

**THE NATIVE-LIKE SPEAKER MYTH: CHALLENGING NATIVE-LIKE
PROFICIENCY AS THE ONLY MEASURE OF ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION SUCCESS**

By

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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December 2023

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to challenge the native-like speaker myth, which consists of four assumptions about adult additional language acquisition. These four assumptions are as follows: 1) assumption of a homogenous native speaker, 2) assumption of native-like proficiency as ultimate attainment goal, 3) assumption of native-like proficiency as the only measure of success, and 4) assumption of an objective measure of additional language acquisition (ALA) success. Using a qualitative life histories approach, this study adds nuance to the notion of success and failure in adult ALA. This study consists of individual interviews of twenty-six (26) participants who began learning an additional language after the age of 12. Their interview data was analyzed primarily using a qualitative data analysis process and secondarily using corpus analysis. As a result of these multiple rounds of data analysis, four themes emerged: 1) adults learn language to connect with people, not to be like native speakers; 2) adults learn language to connect with cultures, not to be like native speakers; 3) adults can succeed at reaching or exceeding their additional language goals; and 4) adults do not always fail at ALA; instead, they have varied measures of AL success, which are not always measured by nearness to native-like proficiency. The use of the life histories approach allowed adult additional language learners to voice their own individual measures of additional language acquisition goals and measures of success. The themes that emerged from the data analysis challenged the four assumptions of the native-like speaker myth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Suganthi John, for her unwavering support, guidance, and wisdom for the entirety of this thesis. I absolutely could not have completed such a large project, especially through a global pandemic, without her. Thank you also to Paul Daniel, who edited portions of this thesis for grammar, spelling, and style. You helped me learn not to use too many semi-colons.

Many thanks to my participants who were willing to answer all my questions about your language acquisition process. It was fascinating to learn each of your individual stories.

I have so much gratitude for my husband, Josh, for allowing me to chase my big goals and to my kids, Chloe, Josiah, Mia, and Lana who inspire me every day. Thanks also to my parents, Matthew and Kellie Lim, for guiding my strong will toward big things in education and in life. I know Grandpa Bob would be so proud of me.

I am forever grateful for the many friends who have encouraged me along the way. Rachel, Emily, Tracy, Sarah, Cindi: your belief that I could, in fact, complete a PhD was helpful beyond measure. Thanks for reminding me that I can cry, but I can't stop [writing]. Shout out also to the bois for listening to me talk about this dissertation endlessly for years while we ran all those miles. I'm sure I missed naming a few people, but please know that I am grateful for you.

Thanks to Dr Leslie Layne for mentoring me through the earliest version of this project, when it was but a Master's thesis. And, thanks to all my colleagues who have heard me jabber on about this for literal years now.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to challenge the native-like speaker myth which has dominated the field of additional language acquisition for many decades. The myth is based primarily on four assumptions in which adult additional language acquisition (ALA) is compared to the nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. Each of these assumptions will be investigated in turn in this thesis using the life histories of adults who learned an additional language after the age of twelve (commonly considered the age at which people can no longer acquire an additional language in the same manner they learned their first language as a child). The choice of using this life histories approach is to give voice to individuals whose additional language acquisition experiences are often broadly generalized in typically quantitative language studies which dominate the field. Often, these studies tend to set adult additional language learners in comparison to the *native speaker*. However, this thesis posits that individual learners may have more nuanced experiences of ALA than past and current research in language acquisition suggests. It was anticipated that this research could give further insight into individualized ALA goals, motivations, measures of proficiency and success. Over the course of multiple months, twenty-six (26) adult additional language learners described their ALA experience in recorded interviews with the researcher. The participants represented multiple backgrounds, countries of origin, first and additional languages. From the data elicited from their life histories and the subsequent analysis, four common themes were identified. These themes, their development, and their implications will be addressed in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

This chapter begins with an overview of the contexts and backgrounds that spurred this study. It will cover the social and academic notions of the *native speaker* and adult ALA. Then, the statement of intent of this study, the research methodology overview, and the position of the researcher will be presented. This section will describe the research approach and how it fits into the field of language acquisition. Following this is the significance of the research and the presentation of the organization of this thesis.

1.2 Contexts of Additional Language Acquisition

The study of additional language acquisition, often referred to as *second language acquisition* and abbreviated as L2A or SLA, addresses quite a wide range of ideas including why people learn additional languages, how they learn them, what they can learn, and what they cannot learn within the language. The following sections address the reasons people learn ALs and the use of language to include and exclude others. Following that explanation, I will describe my background as researcher, in relation to these concepts.

1.2.1 Voluntary ALA

Throughout the world, for centuries, people have voluntarily learned additional languages. The reasons why people around the world learn additional languages are quite diverse. Some people choose to learn an AL to further their education, their career, and their travels. Today, advertisements for websites and language learning applications, promise that people can learn a new language fast or that it will only take eight (Knight, 2023), twelve (Mykhalevych, 2023), fourteen (Zhou, 2023), or eighteen (Kostiuk, 2023) easy tips to learn an AL. Rosetta Stone (2021) claims it has a “secret” to learning an AL. Duolingo claims it is “free, fun, and effective.” People around the world seek to learn an AL, choosing when to start, how to learn, what their goals are, and having the freedom to stop at any point.

Additionally, students around the world learn ALs at school. In schools across the United States, students begin learning a “foreign language” in high school. And, while they may not consider it voluntary, they are not forced to learn a language for any reason other than to get a good grade in the class.

1.2.2 Involuntary ALA

In contrast, many others do not have a choice to learn – or not learn -- an AL. Language can be used to oppress or colonize people. In Mexico, prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in 1519, the Aztec nation spoke their own language, Nahuatl. After the Spanish conquest, those left behind were forced to speak Spanish. Similar to the conquest of Mexico, the same situation occurred in much of South America and parts of the Caribbean. All of these spaces now speak Spanish as their primary language though some areas maintain their indigenous languages.

