starbucks Experience**

It is really interesting as I compose Biljana's story and think about her rage at British culture; I have an experience at Starbucks that I could relate to this feeling.

Weekend hours at the central library which is right across from our apartment building do not allow me to stay longer than five o'clock in the evening to work on my thesis. So I go to the Starbucks close by and since I was hungry but could not decide what to have, I ask the waitress to read me the list of their sandwiches. She reads them so fast that I hardly have a time to figure which is which, let alone decide on one. So I have to ask a couple more questions to finally decide what I am having. Later as I sit in the armchair thinking of Biljana I suddenly feel like I understand her rage better now. The following monologue goes in my mind:

Hey, I am a second language learner, OK? English is not my first language, OK? So don't expect me to understand your speedy list like a native speaker does, OK? Don't expect me to know English as perfect as you do. I have worked hard to learn this language of yours and it is not like you learning it as you grew up. So it does not come naturally to me as it comes to you, OK? But it should not undermine my efforts and my accomplishment, in fact I might be smarter than you coming this far, learning another language.

It is even more amazing to see my experience in accordance with theories of second language and culture learning described by Brown (2007) as I immediately open his book to consult the theories of second language identity. According to Brown, culture

shock refers to phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis. Culture shock is associated with feelings of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness. Persons undergoing culture shock view their new world out of resentment and alternate between self-pity and anger at others for not understanding them (p. 183).

Moreover, second language learning involves the acquisition of a second identity that is at the heart of what is called acculturation. People coming from different cultures might see other people as having strange ways of behaviour. Maybe, my questioning of the waitress or any other body language from my part had also caused her to feel one or more of the same feelings as described by the culture shock theory.

Later, as I am musing, I take a glance at my hot chocolate and realize that it is white. Something I had never had before. I mention that to the waitress and she says that I had asked for white-hot chocolate, which I hadn't. Apparently my accent had prevented her from understanding me fully. Right then I remember Biljana's raving:

*Don't terrorize people by demanding them to have a perfect English accent!*

Another anecdote about cultural difference and a by-product of a new language, is the one I experience while interviewing Aurora.

My first question from Aurora was very direct and seems she was taken off guard and tried to take control by directing where the conversation should go next. I quote her answer to a question from the survey where she says: I told myself to continuously learn new things every day and I told myself that were always more things to learn." And I ask:

So my Question is that telling yourself to learn every day; has that always worked for you or you had to do other things to motivate yourself?

*Uh...I think for now it works for me, it is very hard, in China I don't have English speaking environment, so you want to know my strategies? In China, how I motivate myself?*

Maybe I should have posed my question differently, gentler and less direct. As it is now, it sounds like I am implying that she has been inadequate in motivating herself. Especially right after this brief response she redirects the focus or somehow manages the conversation by directing it to what she thinks is my intention of the interview. She asks whether I want to know how she motivated herself when she was in China. Here her voice has taken control and manages the direction of the conversation.

When I asked her:

Did you like the content that you were hearing in English or did you like the English language that you learned? Which one?"

I am surprised of her answer:

*I think that I am more interested in the content, that's one of the criteria that I choose the programs, not only the language itself because they all speak perfect English, and I'm more interested in if there is a music Channel or they talk about an interesting English movie.*

Maybe both my reactions and Aurora's were the results of cultural difference. Iranians are usually more direct than Canadians for criticizing other people's actions or

understandings. My personal experience living and working in China for two years leads me to believe that Aurora's attempt to redirect our conversation to what I initially was after could have been an act to please others, namely, me.

### **My Story's Coda**

Back in Canada, after I got my French qualifications for teaching and entered the Master's program in 2009, my circumstances changed. I no longer had enough time to spend on French. Although I read French books every now and then, I did not focus much on it as before. The next year, I had my baby girl, Sophie, and became totally absorbed in motherhood and so my contact with French declined to nil. Presently, my baby is one year old and I am looking for French teaching jobs. I see that I need to review my French, which was once at an upper-intermediate level according to my last French tutor in China.

