

**An analysis of the speedy development of an Albanian language learner's
oral English skills over the course of seven months**

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I have been teaching English to speakers of other languages since 2009. I have taught college students English in China and I have taught English to various adult immigrants to the U.S.A. in Rochester, N.Y. Over this time I have noticed a few misconceptions many language learners tend to have about acquiring the English language. The first misconception is that learning an additional language can be done quickly. A common question sincerely asked of me by my language learners is, "What can I do to improve my English?" Achieving acquisition of an additional language is not an easy task for some. For some of my language learners, achieving the level of acquisition they desire has felt unattainable at times; yet they press on. For others, however, learning English is accomplished for them without much sweat or struggle. Regardless of into what category a language learner falls, it has been my aim to help students recognize what they have already accomplished in language learning, to celebrate those accomplishments, and create attainable goals for their next steps in their language learning.

Another common misconception I have noticed is that some language learners equate the ability to speak with an American accent with their ability to reach fluency in English. Regarding this misconception, H. Douglas Brown (2014) writes in his text *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, "It is important to remember in all these considerations that pronunciation of a language is not by any means the sole criterion for acquisition, nor is it the most important one" (p. 59). As a language instructor, I want to help my language learners understand that they can achieve acquisition in English with a foreign accent.

The final misconception I have noticed teaching English to speakers of other languages is the expectation that they must become experts in all areas of the English language in order to

obtain English acquisition. Muriel Saville-Troike and Karen Barto (2017) discuss components of language knowledge and this misconception in their text *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*. They state,

Linguists have traditionally divided language into the following six components for purposes of description and analysis...:

- Vocabulary (lexicon)
- Morphology (word structure)
- Phonology (sound system)
- Syntax (grammar)
- Nonverbal structures
- Discourse (ways to connect sentences and organize information)

Even the most highly educated adult native speakers can never expect to have mastery of *all* the potential resources of a community's language, and such an expectation for the vast majority of any L2 learners would be completely unrealistic. (p. 145)

Saville-Troike and Barto go on to encourage their readers that “deciding on priorities for what needs to be learned is an important step for teachers and learners to take” (2017, p. 146).

The purpose of this case study is to observe and evaluate one language learner's language learning experience in an ESL setting, and to reflect on that experience. The language learner chosen for this case study is a 29 year old Albanian immigrant to the U.S.A., Emanuela (Ema) Velo. It is my observation that the common misconceptions of acquiring English quickly, needing to speak with an American accent, and feeling pressure to become an expert in all areas of the English language are not misconceptions Ema has. On the contrary, she has had a focus from the beginning of learning with me. That focus has been to improve her oral English skills.

Methods

Participant

Ema is a young woman from Korca, Albania. Korca is in Southern Albania close to the North Macedonia border. In October 2019 she married an Albanian-American who has been living in Rochester, New York for 21 years with his parents and older sister. In Albania, Ema was a math teacher. Ema talks with great pride about her accomplishment five years ago of passing the exam necessary to become a math teacher in Albania. "I won school for my favorite subject, Math!" she said. She explained, "It was a win because there was a lot of competition." Nineteen of her college classmates also passed the exam and nine went on to be hired as math teachers, including Ema. My first impression of Ema in class was that she was friendly, easy to get along with, eager to learn, and corporative with how the classroom functioned including the role of the teacher, classmate interaction, instruction, and completing assignments. She has been a joy to teach.

Ema studied English sporadically in Albania. She bought an English textbook to study independently before coming to America. Unfortunately, she was not very motivated to study it independently. Also, she said that she had attended an English class in 6th grade. She enjoyed the class very much. She learned basic words in English like tea, apple, orange, etc. However, the class was not continue into her 7th grade year. She also studied English for six months in college while studying to be a math teacher. She was given an English textbook for the class but, she said, the teacher was not very good. "I don't learn," she said. Basically, Ema has seriously been learning English for only 7 months, since she arrived to Rochester in October and began classes with me and my coworker, Soun, at the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)/Center for Workforce Development (CWD).