A similar situation occurred in the United States where over 600 tribes of indigenous peoples lived, speaking as many languages, prior to the European conquest in the late 1400s (“Native Americans,” 2019). In the years that followed, the original inhabitants of what is now the United States were forced to speak English. Children were taken from their home and put into Federal Boarding Schools, which “were designed to separate a child from his reservation and family, strip him of his tribal lore and mores, **force the complete abandonment of his native language**, and prepare him for never again returning to his people” (Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 1969, emphasis mine). These students were forced to learn an AL and did not choose to speak English.

Furthermore, British Colonization around the world has influenced the widespread dominance of English (Phillipson, 2018; Meigham, 2023). India, where hundreds of languages are spoken, uses English as its official and governmental language due to the British Colonization in the 1800s-1900s (Mohanty, 2022). Many other countries share this story of British Colonization influencing language. Kenya, Nigeria, Singapore, among many others now use English as an official language, often using it in daily and educational life (Phillipson, 2018). However, as will be discussed in the following section, these speakers will often be overlooked when it comes time to define who qualifies as a *native speaker*.

1.2.3 Who is and is not a native speaker

The above factors that motivate or force people to learn an AL contribute to the blurriness of who is and is not a *native speaker* of a language. One example of such complexity is in India where there are 270 “mother tongues” that have 10,000 or more speakers. English is one of the “mother tongues” with 2.6 million speakers. When combined with those who speak English as a “second” or “third” language, over 129 million people in India speak English (Census of India, 2011) and is an official language of government (Constitution of India, 1950). However, global immigration policies exclude those from India as *native speakers* by requiring them to take English proficiency tests prior to immigration (UK Government, 2023). Similarly, speakers of English from Nigeria, Kenya, and others are often not considered when determining who is a *native speaker*.

For example, the United Kingdom requires “proof of English language ability” for those “applying to settle permanently in the UK (also known as applying for 'leave to remain' or 'long residence')” (UK Government, 2023). To prove their English language ability,

people must take the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which is “designed to help you work, study or migrate to a country where English is used as the language of communication” (Cambridge, 2023). This includes countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States (IELTS, 2023). The UK exempts people from 18 different countries from taking the IELTS; however, notably missing from the exemption list are countries such as India whose official language is English and includes countries of the African Commonwealth such as Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, and Kenya. Although Nigeria’s official language is English and many of its businesses require employees to speak English (Pinon and Haydon, 2010), those wishing to immigrate to the United Kingdom or the United States are required to take an English proficiency test.

In contrast, a number of countries on the exemption list, including the United States, do not have English as an official language (UK Government, 2023). Canada, like many other countries is a French and English bilingual country, but its citizens are not required to take English proficiency tests prior to immigrating to the US or Europe. The issues surrounding the use of proficiency tests for travel and immigration and the social and governmental complexities are well beyond the scope of this thesis. But the key point for this thesis is that the use of the term *native speaker* is ambiguous.

The use of language as a way to include or exclude people is a centuries old concept. The concept of discerning a person as like or unlike oneself based on their accent is recorded in the Biblical book of Judges, chapter 12, which was reportedly written as early as 1090BC. People identified others based solely on their pronunciation, determining essentially who was with them and who was against them: The “Gileadites struck . . . down the Ephraimites. . .and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over [the Jordan river],” the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he replied, “No,” they said, “All right, say ‘Shibboleth.’” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan” (Judges 12:5-6). In this historical context, the distinction in accent was used to distinguish who is a part of the in-group and who was not.

Today, the word *shibboleth* is used more broadly as a way to identify people as part of an in-group, which consequently also creates an out-group or distinctions of people based on their use of language. In many countries, language proficiency tests are used as a

“shibboleth” (Mcnamara, 2005) as a way to control immigrant and refugee statuses. Furthermore, these tests can be used to “establish social identity” and creates in-groups and out-groups based on language (Mcnamara, 2005).

The use of language as a means of inclusion or exclusion is also discussed in a popular 2018 podcast. In the *NPR Code Switch* podcast episode “Talk American,” hosts Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby explore the idea of the “standard American accent” and the hierarchy of different American English dialects:

MERAJI: . . . I'm going to call myself out for a minute. When I hear someone's voice, I automatically - like, in a second - start guessing things about them, like where they're from, their age...

DEMBY: Gender, the sexual orientation maybe, their education level. We all do it. I do it. And it's easy to say that those thoughts are, like, based on some kind of, you know, linguistic evidence. People with advanced degrees use words with more syllables, stuff like that. Men have lower voices. . .

MERAJI: But when we're thinking about someone's accent, let's be honest - we're making judgment calls. We're listening to the way they speak to tell us whether they have power, whether they're trustworthy, whether they're smart, kind, annoying, innocent or guilty. We use people's accents to discern if someone is like us or if they're not like us.

DEMBY: And the research has shown that these judgments have real-life consequences on people. One study . . . showed that people who were perceived to have foreign accents were judged as being less trustworthy than perceived native speakers.

MERAJI: That's right. And other research has shown that it often takes only 30 milliseconds for a listener to detect whether they're hearing a familiar or a foreign accent. So, we start judging people before we even know what they're about to say.

DEMBY: Terrible.

MERAJI: And look. Everyone - everyone - has some kind of accent. (2:27-4:03)

The study Meraji and Demby (2018) are referring to is Flege (1984) which found that American native English speakers can distinguish between a native English speaker or a

French-accented English speaker in as few as 30 milliseconds. The Flege (1984) study is certainly not the first nor the last that proves that people make language judgments about others based on their accent or their proximity to the *native speaker*.

1.3 Defining the *native-like speaker myth*

My background as researcher for this thesis began as a teacher of high school Spanish and then of English to international students studying at an American university. I questioned the notion of the *native speaker* as the ALA goal and the false dichotomy of success and failure in ALA. These stories are as follows.

As first a high school Spanish teacher who became a university-level elective Spanish professor, I quickly noticed a difference in motivation amongst my students. The high school Spanish students were not only required to attend school by law but also they were required to take so-called “foreign language” courses to graduate from high school. The college students who enrolled in an elective Spanish course had chosen to take this course for a variety of reasons and were not required to attend the class. Many of the students in the high school classes had one singular desired outcome level (DOL): earn a good grade in the Spanish class so they could move ahead. And, many of them reached that goal and promptly stopped learning Spanish. Based on their in-class assessments, these students were fully cognitively capable of acquiring a higher level of proficiency in the Spanish language. However, they simply did not have the motivation to do so.