Now what caused me to start studying and using my French one more time despite the busier lifestyle as a mom, was finding a way out of everyday baby care which consumed me fully and did not left me time to nourish my brain. Seeking jobs that required French would provide exactly that nourishment and at the same time would give me enough reason to start all over again. In a way, I had a double incentive at my disposal. I was determined to go to work and I was thirsty to cultivate my intellect. Some incentive originated from circumstances rather than my own volition.

Many years on and many impediments away, I am one more time in a familiar stance where I have to start over. Although I have a great number of strategies, tools and skills at my disposal, it still feels like starting over. I still need to spend quite a

tremendous amount of energy and stamina to get myself back on track and spend still more vigour to continue moving on the way.

It has been a year and half since I have had my little baby girl and since I last took a French book to read or talk in French, except for a short period in six months while I was practicing to pass some job interviews as a French teacher. It has been one of those inevitable times of my life when I had to stop learning the languages I have been working on including English on a continuous basis due to life circumstances. One of those times that I have to begin anew and find inspiration. It is such an accidental coincident and yet indispensable one that I am also working on my thesis about the successful motivational strategies of language learners. Time and time again, I have found myself in these circumstances of language learning suspense where I had to or was even willing to find a way to provoke myself to resume the learning process.

Now that I look back at my experiences of language learning, I remember how in different times, I have tried to use various tactics to stay motivated. Along the way there have been times when I have lost my desire to learn a certain language for a short period. I have always tried to find ways to reinvigorate my attraction to the tongues I have been learning. Even with learning French, there have been times, due to my circumstances, I have lost my will to learn. Then I would have looked around for inspiration. I ask myself what if my love of languages has sprung from the intense focus and involvement in the learning process? What if it has become a second nature to me?

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I started this research project to explore the following research questions: Have other individuals used unique learning tactics that helped them remain enthused in acquiring an additional language? What are those strategies? How might teachers and researchers persuade learners to self-motivate?

The purpose of this study was to expand the frame of previous research about second language learners, specifically, to discover what strategies they use to preserve and improve their second language acquisition.

With this research project, I had these goals in mind:

- To provide second language learners (SLLs) with strategies for acquiring languages
- To valorize the voice of SLLs and thereby shift the power dynamics of current research
- To identify my participants' learning strategies
- To look into the sources of motivation my participants and what causes them to continue their pursuits
- To explore my own sources of motivation to learn other languages

In order to achieve the goals pointed above, I took a postmodern approach to this research project. I used the three qualitative methods of inquiry: narrative inquiry, interviewing and writing (Chase, 2005; Mishler, 1999; Richardson, 2007). For analysing and presenting data I applied McCormack's *five lenses* approach to interview interpretation and her method of *storying stories* (2000, 2001). I developed each

participant's unique story of language learning experience from the data gathered by five lenses' approach: *The lens of active listening, The lens of narrative processes, the lens of context, the lens of language, and the lens of moments*. Through narrative inquiry and writing of an auto-ethnography, I searched for differences as well as similarities among my participants, explored my role in the research both as a language learner and researcher, and provided insights into the second language learning process.

The postmodernist approach to these research questions and goals enabled me to encourage my readers to become co-researchers of this study and to interpret for themselves the answers to some of these questions (Hostein & Gubrium, 1995). I have allowed my readers to explore and compare my participants' stories with their personal accounts of language learning and construct their own understanding of these accounts (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; McCormack, 2000; St. Pierre, 2008). Allowing my readers to participate in the process of meaning making does not eliminate my own task as the researcher. I have provided a table where my participants' learning strategies identified through the survey questionnaire and the interviews are presented. I have identified four major categories and included each participant's corresponding strategy in the adjacent blocks. These categories revolve around the role each phenomena has in strategies each participant has acquired: media, culture, academia, and family/society. In the following paragraphs I report a summary of these tables so that readers could compare their understandings of these tables with mine.