About the classes she has been taking with me and Soun at BOCES/CWD, Ema said, “I like BOCES because the teachers are so good, both Soun and Jeanna. They use techniques that help me learn English.” She went on to say, “I know general technique for learning and I see a good technique.” The reason I decided to ask Ema if she would like to be interviewed by me for this project is because I thought since she has been a teacher she understands what it means to give an assignment and to be given an assignment, as well as the work that goes into completing an assignment well. I felt that I could depend on her to follow through with the interviews, enabling me to complete them and to finish the project. Indeed, that is what happened.

Some other important things to note about my participant, Ema, is that she enjoys cooking, photography, and travel. Since arriving to the U.S.A. in October, she and her husband have traveled to many places together; as near as New York City and as far as Southern Texas. She also loves books. When she saw my collection of books in my apartment it made her miss her parent’s home in Albania and the many books she has there. Finally, Ema likes living in the U.S.A. When asked about this, Ema said she likes everything in the U.S.A. She likes the schools and hospitals here. She said that the schools and hospitals are good because they are more modern and more developed than in Albania. Ema commented on how excellent the doctors and nurses were who cared for her father-in-law when he became ill and eventually passed in September.

Ema also expressed her appreciation of the increased opportunities that are in the U.S.A. for work. About this she said, “[U.S.A.] have work, in Albania don’t have work.” Furthermore, she said that the people here are friendly and good. Ema made the comment in her second interview with me that she does not like people in Albania as much as people in the U.S.A. Although she does have a large extended family in Albania, she explained that the work situation

is bad in Albania. Many people are not working very much. One person may work in a family. Sometimes men or other family members will work in another country and send money back to their family members in Albania. For these reasons, she likes American people more than Albanian people.

All-in-all, Ema's attitude towards the U.S.A. is a positive one and this attitude has had a positive effect on her language learning. According to H. Douglas Brown and Heekyeong Lee (2015), in their text *Teaching by Principles*, "L2 learners may exert their agency by resisting undesirable identities imposed on them and striving for constructing a new one that they prefer and aspire to in their future" (p. 99-100). It appears to me that this quote describes Ema's language learning attempts well. She loves Albania, but she sees some of its undesirable qualities and is eager to expand her identity to include a more desirable one.

Environment

Ema and I met for five one-hour interviews over the course of two months (February and March). My hope was that the interviews would be done in relaxed settings where Ema and I would feel comfortable and stress-free. Our first two meetings were in coffee shops. For our third meeting, Ema came over to my apartment. Our fourth meeting was at a coffee shop at a mall in our area. We went for a walk around the mall after the interview was over. Finally, our last meeting was at Ema's home. She prepared delicious food for us to eat together. Her husband and her mother-in-law were there to greet me, too. It was delightful to meet them.

Procedures

For each interview, I prepared a set of 6-8 questions to ask Ema regarding her cultural, linguistic and educational background, current interests, future goals, personality and attitude towards language learning, experiences with language learning, how the Albanian language

negatively or positively affects her English language learning, and what has motivated her to study English in the past as well as now. I printed the questions out for her before each interview so that she had them in front of her to read easily. I gave her time to read and translate the questions before we began the interview. Occasionally, Ema would translate what she wanted to say from Albanian to English in order to answer the questions thoroughly for me – especially when I asked her to describe her personality. I compiled her answers as she spoke on a Word document on my laptop for my future reference.

Results

Over the course of the five interviews, in addition to time spent with Ema in class through BOCES, I uncovered four significant elements of Ema's language learning experience. These elements include her attitude towards learning English, how culture has played a role in influencing Ema's attitude towards language learning, the impact Ema's personality has on her language learning, and what effects the Albanian language has on Ema learning English. To begin with, I will focus on the attitudes Ema has towards learning English.