In contrast, many of the students who enrolled in my elective university-level Spanish courses have different motivations to learn and have different desired outcome levels. Some seek to improve their career path, to interact with others, or to connect to their heritage. These students, when asked, often say they plan to learn Spanish for life or until they can do what they want to do with the language. These university-level students often acquire significant Spanish proficiency, in theory, due to their desired outcome levels. Although the students in both scenarios have different motivations and desired outcome levels, both sets of students could claim to be successful in reaching their DOLs.

Furthermore, my experience and research has also focused on teaching English to international students attending university in the United States. Many of these students have studied English for many years. Their vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar may be different than those who grew up in the United States. But their ability to understand

and be understood in social and academic contexts was sufficient to function as they desired in the university. Although some research may consider these adult AL learners to be failures for not speaking like the *native speaker*, I considered these students to be successful in their ALA.

Contrary to my observations, however, the language acquisition research both past and current has claimed that adults always fail at learning an AL (Bley-Vroman, 2009) and are “incapable of learning a new language” (Hartshorne, 2018, p. 273). It seemed that the field of linguistics came to a consensus that adults cannot learn an AL like a *native speaker* and moved on to study why these adults are not successful (Coppieters, 1987; Birdsong, 1992; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Saito, 2015). The issue, however, is that these studies are founded on the *native-like speaker myth*, which appears to be based on a set of assumptions concerning adult additional language acquisition. An analysis of these studies (reviewed in detail in Chapter 2, p. 17) point to four key assumptions. These are as follows:

- Assumption of a homogenous native speaker
- Assumption of native-like proficiency as ultimate attainment goal
- Assumption of native-like proficiency as the only measure of success
- Assumption of an objective measure of ALA success

These assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth* will be addressed fully in Chapter 2 in the context of the past and present literature. The methodology used to challenge these assumptions is described in Chapter 3. The findings and discussion of each assumption will be addressed individually in Chapter 5, 6, and 7.

1.3.1 Assumption of a homogenous native speaker

The first assumption of the *native-speaker myth* is the existence of a homogenous *native speaker*. Although the “native speaker” was declared dead by lexicographer Thomas Paikeday in his 1985 book titled “*The native speaker is dead!*”, linguists today still grapple with the notion of the native speaker. A 2021 post on the popular linguistics blog, *Language Log*, asked this very question: “What does “Native speaker” mean, anyway?” (Grammon and Babel, 2021). While Paikeday (1985) argues that the “native speaker” does not exist, Grammon and Babel (2021) argue that the “native speaker” does exist but

only to draw boundaries for exclusion. They contend that the notion of the *native speaker* “draws on deep-rooted assumptions regarding who is worthy of being a speaker and which languages are worthy of being recognized as such.” While the *Language Log* is a not a scholarly journal, those publishing and commenting on the posts are distinguished scholars in their fields of sociolinguistics, Hispanic linguistics, among others. The question of “What does ‘native speaker’ mean, anyway?” is one that many have asked, but few have a definite answer for although most seem to have a personal notion of what it means.

While some linguists tend to believe the idea of a universal, monolithic *native speaker* has been debunked, the rest of the world continues to use the binary of native and non-native speakers. Even the American National Corpus (‘Who is a native speaker,’ 2015) cannot create a specific, unified definition of who qualifies as a *native speaker* of American English. They include a list of potential qualities of a *native speaker*, but each of the qualifications are simply guidelines for a complex concept. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Section 1.2 (p. 2), the definition of who is and who is not a *native speaker* is unclear, given who is required to take the IELTS to immigrate to the UK. Many have an internalized definition of a *native speaker*, thinking everyone shares a definition. But, this is an assumption that often leaves out the many people of colonized countries that use English as an official language today.

In social media, the use of *native speaker* or *non-native speaker* is used without specific definition, but it seems to rely on the reader to decide what it means for themselves. In a tweet on February 28th, 2023, @MerriamWebster asked a question for “non-native English speakers” tweeting:

Non-native English Speakers, what’s a word from your language that you think is perfect that doesn’t have an English equivalent?

Take us to church.

Reply tweets rolled in, from languages like Japanese and Arabic to Icelandic and Native Alaskan Tlingit and even British Sign language. Each reply shared words that carry meaning to the speakers of those languages but cannot be expressed with just one or two words in English. Clearly, each person who read and responded knew what the tweet was asking and from whom. Those on Twitter who responded did not ask for a definition of

native speaker but knew the intent of the Tweet and responded accordingly. But, while the tweet did not define who could be considered a *non-native* speaker of English, it does assume the existence of a unified definition of who is a *native speaker* and who is *non*.

In the field of law, in an article for the *Psychology, Crime, and Law*, authors Hu and Naka (2022) research the “the differences in the quality and quantity of eyewitness testimony given in one’s native and second languages,” finding that when a person is testifying in their additional language the details of the event “may specifically [be] affect[ed].” While this finding is valuable for those investigating events using eyewitness accounts, the research relies on the false dichotomy of *native* and “second language” speakers.

In the field of neuropsychology, in an article for the *Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology*, Hellström, Eckerström, and Wallin (2022, p. 826) test the “second language effects on neuropsychological (NP) test performance,” finding that “second language effects may contribute to misclassification of non-native speakers” meaning that people who are tested in their additional language may be misdiagnosed. The authors do not attempt to give a full definition of *bilingualism*, and they recognize that even *native speakers* of a language will have varied vocabulary knowledge, but in using scholarly linguistic research, they define bilingualism as “denot[ing] proficiency in two languages, L1 (native) and L2 (non-native),” relying on a definition of native and non-native that is not fully-inclusive of all speakers of multiple languages. These authors do recognize the limitations of their study saying that they did not identify current L1 status, age of acquisition, and/or acculturation, which is an important clarification.