All four participants have interest in being exposed to other cultures through the median of language. Aurora mentions watching English programs with cultural content everyday to know about *other cultures and people*. Tanya struggling at some point with

adjusting to her new culture, suggested submersion and immersion in the culture and voluntarily adapting it as her own. She also looks at language as a means to discover and explore other cultures. Biljana is inspired by knowing about other people's cultures from the beginning of her journey with second language learning. Elaheh with her love for literature and poems is also motivated through culture.

The most important factor contributing to success in second language learning for my all four participants is the need to learn a language for a practical purpose. Aurora adds *perseverance*, Elaheh mentions *hard attempt and self-interest* and Tanya thinks that the need to learn should *go in combination to interest*. Their common motivational strategies include: watching English movies; speaking with friends, tourists, and native speakers; reading English magazines, literature, and websites. Each participant has a few unique motivational strategies that they share. Aurora is inspired by her weaknesses in the language she is learning and strives to overcome them. She is also driven by competition and role models. Tanya immerses herself in the culture of the target language in order to blend in and adapt it as her own. Biljana, although apparently disinterested in perfecting her English, has interest in sharing her political views with people around the world and relating what is happening in her home country, the former Yugoslavia. She is also motivated enough to attend the stand-up comedies in English in order to learn about the humour and mentality of the language. Elaheh has devised a personal strategy of practicing lecturing to students in front of a mirror at home. She is also energized by memorizing poems, playing the *No Farsi* game (the one who used one Farsi word in their speech, had to buy ice cream for others) and listening to special English programs on radio.

Table 1.

*Summary of Learning Strategies*

Categories	Media	Culture	Society	Academia	Unique strategies
Participant					
Aurora	Watch English Movies	Programs with cultural related content	Motivated by talking to native speakers, teacher	Driven by marks and competition	Overcoming weakness
Tanya	Watch CND TV	Adapting new culture as her own	Making friends and playing with them	Realized she has an accent, tried to overcome	Put yourself in a context
Biljana	Watch Movies	Knowing about other culture	Motivated to use English to transfer her own mentality through creative writing instead of blending	Pressure from the university rules set up a combative motivation	Sharing Political views
Elaheh	Listen to VOA (Voice of America Radio Program)	Reading the works of English literature	Talking to tourists	Love of leadership and literature and English led to a successful career	Mirror experience

I started this research project hoping to explore the learning strategies of other language learners which fed their motivation to learn, but like much other research I ended up with more than that. I grew personally and academically, encountered other ways of thinking in relation with language learning and the world. As Knopp and Bogdan (2003) suggest in their *Foundations of Qualitative Research for Education*, my

qualitative research is *inductive* in that I did not know from the beginning to what interpretive facts or theories my participants' stories were going to take me.

As a passionate learner of foreign languages, I have often sought out other people's stories of struggle and success. I have often wanted to know how other language learners have acquired the additional tongues. Knowing about other learners has helped me remain interested in the process of learning. When I saw peers comfortable speaking English back in my BA years, I wanted to be like them. I thought I was no less intelligent or competent and I should be able to accomplish the task. Broady (2005, p. 71) has also mentioned the significant influence of peers in persuading to continue learning a language. I imagine this was one of my first callings to attack the task of second language learning. I remember how in my junior year at university in Iran, I would follow the lead of other classmates gathering around senior students who had started learning English from scratch and now were speaking it fluently. We would listen to their stories with great interest and verbalized our wishes of one day being able to speak in English. We were in turn encouraged by these senior university mates that what sounded like an impossible dream would indeed come true with hard work and perseverance. As Bateson (1989, p. 16) suggests, *the most freeing and illuminating* process is the method of teasing out recurrent common themes from a wealth of material and conversation and recognizing aspects of one's own experience in different forms I have strived to provide the means to that liberating and revealing process through composing my participants' stories as well as those of my own in this research. Therefore, I am hoping that by reading these stories other language learners develop new understandings of the phenomenon of acquiring a second or third language, create comparable relations to their

own experiences, and get energized to move on. So one encompassing motivational strategy that I suggest as a language learner, researcher and a participant of this project is to read the stories of other language learners and become inspired, energized and determined to create one of your own.