The Learner's Attitudes towards Learning English

Ema's classes at BOCES have been her first formal English classes over an extended period of time. Ema made the comment early on to me that although she can understand what she reads in English and is able to write English fairly well, she did not feel confident to speak English. Speaking was a weak area for her. About this Ema said, "I stay at home and I don't talk with more people." She also added, "Speaking is most difficult for me." Nevertheless, in class at BOCES she speaks a lot. She has enjoyed the classes because of all of the speaking practice she has had and because of the lessons she has received in grammar. When asked about how she was feeling about learning English in our third interview together, Ema said that she

was “feeling good about it because every day she is learning more.” Overall, Ema’s attitude about her language weaknesses, learning English grammar, and her progress with language learning has been positive.

Ema’s positive attitude towards learning grammar caused me to consider my own attitude towards grammar and teaching grammar. For a while I did not feel confident teaching it and avoided lessons that were solely on English grammar points. Nonetheless, as I have become more familiar with the rules of grammar, I have started to include more instruction on grammar in my lessons, which has been appreciated by students, including Ema. I have taught in a few different capacities now and I have noticed that there tends to be different attitudes towards teaching grammar among teachers in certain educational and language teaching institutions. I have noticed that this can affect how much grammar is taught and how grammar is taught in ESL classrooms. In the article, “The Relationship between TESOL Teachers’ Attitude towards Grammar Teaching and their Grammatical Knowledge” by Khadija Al Balushi (2019), Balushi makes an observation that supports this thought. He states, “...teachers have different experiences related to the context they are working in and accordingly hold different attitudes towards teaching grammar” (p. 46). Through interacting with Ema I was convicted about my own attitudes towards grammar and teaching grammar. The last effect I want to have on my students regarding learning grammar is a negative one, especially when the learners come into the classroom with an initial sense of eagerness and appreciation of grammar and learning its rules.

Another aspect of a learner’s attitude towards language learning that I explored with Ema was her motivations for learning English. Indeed much of her motivation is extrinsic. Brown (2014), defines extrinsic motivation as motivation which “is fueled by the anticipation of a

reward from outside and beyond the self” (p. 160). Ema realizes that in order for her to obtain employment in the U.S.A. she will need to be able to use a lot of English well. Ema’s husband gave her a book about computer language which Ema has been reading and studying. There is an exam she plans to take this spring which will award her a certificate regarding computer language. Furthermore, she has expressed interest in working as a hair stylist in a beauty salon. However, Ema does not have a desire to teach in the U.S.A. In Albania, she said, teachers are highly appreciated and respected. “Here,” she said, “teachers are not highly respected like they are in Albania.”

Nevertheless, Ema is intrinsically motivated, too. “I want to learn English,” she said about her motivation, “I like to learn it.” Also, Ema remembered a situation from her past that demonstrates her intrinsic motivation to learn English. She shared that one day in Albania she was sitting in a café with a friend. They were sitting close to an American family of five: husband, wife, and three children. She could understand a few words from their conversation, like “cup,” “table,” etc., but she could not understand the conversation as a whole. She remembered being fascinated by this and curious to learn more English so that she could understand more of it when she hears it being used. Brown (2014) writes about intrinsic motivation citing Maslow (1970):

Maslow claimed that intrinsic motivation is clearly superior to extrinsic. According to his hierarchy of needs...motivation is dependent on the satisfaction first of fundamental physical necessities...then of community, security, identity, and self-esteem, the fulfillment of which finally leads to self-actualization, or, to use a common phrase, “being all that you can be.” (p. 160)

“Every day I have positive experiences with learning English,” Ema said, in our third interview together. She demonstrates a very low affective filter, which Stephen Krashen refers to as “the relationship between affective variables and the process of second language acquisition...” (Mitchell & Myles, 2013, p. 45). Individuals with low affective filters “will be more open to... input, and it [input] will strike “deeper”” (Mitchell & Myles, 2013, p. 45). This truly seems to be the case for Ema and her language learning experience with English these past several months.