The concept of a *native speaker*, specifically a *native English speaker* is still prevalent in mainstream culture. In the corporate world, the requirement to be a “native English speaker” is prohibited in job postings according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2023). However, a recent study (Spence *et al*, 2022) found that language discrimination specifically discrimination against those who do not speak English as a *native speaker*, is still occurring. Additionally, lawsuits such as *EEOC, et al. v. Wisconsin Plastics, Inc* (2016) or *EEOC v. Central California Foundation for Health d/b/a Delano Regional Medical Center* (2010), wherein a corporation is sued for illegally firing employees who did not speak English like a *native speaker* (such as speaking English with a “foreign accent”), demonstrate that the concept of the *native speaker* remains an issue.

Linguists, too, for decades have made similar distinctions, identifying people as either native or non-native speakers (eg. Birdsong 1992; Derwing and Munro 2013; Hendriks and Hickmann 2015), measuring them by native-like proficiency or lack thereof (eg. Bley-Vroman 1990; Hartshorne 2018), distinguishing them as having communicative competence or not, having reached ultimate attainment or having failed (eg. Bley-Vroman 1990; Birdsong 1992). However, these distinctions are false dichotomies, relying heavily on the existence of a homogenous *native speaker* and not creating any room for diversity of language goals.

This assumption of the existence of a homogenous *native speaker* leads to a false dichotomy between *native speakers* and *non-native speakers* which lead to further assumptions.

1.3.2 Assumption of native-like proficiency as ultimate attainment goal

The second assumption of the *native-like speaker myth* is that all adult language learners share the same ultimate attainment goal of reaching *native-like* proficiency. Although it is reasonable to presume that the inability of people to speak like a *native speaker* in an additional language is old news, a quick search of (“native”) and (“second language”) in Google Scholar show eighteen thousand (18,000) publications just in the last 15 months (since January 2022 until March 2023). In fact, in just the first three months of 2023, over three thousand (3,000) scholarly articles have been published according to the same search results. Even within linguistics, research still uses the distinction of “native” or “native-like” and “nonnative” to describe additional language learners. For example, Birdsong (2014), which has been cited 183 times, uses the phrase “native-like” and “non-native-like” sixty-five (65) times within their article, using the native speaker as a measure of additional language proficiency.

This assumption is also made in the widely cited article by Hartshorne *et al* (2018). This study used an online quiz that went viral and gathered data from 2/3 of a million participants. It not only has been referenced by scholars, but it also was featured in a BBC news article (2018). In this article, Hartshorne *et al* (2018) propose a critical period for second language acquisition, based on their data. They use a track metaphor to describe this phenomenon:

People who began learning [an AL] at a certain age reached nativelike proficiency merely indicates that they learned fast enough, not that they learned as fast as a

native speaker, just as the fact that two runners both finished a race indicates only that they both started early enough and ran fast enough, not that they ran at the exact same speed. (p. 264)

However, the assumption is that all AL learners are “running” the same distance race and that all “runners” have the same target. It assumes that all learners share the goal of *native-like proficiency*. To follow the metaphor, I would argue that while some runners may be running the full marathon distance, others may have only set out to run the half marathon distance. This means that once they reach their finish line, they have successfully reached their goal even though it is half the distance as the full marathon. Similarly, adult language learners may set out to learn an AL for a specific purpose and upon reaching that goal, they are successful. Their goals can be anything from conversational functionality, travel proficiency, or survival proficiency to *native-like* proficiency. However, to assume that all runners or language learners share the same finish line goals is a flawed assumption about both groups of people.

This assumption will be fully described in Chapter 2 (p. 17). This assumption will be addressed further in Chapter 5 (p. 118), wherein the data from individual participants will be presented to challenge this assumption.

1.3.3 Assumption of native-like proficiency as the only measure of success

The third assumption of the *native-like speaker myth* is that the only measure of ALA success is to reach *native-like* proficiency. The idea that native-like proficiency is the only measure of AL success is the gold standard and has been assumed without attention for decades in literature. Selinker (1972) while focusing interlanguage and methodology, briefly referred to the assumptions that “must be made” (201): “Regarding the ideal second-language learner who will *not* ‘succeed’ (in the absolute sense described above) and who is thus representative of the vast majority of second-language learners, we can idealise that from the beginning of his study of a second language, he has his attention focused upon one norm of the language whose sentences he is attempting to produce” (213). While Selinker’s research is based on other facets of ALA, he clearly makes the assumption that the measure of success is *native-like* proficiency. This study, and its assumptions, is still cited highly in scholarly ALA research today.

This assumption of a singular measure of success is based on a deficit model of ALA. It rests on the idea that adult language learners must always try to catch up to those who

began learning their AL from a young age. It also suggests an individual deficiency in which the adult language learner cannot and will not ever overcome the deficit of their AL proficiency and, thus, will always fail.

However, even if a proficiency gap will always exist between L1 speakers and AL learners, a model in which AL learners are always trying to “catch up” to the *native-like* speaker indicates a deficiency, when ultimately it is a choice. As indicated in Section 1.3.2 (p. 9) and detailed in Section 5.7 (p. 133), adult language learners have diversity of desired outcome levels, which often are not to speak like a *native speaker*. But, once they reach their individual desired outcome levels, they should consider themselves successful.

As discussed in Section 1.2 (p. 2) and Section 5.5 (p. 123), different people have different motivations for learning an AL, some of which are not voluntary motivations for ALA. The motivation to learn influences the level of AL proficiency each person gains and if they successfully reach their AL goals. Ogbu and Simons (1998) did significant research on the sociocultural reasons that people are minorities and found that involuntary minorities such as Native Americans and African Americans along with refugees and migrants may have a “tourist mentality” in which they are not interested in assimilation but just survival in the culture while they are in it (Ogbu and Simons, 1998). If a person knows they are only going to be in a culture temporarily, whether it be by choice or not, the motivation to reach *native-like* proficiency is low, instead reaching for survival-level proficiency. Furthermore, voluntary minorities, such as those who have moved to a new country for the purpose of bettering their life, are more likely to want to assimilate to the culture and language, therefore, striving for a different proficiency level. They are more likely to strive for an AL proficiency that allows them to integrate into the culture and live within their AL culture. For these reasons, the success of an adult additional language learner should be based more so on if they can do what they want to do in their AL.