Through each participant's story I discovered something new about my views and my experiences. Aurora, with her competitive and hard-working spirit teaches me to strive to be the best through perseverance. Tanya, with her passion for culture and learning languages through immersing in the culture, has opened my eyes to my soul's hunger for cultural experiences in language learning due to my cultural deprivation growing up in Iran. Biljana, with her totally different perspective on languages and language learning has enhanced my sensitivity to English imperialism and has shown me new ways of looking at this phenomenon of language learning. Elaheh, with her passion for literature and her career as a university professor has shown me the possibility of combining passions in one single mission and to grow within it. I am hoping that by setting this example of gaining insight from creating my participants' stories, the readers of this research paper take the same approach of forming their own perception, adopt an inspiring attitude and turn it into a personal motivational strategy.

Three of the four sources of motivation for my participants (media, culture, society, academia) are categorically identical to the four major influences in motivation introduced by Gardner (2001). According to Gardner the four main categories include: external influences, individual differences, language acquisition context, and outcomes. External influences refer to socio-cultural or family background of individuals and their effect on level of their motivation to learn other languages.

All my participants have demonstrated a desire to be accepted by society or their environment in one form or another. Tanya aspires to blend with the new culture in order to avoid appearing stupid. Aurora is apprehensive of falling behind her advanced classmates studying in one of the best high schools in their city and therefore strives to obtain high marks. Biljana who does not want to be seen “as a twelve year old” who needs to be motivated (i.e. as socially unequal to native English speakers), is socially influenced to learn the language in order to communicate her political views with other foreigners (as an equal). Elaheh gains self-esteem to continue learning through the approval of her family and society.

Individual difference as a contributor to motivation is also evident in my participants. Tanya is willing to learn the humour and intricate aspects of English in order to be able to adapt the English culture as her own. Biljana is quite the opposite and refuses to accept another culture as her own. Instead, she introduces this amazing theory of ‘language as technology’ and claims to use the new language with her own cultural mentality. Although Aurora does not directly seek to identify herself with the English culture, she is curious about the kind of TV programs that contain English cultural content. Elaheh connects herself to the culture of the language she has learned through her universal love for literature.

The language acquisition context referring to formal classes and informal environments is comparable to my category of academia. Tanya considers living in an informal setting as the best way to learn a foreign language. While Biljana confesses that living in a location where she has to use the additional language to survive has forced her to learn, she also admits that she has mostly learned the language through attending ESL

classes as opposed to teaching it to herself. It was through formal English classes that Elaheh initially gained some confidence to go about talking to tourists. Then she was encouraged to continue learning through the applause she received in family gatherings. Later, attending the same formal classes, she discovers her leadership inclination and her need to improve her English through the mirror strategy. Aurora has balanced formal and informal language acquisition contexts by attending formal classes and learning grammar and immersing herself in English language content through media and culture.

Outcomes that could be linguistic or non-linguistic, refer to two sources of motivation through the different results one obtains from acquiring a foreign language. The linguistic outcome is when a learner gains new competence in the language they are learning and this gives them motivation to move on. Elaheh had this experience when she could apply her new skill by talking to tourists. Aurora became eager to learn more when she could use her skill with English on a trip to Europe. The non-linguistic outcome is when one uses her new expertise for purposes other than the language itself, e.g. a career, continuing education, etc. Biljana needs the language to survive and therefore she is driven to learn it for that external purpose. Elaheh combines her love for leadership manifest in her teaching career with the love for literature and uses the language she has learned to maintain her other passions. Aurora mentions that knowing other languages make her more competitive for the job market.