Cultural Aspects Influencing Learning English

A language learner’s perceptions of their native culture and of their new culture may differ from the full extent to which the culture truly represents. This is of primary importance to consider when analyzing how culture influences language learning for a particular language learner. In other words, as I analyze Ema’s language learning experience, it is her perceptions of Albania and America that are of most importance to me, rather than what Albania truly may be in its entirety. For instance, Ema commented on the religious climate of Albania during one of our interviews. She said that Albania is a very peaceful region in regards to different religions. Everyone gets along very peacefully with each other, she said. Although this may be true in Albania today, some sources I have studied paint a different picture of Albania. For example, Kristel Ringer Ortiz (2019) wrote in her article “Reconciled to God, Reconciled to Each Other,” “This is vital [profound precedents of friendship and partnership in Albania and far beyond] in a region where prejudice and division have run deep for centuries” (p. 20). Nevertheless, what matters to me in this case study is not so much what Albania or America truly looks like, but what Albania or America looks like through Ema’s eyes.

Of second importance to me in this study are the aspects of Albania that have influenced Ema's worldview and attitude towards life, language, and learning. An aspect about Albania that stands out to me as something which has helped shape Ema's worldview is an ancient cultural law called the Law of Lek. About this, Kristel writes in her article "Bought by Blood," "Law of Lek, a behavioral code named for its medieval author, Lek Dukagjini..." is an ancient cultural law of "sacrificial hospitality" (2019, p. 4-5). Political scientist, Ben Curtis, interviewed by Rick Steves on Steves' radio episode called "Albania – Audio Europe: Eastern Europe" (2015) makes this comment about Albanian hospitality, "...it's deep in the culture to treat guests like royalty... even with young people" (01:43-01:50). Ema demonstrated this law of Lek when she had me over for our final interview. Despite the concerns of the spread of coronavirus in our area, she and her family were happy to host me. We shared delicious food together which Ema prepared.

Furthermore, Albanian people seem to have a positive view on Americans and foreigners. About tourism of foreigners in Albania, full-time tour guide, David Willett, also interviewed by Rick Steves in the episode previously mentioned, said, "Albanians are actually thrilled to bits that anyone would want to go and look at their country because...many of them regard their country as something of a ruin; they are fascinated that people should be coming and taking an interest in it" (2015, 09:40-09:50). His comment rings true to the sentiments Ema has expressed and to her own experiences growing up in Albania.

In Albania, Ema's family is considered to be on the high end of the middle-class. Growing up, Ema's family owned a small company which was connected to their home. Many foreigners came to their home to visit because of the company they had and because they had a war-time bunker on their property which foreigners were interested in seeing. Ema said that

people came from far distances to see the bunker. This exposed Ema to many different cultures and languages when she was growing up and this exposure was a positive one.

Finally, another important element of culture to take note of is the support Ema receives from family and friends to live in the U.S.A. and to learn English. Ema has expressed that she feels supported by her family and friends. Her husband has been very encouraging to her as she learns English. Ema shared, “He has said, ‘You are good in your English.’” He also said that Ema can understand a lot and that others can understand her too. Ema’s mother and father are happy about Ema living in the U.S.A. Although they miss her, they feel that the livelihood here is easier than in Albania. Ema’s sister lives in Greece and speaks English. Ema’s younger brother lives with her parents and does not speak English. When asked about Ema’s friends in Albania she said, “They feel that it is good for me to be living in the U.S.A. and they are proud of me for speaking English.”

Ema has one teacher friend who lives in Tirana, the capital city of Albania. Her friend’s English has improved since living and working there, like Ema’s has improved. Ema has another friend, whom she admires, that lives in New York City. Although this friend went to college in Albania to be a teacher, upon moving to NYC with her husband, she went to school to be a nurse and is working as a nurse now. Her husband is a professor in a university. This friend’s English skills are very good, Ema said. Along with Ema’s husband, Ema also has the support of her husband’s mother, sister, and brother-in-law who all speak English very well. Additionally, Ema spends a lot of time with her niece and nephew, both under the age of 10, who speak English mainly, and only a little Albanian.