This assumption will be fully described in Chapter 2 (p. 17). This assumption will be addressed further in Chapter 6 (p. 158), wherein the data from individual participants will be presented to challenge this assumption.

1.3.4 Assumption of an objective measure of ALA success

The final assumption of the *native-like speaker myth* is that there exists an objective measure of ALA success. As the previous assumptions indicate, the homogenous *native*

speaker does not exist; therefore, it cannot, should not be, and is not the ultimate goal for all additional language learners. Additionally, due to its lack of clear definition, the *native speaker* cannot be the measure of ALA success. Therefore, there also cannot exist an objective measure of ALA success.

This thesis proposes a variable measure of ALA success based on the individual's personal indication of having reached their individual DOLs. It hypothesizes that adult AL learners can and do reach their DOLs and by reaching those goals can and should be considered successful.

Research has shown that people can self-assess their own language proficiency with relative accuracy. Ma and Winke (2019) found that students' ability to self-assess their proficiency compared to OPI ratings are moderately accurate (79). Ma and Winke (2019), among many others, suggest that self-assessment not only gives learners agency but allows them to set their own goals --- and therefore their own measurement of success.

This assumption will be fully described in Chapter 2 (p. 17). This assumption will be addressed further in Chapter 7 (p. 118), wherein the data from individual participants will be presented to challenge this assumption.

1.4 Research Aims

The aim of this thesis is to challenge the aforementioned four assumptions that comprise *native-like speaker myth*. The method of challenging these assumptions is through the use of a qualitative life histories approach comprised of individual interviews of adult additional language learners. The purpose of using this approach is to give individual language learners agency in telling their own stories and to determine their own measure of ALA success. These individual life histories add nuance to the current field of additional language acquisition. The details of the methodology used in this thesis can be found in Chapter 3 (p. 64).

1.5 Research Context

This thesis fits into current themes in the field of additional language acquisition. In the past few years, a number of professional organizations have identified the need to address ALA from a more qualitative, individualized perspective. This thesis intends to add to the field of linguistics by providing individual life histories of adult additional language

learners to address the diversity and complexity within their language learning experiences.

In a commemorative article in the *Foreign Language Annals*, published by the American Council on Teaching on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Larsen-Freeman (2018, p. 55) “looks ahead” into the “future directions in, and future research into, second language acquisition.” In this article, the author states the need to adjust the method of researching ALA:

We need to think differently about [second language acquisition] . . . the researchers in the field adopt an ecological perspective, whereby the relations among factors are what is key to elucidating the complexity. I offer as an example overcoming the bifurcation between research on individual differences and research on the SLA process. Doing so ushers in a person-centered, humanistic dimension of SLA. (p. 55)

This thesis seeks to add to the field by contributing individualized, “person centered” data, which describe some of the complexities of adult AL learners.

Additionally, the 32nd International Conference on Foreign and Second Language Acquisition (ICFSLA), which took place in May 2021, had the theme “Narratives of Success and Failure: Stories from Foreign Language Teachers and Learners.” This conference focused on the individual stories of success and failure in additional language acquisition. The theme placed an emphasis on “the role of qualitative methods in SLA research, and especially the role of (personal) narratives as a tool not only of expression of subjective perceptions and experiences but also of interesting in-depth analysis of the issues relating to FL success and failure in a diversity of educational and non-educational contexts (Gabryś-Barker, 2021, p. 82). This thesis will add to the field of linguistics by allowing individuals to tell their own ALA experiences and to determine their own ALA success.

Throughout the field of linguistics, specifically in additional language acquisition, the majority of studies use quantitative methods. These studies have produced essential insights into the additional language acquisition process and the things that learners can and cannot do. However, a quantitative method lends itself to broad generalizations of participant data. But adult language learners are individuals with individual reasons to

learn and individual experiences that lead to individual and varied measures of AL proficiency and success. For this reason, I chose to use a qualitative method of research to individualize each learner's story and discover the details that make each learner different. The methods used are detailed in Chapter 3 (p. 64), and the analysis of the data is detailed in Chapter 4 (p. 92).

1.5.1 Participants' role in research

The participants who consented to participating in this study were informed in advance that they would be asked to share their experience learning an AL. Participants had many varieties of first languages, additional languages, places of origin, education levels, desired outcome levels, etc. They all had some experience learning an AL. In describing their own individual AL experience, these participants contributed their stories to this thesis so others can learn more about the ALA process. The details of these participants and their individual life histories will be discussed in Chapters 3-7.

1.6 Summary

As many around the world learn an additional language, they are often told either directly or indirectly that they will fail at ALA because they will not be able to speak like a *native speaker*. In understanding the nuances of adult ALA, it is crucial to recognize the diversity of individual adult AL learners, specifically in relation to desired outcome levels and measures of ALA success.

This chapter has highlighted the background of additional language acquisition over the centuries across the world. It has presented the four assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth*. Additionally, it has described the use of the qualitative method with a life histories approach to challenge these four assumptions. It then described how this thesis fits into and extends the field of linguistics.

In the upcoming chapter 2, I will undertake to cover the past and current literature concerning additional language acquisition. This literature review includes description of the critical period hypothesis, the fundamental differences hypothesis (Bley-Vroman, 1990), and the development of the research questions that are addressed in this thesis.

Chapter 3 explains the qualitative method used in this thesis. It gives an overview of the broad use of quantitative methods in the field of additional language acquisition. This

chapter will describe the life histories approach and the justification for its use in this thesis.

In Chapter 4, I detail the methods of qualitative data analysis including the coding process, the use of corpus analysis to add rigor to the analysis, and the emergence of four themes from the data.

In Chapters 5, 6, 7, I discuss the findings of the data analysis and the themes that emerged. The discussion of these themes includes identifying how these themes converge with the scholarly literature and where they diverge from it. This discussion presents both quantified data representing participants' experiences and excerpts of individual life histories as they relate to each theme. These chapters as a whole challenge the *native-like speaker myth* with the discussion of participants' diverse ALA experiences, desired outcome levels, measures of AL proficiency, and measures of AL success.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by reviewing the aim of the study and assessing how the participant data and the analysis addresses the research questions. This final chapter will also address the limitations of this study, implications of this study, and future research potential with this data and similar methodology.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This thesis, as described previously, examines critically the pre-conceived assumptions associated with the *native speaker* and the markers related to additional language acquisition (ALA) success. Although the topic of research presented in this thesis closely aligns with the field of additional language acquisition, the use of the life histories method more closely aligns with fields of discipline such as sociology, medicine, and education.