If intrinsic motivation as defined by Deci and Ryan (1985) refers to when one does something in the absence of a possible reward, most of my participants learning strategies contribute to this kind of motivation. For example, watching TV with specific cultural content, talking to tourists or friends, or matching talent with passion through

learning a foreign language all are instances of being intrinsically attracted to the task of learning. When Elaheh mentions that she is energized to learn more once she understands a sentence from a movie, it is the same internal pull at work. Biljana's interest to 'inegrate into' other people's lives and 'communicate' with them is another example of intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is defined as when one does an activity for a reason other than an interest in the action itself. Aurora is extrinsically motivated by marks during one part of her journey. Biljana is also extremely motivated by the external need for survival and finding jobs. Elaheh has artfully combined her intrinsic passion for literature with the external influence of her family's approval of her newly gained skill, with her leadership talent to shape her successful career in teaching. Although Tanya is externally determined to overcome her accent and to learn the humour of the language in order to blend in, she has a lot of internal passion for culture.

Elaheh's 'mirror experience' is an interesting example where intrinsic and extrinsic motivations meet. Elaheh is intrinsically induced to fulfill her leadership desire in a group of classmates by being able to discuss different themes in English. She is also externally determined to overcome her lack of confidence and accomplish her task of lecturing in front of a class of people and get rewarded by marks.

As I previously described to my participants in the interview, motivational strategy is any action you consciously take as a language learner in order to provoke yourself to either start or continue learning a foreign language. I would like to explain here that 'adopting one person's learning strategy' can stimulate other person's sense of interest in the task of learning. This approach has worked for me as an ubiquitous tactic throughout the long journey of acquiring other languages. Now I see how craving for

other learner's stories of struggle and success has fuelled my fire to be willing to continue learning other languages almost all my life.

Therefore, similarly to the example above all the four major categories and their specific subcategories could be considered individual motivational strategies for any language learner who adopts it as a tactic to provoke themselves to continue learning despite the obstacles. The potential readers of these stories are going to form unique understandings, adopt strategies, and possibly become energized to move on their paths of learning.

The dominant focus of this research was to move away from a teacher-centered theory and to approach the study of motivation and sources of motivation from a possibly student-centered premise. This study was an exploration of driving forces for different learners of additional languages. Nevertheless, through this research study I discovered many personal tactics and basis of inspiration each of which could be adopted by other individuals as their own motivational approach. As a teacher, I would recommend other teachers to either simply transfer these individual strategies through enthusiastically charged lectures or providing their students with these individuals' motivational stories through literacy and language lessons. As a language teacher and once a language learner, I would provide my students with my own exciting experiences of language learning. A whole new research project needs to be conducted in order to see how we could implement these strategies as part of a curriculum to be taught in a classroom. This research is required to test the effect of teaching these strategies through the methods recommended above on the level of interest in students of a second language.

Looking more deeply into this research project reveals one more powerful way to transfer the findings of this study to an ESL classroom. The research methods themselves could be used as parts of ESL lesson activities to be carried out: students interviewing each other about their personal learning strategies, writing their own stories of language learning, creating videos of each other's language journey, preparing and presenting these stories in the form of drama or posters.

#### Limitations of This Research

There are some natural limitations to this research as a result of my recruiting and research methods. Recruiting from an unknown pool of people as opposed to the convenience sample of my graduate students would have resulted in less predictable findings. It would have also been more beneficial to have a gender balance of participants, as female individuals may have different general attitudes to learning language than male participants; and male individuals may have different stories to tell about family expectations, social status, and career, as motivation, and have developed different tools or strategies in response. My initial desire to look for experiences of struggle and success that meshed with mine might have contributed to bias in interpreting my participants' interview transcripts to form and understand their stories. Finally, looking for successful strategies of learning and motivation has limited my research results on another level. Readers could also have benefited from knowing the strategies that did not work for my participants.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