The Impact of the Learner’s Personality on Language Learning

A learner's personality can have a major impact on their language learning experiences. When asked, "How would you describe your personality," Ema said she was patient, hard-working, quick to make friends, curious, and observant. From what I have observed of Ema, I would add the word "optimistic" to her list. This personality trait has given Ema an advantage in language learning. "As early as the 1978 'good language learner' studies, positive attitudes and believing in oneself were at the top of everyone's list" (Brown, 2014, p. 144). Ema is also a people-person. Although quiet-spoken at times, Ema has been able to make friends with her classmates quickly and easily. Regarding this Ema said, "I like working and learning with the other classmates at BOCES." Having friendships with classmates has been helpful to Ema in her language learning experience because it has given her a lot of additional practice outside of class to speak English. On one occasion, for instance, Joelle and her husband had Ema and Ema's husband over to their house for dinner. Since moving to the online learning platform, due to the coronavirus, Ema has continued to remain in touch with her classmates, Joelle and Carla.

Ema is also keenly aware of her classmates' unique language learning journeys. Comparing herself to some of her classmates', she said, "They don't have a lot of time to practice their English at home" because they are busy with large families. She observed that she and some of the other women in the class without children at home have more time to study. About one of her classmates who is busy at home with children, Ema said, "She is understanding and speaking a lot more than she ever did before!" Not only does Ema have a positive personality that influences her language learning process, but she has a positive outlook on others learning processes, too, and her optimism is quite contagious.

A learner's personality can also shed light onto what language learning strategies might work best for the learner. Goudarz Alibakhshi, Mahmoud Qaracholloo, and Mohammad Javad

Mohammadi (2017) wrote an interesting article about personality factors and language learning strategies called, “A Cultural Inquiry into Personality Factors and Language Learning Strategies in an Iranian EFL Context.” In their studies they noticed that “conscientiousness was related to organizational competence” (p. 4). This has demonstrated itself to be true in Ema’s language learning experience so far. I observed early on in class that Ema takes careful notes. She is also very well organized with her learning. About her learning, Ema said that she “notices things others don’t notice.” This conscientiousness, according to Alibakhshi, Qaracholloo, and Mohammadi, is a beneficial trait to have with language learning.

In addition, Alibakhshi, Qaracholloo, and Mohammadi found a connection between learning strategies, personality, and cultural context. In their study of the use of metacognitive language strategies and personality traits among Bosnian university students, they found that “extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were in relation with metacognitive language learning strategies” (2017, p. 4-5). Therefore, Ema, who is from a country that is a close neighbor to Bosnia, may find metacognitive language learning strategies helpful to her as well. Some examples of metacognitive strategies include: plan/organize, monitor/identify problems, evaluate, and manage your own learning (Chamot, 2009, p. 59). I have observed Ema excelling in the utilizing of organizational and management of her own learning strategies.

First Language Effects on Second Language Learning

One of the first significant differences that presented itself during my time with Ema between American communication and Albanian communication was a simple yet crucial gesture. Even Rick Steves (2015) mentions this difference in his radio episode. He said, “I understand in Bulgaria they shake their head ‘no’ for ‘yes’ or something like this...” (09:40 –

09:50). The same is true in Albania. Thankfully, Ema told me about this early on in class at BOCES. This was very helpful for me and her classmates to know. Other than that difference, for the most part the differences between English and Albanian syntactically are minor.

In response to a question about what language would be most helpful to a tourist in Albania, Ben Curtis, David Willett, and Rick Steves, in the radio episode cited earlier, agreed that Italian would come in handy, especially in Southern Albania, as well as Greek and English. Steves said, “I would imagine, since they’ve been a free society, English has been the focus of their education...especially among the young people,” (2015, 04:54 – 5:05). It is for these reasons, similar syntactic elements between Albanian and English as well as the use of English in Albania, that I feel Ema has been able to find learning English not as challenging as some of my other students who speak Arabic, Chinese, or Vietnamese as their native languages.