This chapter is organized into two main sections. In the first section, it reviews foundational and present scholarly research on ALA. I will address the assumptions made about ALA with particular emphasis on the *native-like speaker myth* (See Ch. 1, p. 1). In addressing these assumptions, I will discuss contested terminology as used in the literature and clarify how they are used in this thesis. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use the term additional language acquisition (ALA) rather than the more commonly used term, second language acquisition (L2A or SLA). L2A/SLA refers to the intentional learning of a language in addition to a person's L1 (Bley-Vroman, 1990; DeKeyser, 2000). However, L2A and SLA are often misnomers as they tend to refer to the acquisition of any additional language even if it is a third, fourth or subsequent new language (Dewaele, *et al* 2017). The term ALA is a more precise phrase to describe the language acquisition described in this thesis.

In the second section, it reviews the methodology of foundational and current ALA research. This section seeks to demonstrate how I will address the assumptions made in ALA research. I will explain why this thesis uses qualitative methods with a life histories approach rather than the more-frequently-used quantitative methods to address these assumptions in ALA. When relevant, I will specify how my research fits and extends the current body of literature of this respective area of research.

2.2 Locating the *native-like speaker myth* in past and current literature

The following section will address the *native-like speaker myth*. It will demonstrate how these four assumptions of the *native speaker* are made in both historical and current research. The *native-like speaker myth* is the notion that ALA success is measured by the nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. This measurement of ALA success, however, is based on four assumptions:

- Assumption of a homogenous native speaker
- Assumption of native-like proficiency as ultimate attainment goal
- Assumption of native-like proficiency as the only measure of success
- Assumption of an objective measure of ALA success

This thesis seeks to “challenge equating success with conformity to native speaker norms” which Larsen-Freeman (2016, p. 207) states is “a step that needs to be taken.” For this reason, I will present the literature that makes these assumptions. When appropriate, I will point out how I can contribute to and extend the field of linguistics by challenging these assumptions.

2.2.1 The issue of defining a native speaker

The first assumption of the *native-like speaker myth* is the existence of one homogeneous native speaker without variation of accent, lexicon, or dialect. This notion of the *native speaker* has served as the “yardstick to measure second language knowledge” (Han, 2004, p. 166; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). However, the definition of who is the *native speaker* is imprecise. This thesis is not the first to note the lack of convergence in meaning of *native speaker*. In fact, some argue that “[the construct of the native speaker] is one of the least investigated (and for that matter, least understood) concepts in the [SLA] field” (Han, 2004, p. 166; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). The following section will present the ambiguity of the term *native speaker* and describe the lack of one homogeneous *native speaker* to which adult language learners may be compared.

2.2.1.1 Lack of Definition regarding the Native Speaker. Many people have a general idea of who is – and is not – a native speaker. Usually, a *native speaker* is someone who has spoken a language since birth (Mack, 1997). For example, an American born in the United States to English-speaking parents or a Briton born in the UK to English-speaking parents is considered a *native speaker* (Bloomfield, 1935; Love and Ansaldo, 2010). Most people consider someone to be a *native speaker* of English if they are from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and/or Australia, (IELTS, 2023). However, this fails to consider the 68 million people in the United States alone who speak a language other than English as their home language (HHS Language Action Plan, 2023) or the 1.077 billion (Ethnologue, 2023) people worldwide that have learned English as an additional first language or as an additional language. This idea of who is considered as a *native speaker* “has occupied a prominent place in foreign/second

language research and theoretical linguistics: it has influenced both the way we theorize about language and the way we conduct empirical research” (Vulchanova, *et al.*, 2022). However, the complexity of succinctly defining who *native speakers* are, is quite undeniable.

The field of linguistics does not have a unified definition of who a *native speaker* is. *Native speaker* is typically described as a person who acquires a *native language* implicitly from childhood (Lenneberg, 1967; Hartshorne, 2018). A *native language* and a *first language (L1)* are sometimes used interchangeably (Flege, 1984). Sometimes an L1 is referred to as a *mother tongue* (Love and Ansaldo, 2010). Dąbrowska (2012) uses the phrase *first language* to describe the language acquired prior to the fifth year of life despite “large individual differences” (220). Dąbrowska’s (2019) study uses the phrase *native speakers* of English to describe “L1 participants [who] were all born and raised in the United Kingdom” (75). In this thesis, when referring to a person’s first language, I will use L1. When referring to the language a person uses most commonly, I will use *primary language* rather than a person’s *native language* as these terms more precisely describe participants’ language acquisition.

The term *native speaker* is used frequently throughout scholarly and popular literature as a commonly understood concept. But the notion of the *native speaker* is not as well-defined as many would assume. Some studies question the use of terminologies such as *native speaker* and *nonnative speaker* (Dewaele, 2017). But, as Hulstijn (2019, p. 159) points out “in the academic literature . . . the terms are still in use in the neutral sense.”

Dewaele (2017, p. 236) states: “The debate on the concept of the native speaker and its use has been raging for decades and shows no sign of abating.” This notion was addressed earlier by Davies (2003, p. 1), who says “[The concept of a native speaker] is surely a common-sense idea, referring to people who have a special control over a language, insider knowledge about ‘their’ language. They are the models we appeal to for the ‘truth’ about the language. . . but the common-sense view alone is inadequate and needs the support and explanation given by thorough theoretical discussion.” Similarly, Han (2004) says:

Even a cursory reading of the major SLA literature would not yield one readily available definition that captures the essential uses that have been made of the

concept: including, but not limited to, setting the native speaker as a yardstick to measure second language knowledge. As is, the concept remains assumed – based on common sense observation and intuition – rather than exposed to scientific inquiry. (p. 166)

Historical and current ALA literature has used – and still uses -- the *native speaker* despite its lack of a clear definition. The following Table 2.1 displays the varied definitions of the *native speaker* as published in scholarly linguistic journals.