I began to explore the successful motivational strategies of second language learners, and I came across multitude of threads and themes each worth conducting

research on. Bateson (1989, p. 16) suggests to *weave something new from many different threads* and that is what I have done in my story and expect my readers to do from reading all these accounts. The themes I came across in this research that could become sources of future research in the area of second language learning can include but not limited to

- Discovering the source of interest in different individuals to learn other languages
- Exploring the competitive tendencies of human beings and their effect on desiring to perfecting one's knowledge of a second language through competition
- The role of family and family background in encouraging language learning
- The gender factor in having enough self-esteem to acquire and produce a second language
- Formal (classroom/institution) versus informal learning (self-teaching, living in the environment, etc.)
- The ways learners of a second language could relate to the ideas of intelligent and unintelligent and how could these perceptions affect the process of learning
- How knowing a second language affects the way one is perceived by others in a particular society
- How outside forces can influence the desire to learn a second language and the way it can affect or be affected by forcing oneself to learn

- The extent to which cultural or psychological assimilation is a current issue within language learning /teaching of ESL in Canada?

The first five themes mentioned above could be further discussed and investigated through Dornyei's (2001) four main categories for motivational strategies, as a base of reference for motivational studies. Dornyei suggests that there are four main stages for motivation: first basic motivational conditions should be present in a classroom. The lack of self-esteem that could be a result of different social interactions between male and female individuals in different cultures could become a source of new research on how to generate basic motivational conditions. Elaheh's suggestion of calling her students with their first names to produce a friendlier atmosphere can be considered an attempt to generate that encouraging conditions in an ESL classroom; the effect of such efforts could become source of future research.

The second stage for motivation according to Dornyei is to generate initial motivation through short and interesting opening activities or setting student and class goals. These goals could be based on each student's individual interest that is identified through the strategies suggested in conclusion (e.g. student's interviewing each other).

The third level is maintaining and protecting motivation that, according to Dornyei, is possible through teachers adopting the role of a facilitator, teaching self-motivating techniques, and involving students in designing the course. Although, as a teacher, I can see myself as a facilitator of learning through guiding my students' progress, I have found it difficult to teach self-motivating techniques to my students with variety of intelligences. Further research could investigate and categorise these self-motivating techniques across the multiple intelligences spectrum.

The fourth level of motivation happens when students are encouraged to demonstrate 'positive retrospective self-evaluation' through assessing their own work and celebrating their progress. Aurora has demonstrated a tendency for competing with others for better marks and this inclination has helped her to acquire grammar and pass through some difficult stages of learning. Further research could investigate the positive effects of competitive tendencies of human beings on motivating students when they perceive their progress through marks.

Each of the last four themes suggested above for future research have a residual effect on the other while all could be investigated through the common theme of British imperialism. In some parts of the world, like the country in which I have been raised, Iran, the fluency in the language of the current superpower, America is a sign of intelligence, education or sophistication. This shows how our perceptions about ourselves could be shaped by a social context, in this case a post-colonial one. This issue could also become relevant for other learners who want to learn English for practical and psychosocial reasons that belie a political history. So we may just want to learn English to get a job, but we may also want to do so to be perceived as part of a desired class.

I was planning to include in this conclusion a brief reference to stories unsaid, as they are according to McCormack (2001) a rich base of knowledge in itself and worth doing research on. What is unsaid in my case, can be the challenge of balancing a personal life as a woman and completing this thesis project. In my mind, I compare these challenges with the challenge of learning languages in adulthood. Has the latter prepared me for the former ones? What is unsaid could be the unexpected experiences gained and perspectives changed that were the inevitable results of a long enough journey in this

research. I read Bateson's (1989) introduction to *Composing a Life* and I take one last lesson: *self-knowledge is empowering*. Through composing my participants' stories and gaining new understandings of my own experiences through their experiences and creating one of my own I have not only empowered myself to share my experiences but also hopefully my readers.

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