In the article, “Syntactic Similarities and Differences between Albanian and English” by Aida Kurani and Anisa Trifoni (2011), regarding syntactic differences between Albanian and English, the authors write, “Albanian language, just like English, is part of [the] Indo-European language family...” (p. 48). However, according to this article, the two languages do not branch from the Indo-European language family in the same way. “Albanian language is a sister, not a descendant of the Indo-European family...,” therefore, “in addition to common features in the phonetic, semantic and grammatical system, they naturally have differences from one another” (Kurani & Trifoni, 2011, p. 48). In their article, Kurani and Trifoni highlight word order differences, differences in the syntax of subordinate sentences, and differences between time, purpose, and attributive clauses. I found their analysis of the word order differences most helpful to me when considering Ema and the common mistakes she makes in English. Ema has made errors with the adjective-noun word order. For instance, about a book she is reading she

called it “the book for **language computer**” rather than “the book for **computer language**.” Nevertheless, I also found the analysis of the syntax of subordinate sentences helpful as well.

Regarding the syntax of subordinate sentences, Kurani and Trifoni write, “...in English it is always obligatory to place a subject in the sentence, whereas in Albanian...the subject expressed with a personal pronoun may not be present and the sentence is grammatically right” (2011, p. 54). It is my conclusion, having reviewed my interview notes, that forgetting to include the subject in her sentences does not appear to be a problem for Ema. Another difference which Kurani and Trifoni point out in their paper did not seem to reflect areas of weakness for Ema. They explained that in English the word “that” is not obligatory. However, in Albanian, the relative pronoun used for the word “that” is obligatory. Also, “In the case of the indirect object in Albanian, the latter remains unchanged even when we change the sentence from the active to the passive voice” (Kurani & Trifoni, 2011, p. 57). I did not notice Ema using “that” more than what was necessary or misunderstanding when to omit “that” from her sentences in English.

Moreover, Ema explained to me that there are many cognates in the Albanian and English languages. These have been helpful to her while learning English. Some examples are: computer/kompjuter, class/klas, and motivates/motivuar. However, there are some false cognates too, such as, the word “spoon.” In Albanian, “spoon” means “fork.” I found it interesting that there are similar pronunciations of word parts between Albanian and English. One that was especially interesting to me was the pronunciation of “th” in Albanian. It is very similar to the English voiced “th.” The voiced “th” is often the hardest word part for English language learners to pronounce correctly, but Ema can pronounce it perfectly. Moreover, Ema said that she found grammar in English easier than grammar in Albanian.

My final comments about Ema's first language's effects on her second language learning is in regards to error correction. A comment Ema's husband made to me when I visited Ema's home for our final interview was about Ema's English progress related to error correction. He said, that Ema's English improved a lot because "Ema has stopped worrying about making mistakes!" Due to the fact that Ema attended college in Albania, studied to be a teacher, and taught Math in Albania, it seems to me that her affective filter is low in regards to language ego. Affective filters are hindrances that some students have towards learning a second language. According to Brown (2014), language ego is that which accounts "for the identity a person develops in reference to the language he or she speaks" (p. 64). It seems to me that Ema's language ego is high in her native language. This high language ego has transferred to her English learning. Brown goes on to explain about language ego, "A person's self-identity is inextricably bound up with one's language, for it is in the communicative process – the process of sending out messages and having them "bounced" back – that such identities are confirmed, shaped, and reshaped" (2014, p. 64). It appears that Ema's language ego has been shaped well in Albanian. This is helpful to her language learning in English. Ema is less afraid that her messages will "bounce" back since she has built up a lot of confidence in this already from her first language.

Some common mistakes Ema has made during her time with me are misuses of prepositions, misuses of the word "too" when she means "very" or "so," and saying "much" when she means "many." Ema admitted that at first she felt bad about making mistakes, and she did not like to be corrected. When asked, "Is there anything about your personality that makes it difficult to learn English," Ema said her fear of making mistakes. However, this personality trait seems to be balanced well with Ema's outgoing personality. About her level of nervousness to

Speak English with others, Ema said that she feels comfortable talking to new people; she likes to talk with new people. During our fifth interview, Ema shared that now she realizes that people are just trying to help her when they correct her. She does not feel badly anymore about being corrected by native speakers.