Table 2.1 Definition of Native Speaker in the Field of Linguistics

Source	Definition of Native Speaker
Bloomfield, 1935	“The first language a human being learns to speak is his <i>native language</i> ; he is a <i>native speaker</i> of this language” (p. 43)
Chomsky, 1965	A <i>native speaker</i> has “ linguistic intuition ” to distinguish between “well-formed and deviant” sentences (p. 24).
Stern, 1983	“Native speakers have (a) a subconscious knowledge of rules, (b) an intuitive grasp of meanings , (c) the ability to communicate within social settings, (d) a range of language skills , and (e) creativity of language use .” (p. 154)
Mack, 1997	“A native speaker is here defined as an individual who has, or has had, a first language . Most often, the native speaker is exposed to his/her language from infancy ” (p. 115)
Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam, 2009	A native speaker “(a) has spoken only Swedish at home during childhood ; (b) has had Swedish as the only language of instruction at school ; and (c) has lived his or her whole life in a context in which Swedish has been the majority language ” (p. 264)
Love and Ansaldo, 2010	“If you were born and brought up from birth to speak a given language, for preference in a family where the parents or other adults had the same experience with the same language, then you are a <i>native speaker</i> of that language, which is your <i>mother tongue</i> .” (p. 589)
Benmamoun <i>et al.</i> , 2013	“A prototypical (educated) native speaker lives in a monolingual environment , or in a bilingual environment in which his/her original native language has not undergone attrition. Such a prototypical speaker is expected to have “native” pronunciation and a sizable, comprehensive vocabulary (about 20,000 words)” (p. 130)
Birdsong and Gertkin, 2013	“For the sake of simplicity, and consistent with the stance of many other researchers, we connect “native” (as in native speaker or native user of a language) to the language-from-birth and also to monolingualism ” (p. 109).

Rothman and Treffers-Daller, 2014	“A native language is one that is acquired from naturalistic exposure , in early childhood and in an authentic social context/speech community ” (p. 95)
Hartshorne <i>et al</i> , 2018	“The first several thousand participants were asked to list their “native languages.” Based on participant feedback, this was adjusted to “native languages (learned from birth)” (p. 265).
Birdsong, 2018	65 uses of “native,” “nativelike,” “nativeness,” “non-nativelike,” “non-nativeness,” or “near-nativeness” without definition
Kang <i>et al</i> , 2019	54 uses of “nonnative” or “native” as an adjective describing “accent,” “variety,” “speakers,” “listeners,” or “speech,” but no specific definition within the article though do refer to the TOEFL / IELTS definition which includes North American, British, Australian, and New Zealand English.
Birdsong, 2021	84 uses of “native” or “non-native” as either a noun or an adjective describing “ultimate attainment,” “speaker,” “controls,” “-language grammars,” “participants,” “performance,” “acceptability ratings,” “judgments,” “variability,” “overlap,” but no definition.

Davies (2003, p. 2) however, says that while linguists have their own definitions of the *native speaker*, these “are all helpful but they are also quite partial and do not make sense of the complexity of the native speaker.” The lack of convergence among those in the field of linguistics on the definition of *native speaker* demonstrates the lack of one homogenous *native speaker*. In this thesis, I will use the phrase *native speaker*, using italics, to refer to the assumed understanding of the notion of being a *native speaker*. This thesis attempts to challenge the notion of using the *native speaker* as a measure of success for adult AL learners, in part, due to the lack of precise definition.

2.2.1.2 Qualifications of a Native Speaker. Defining who does and does not qualify as a native speaker is often dependent on age of onset, age of acquisition, or age of arrival. Most studies consider a person to be a *native speaker* of a language acquired prior to the end of the critical period (Section 2.2.2, p. 27). Some say a native speaker is one who learned “from infancy” (Mack, 1997; Hartshorne, 2018) or simply the language acquired first (Bloomfield, 1935; Mack, 1997). Others add additional qualifications such as subconscious knowledge requirements (Chomsky, 1965; Stern, 1983), family requirements (Love and Ansaldo, 2010), community requirements (Rothman and Treffers-Daller, 2014), or monolingualism (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam, 2009; Benmamoun *et al.*, 2013; Birdsong and Gertkin, 2013). These varied qualifications indicate the difficulty of defining who may be classified as a native speaker.

Globally, some people fit neatly into these categories. For example, many Americans have spoken one language from birth, in monolingual English-speaking families and communities. Therefore, they are unequivocally considered *native speakers* of English. However, for many around the world, language acquisition is much more complex. For example, Cheng *et al.* (2021, p. 8) include a case study of Leila who was born in India. She learned Malayalam from birth, then English and Malayalam in school. Later, she began learning Hindi in school, too. Leila consistently used each of these languages in different domains such as work, educational, and social spaces. Although Malayalam is her first language and is considered her “Mother Tongue... she doesn’t feel proficient in any language.” Leila’s experience could be described as L1 attrition, which is the phenomena that could occur when ALA affects L1 proficiency. Research in L1 attrition has shown that sometimes “L1 speakers may exhibit changes to their native accent to the extent that they may be perceived as sounding non-native” (Saud Alharbi, *et al*, 2022, p. 1134). This means that even those who have a clearly defined L1 may develop “non-

native” pronunciation in their *native language*. Although L1 attrition is not always permanent (Chamorro, *et al*, 2016), the ability for a person to develop “non-native” characteristics in their L1 further validates the complexity of the *native speaker*. Leila’s experience is representative of many, whose qualifications as a *native speaker* are more complicated than a singular definition allows.

In fact, the definition of *native speaker* can more easily be described as what it is not. Han (2004, p. 166) claims that “to be a native speaker means not to be a non-native speaker.” The term *non-native* refers to any person who learns an AL but who has perceptible differences from native speakers, including having foreign accents and differences in grammatical and lexical choices (DeKeyser, 2000). Mack (1997, p. 116) defines it as follows: “a non-native speaker of a given language is an individual who has acquired his/her language or languages after infancy.” Some suggest using *new speaker* (O’Rourke and Pujolar, 2013), but this designation could also be a misnomer as the definition of who is *new* and how long they remain a *new speaker* is unclear. Dewaele (2017, p. 239) suggests using L1 vs. LX user to create a more “balanced dichotomy” between the two language users.