Of all the modalities, speaking English in conversation is the greatest challenge for Ema. Ema commented in an interview about how it is difficult to understand people in English when they speak quickly, yet she and her husband have American friends and family members that are patient with Ema and provide her with lots of excellent listening and speaking practice. Ema has also had opportunities to practice her spoken English with native English speakers while traveling throughout the U.S.A. with her husband. She said that she has had to communicate with people at coffee shops and restaurants while traveling. This has been good for improving her spoken English skills. In addition to having family and friends around and traveling a lot, another advantage for Ema is that she feels comfortable to ask people, like her husband, to speak slower so that she can understand them; but, “sometimes they forget,” she said.

Conversing with me has been a positive language learning experience for Ema. About talking with me, Ema said, “With you, you speak slowly and I understand 95%.” When asked what her family thinks about her learning English and living in the U.S.A., Ema said, “They think that I speak English more now than before when I first came to U.S.A.” Finally, on her entrance oral exam at BOCES (a BEST Plus 2.0 exam) Ema tested at the Low Intermediate level in October. Since the coronavirus has spread and schools have been closed, my colleagues and I have not had the chance to test her again. However, I imagine that she will show a significant improvement in her oral English skills the next time she is tested.

Discussion

It is clear to me that since starting her formal English education, Ema's English has improved, especially her oral English skills. I observed that in the fourth and fifth interviews with Ema, she began correcting her own mistakes and errors. This has been impressive to me. For instance, Ema at one point was talking about her husband and said "her" but self-corrected herself and said "him." Also, when she was talking about her cousin she said "tried much times" but then self-corrected herself and said "tried a lot of times." This shows an awareness of the language that she did not have before.

Brown (2014) maps out four stages of learner language development for his readers. The four stages are: (1) presystematic stage, (2) emergent stage, (3) systematic stage, and (4) postsystematic stage (p. 246). The third and fourth stages are of most interest to me in regards to Ema's language development. About the third stage, Brown writes, "The most salient difference between the second and third stages is the ability of learners to repair their errors when they are pointed out – even very subtly – to them" (2014, p. 245). In our earlier interviews together and in class Ema was able to repair her errors when corrected. However, what is significant about Ema's development over these past seven months is that now she is able to self-correct. The fourth stage is distinguished from the third stage by the learner's ability to self-correct (Brown, 2014, p. 246). This stage is called "stabilization" by some researchers. However, "It should be made clear that these four stages do not *globally* describe a learner's status in the development of the L2. For example, learners would rarely be in an emergent stage for *all* L2 subsystems" (Brown, 2014, p. 246). Therefore, it is my belief that Ema has reached this stage of stabilization in some areas of her oral English language development.

Conclusion

The lessons that can be gathered from this case study for me and all language instructors are three-fold. Firstly, language learning is progressive. Teachers and learners must recognize that all learners build off of language learning experiences from their past, both from learning their native language and from learning additional languages, however small, that influence their current language learning experience. Secondly, whatever a language learner is able to do in the additional language they are wanting to acquire should be celebrated. Teachers need to keep in mind their students' unique attitudes, cultures, and personalities, which affect their language learning experience. Related to this is the teacher's responsibility to guide students with their understanding of what is needed in order to acquire an additional language. Sometimes students' expectations are not realistic; which leads me to my final point: there needs to be a collaboration between teachers and students to create measureable and attainable language learning goals for individual language learners. Teachers should help students prioritize their goals and decide which goals to focus on and when. They should also give students opportunity to guide discussions with the teacher about their own language learning goals, their views on their strengths and weakness, as well as what their language priorities are.

Emma had opportunity to evaluate her own language learning experience throughout the five interviews we had together. In Emma's case, she already knew that oral English was a weak area for her. She expressed to me that she especially wanted to improve in this area. Over the past seven months, Emma's oral English skills have been our focus. Through interviews, times with family and friends, classes at BOCES, and travel, her oral English skills have made a speedy development. Now, more discussions should be had about her goals and what next steps could be taken.

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