Often, the definition of *native speaker* is more closely tied to social and cultural standards such as the locality where a person was born and the make-up of their community, rather than actual language proficiency (Rothman and Treffers-Daller, 2014; Hartshorne, 2018). For example, some AL speakers are considered *near-native* or *native-like* speakers of their AL. *Near-native* / *native-like* refers to any person who acquires an AL and has reached proficiency such that they are nearly imperceptible from native speakers in all domains including accent, grammar, and lexicon. Coppieters (1987) uses the term “native-like non-native” and “near-native” to describe people who have learned an additional language and have reached “native-like proficiency” (544), who have reached “surface equivalence with [native speakers] in language use and proficiency” (547), and who “routinely pass as [native speakers]” (568). (See also Birdsong 1992). Hartshorne (2018) uses the term *native-like* as does Dąbrowska (2019) who uses the phrase *nativelike* to describe AL speakers who are similar to native speakers. Bylund *et al.*, (2021, p. 18), however, distinguish between *near-native* and *nativelike*, indicating that *nativelike* is closer to *native language attainment* than *near-native attainment*, which is when people “who acquired the L2 during childhood do not always converge fully with native speakers.” Basically, “near-native” and “native-like” speakers of an AL are defined more

by their difference from the *native speaker* rather than their similarity to a *native speaker*. For the purpose of this thesis, I will use only *native-like* / *near-native* when the term is used in research or by a participant.

2.2.1.3 Regional and dialectal variations among native speakers. This “complexity of the native speaker” (Davies, 2003, p. 2) is represented in the many dialectal variations among the primary speakers of any language. In English alone, multiple dialectal variations have been well-documented such as in the six-volume *English Dialect Dictionary* (Wright and Wright) published in the late 1800s that had seventy-thousand entries. More dialectal variations are found in the 1889 establishment of the American Dialect Society which worked for decades to create the *Dictionary of Regional American English* (1985). Additional dialectal variations are to be found in the *International Dialects of English Archive*, created in 1998, which is an “archive of primary-source recordings of English-language dialects and accents” including approximately 1600 speech samples from over 120 countries and regions, mostly from *native* English speakers. The vast number of regional dialectal variations in English proves that a homogenous native English speaker, used to serve as the measure of ALA success, is non-existent.

Additional studies confirm the diversity of lexicon and dialect among English speakers, proving that the concept of a homogenous native speaker is non-existent. For example, Vaux and Golder (2002) conducted a dialectal study of world Englishes by giving online participants a survey with multiple choice questions to indicate their lexical, syntactic, and phonological preferences. The study used an algorithm to guess the US origin of the speaker. One example that is indicative of at least 4 different American regional dialects is based solely on whether people use the word *soda*, *pop*, *coke*, or *soft drink*. Katz and Andrews (2013) used many of the same questions from Vaux and Golder’s study (2002) and asked the question “What does the way you speak, say about where you’re from? Answer all the questions below to see your personal dialect map,” and gathered over 350,000 survey responses. The responses were used to create a “visual exploration of American regional dialects.” The survey, hosted by the *New York Times*, went viral and as of 2013, has had more than 21 million views. The first question of Katz’s survey (2013) gives participants a choice of eight (8) different ways to express the second person plural pronoun. Each of the responses is correct depending on the United States-based origin of the participant. This first question alone suggests 8 different variations of *native speaker*

English. The number of regional dialects confirms the non-existence of a singular *native speaker* to be used as the measure of ALA success.

Regional dialects of English exist not just in the US but also in other countries where English is the primary language. Grieve, *et al.* (2019) used Twitter to map regional dialects within British English, comparing “the regional patterns found in 139 lexical dialect maps.” The study found multiple variations of lexical choices, including 18 different variants to describe a left-handed person (p. 3). The sheer number of variants for the word *drunk*, 104 different variations of the concept of being *drunk*, proves the inexistence of one definite standard way to speak English as a *native speaker*. The above examples of regional dialects are only about the English language. However, every language has multiple dialectal and lexical variations. In fact, some languages have dialects so different from each other that they are not even mutually intelligible (ex. Chinese dialects, Gaelic dialects). This means that no language has one standard *native speaker* model that could be used as the standard for ALA.

2.2.1.4 Individual Differences among Native Speakers. Further demonstrating the lack of a homogeneous *native speaker*, research has shown that those considered *native speakers* of a language have multiple individual differences. Research shows that even people considered native speakers acquire varying degrees of L1 proficiency (Hulstijn, 2019). Dąbrowska (2015, p. 8) says, “Native speakers do not converge on the same grammar: there are, in fact, considerable differences in how much speakers know about some of the basic constructions of their native language.” Basically, even those considered “native speakers,” primarily those who are using their L1, are not a homogenous group. In fact, even people with the same L1 have individual differences in “linguistic competence” such as in varied levels of mastery of morphology, syntax, and grammatical structures (Dąbrowska 2019, p. 73). Using multiple sources, including her own empirical data, Dąbrowska (2019) claims “that native-speaker convergence is a myth” (73), having proven the number of differences in language aptitude of L1 speakers, and not even including dialectal differences (Dąbrowska 2018). Research has shown that these individual differences in L1 proficiency could include reading, writing, and vocabulary (Sparks, *et al.*, 2023) and pronunciation (Chamorro, *et al.*, 2016). Although Hartshorne, *et al.* (2018), found that “Even native speakers—who are able to make full use of the critical period—take a very long time to reach mature, native-like proficiency,” research on individual differences in L1A challenges the notion that *native-like*

proficiency can even exist. Vulchanova, *et al* (2022) says, “Individual variation in language competence has been amply documented, both in adult native speakers, and across language development.” Therefore, the existence of so many individual differences among *native speakers* highlights the fallacy of using the *native speaker* as the yardstick to denote adult ALA’s ultimate attainment goal and ALA success.

2.2.1.5 Summary. The research presented above challenges the assumption of the existence of a homogenous *native speaker*. The assumption that a singular *native speaker* exists is flawed. Therefore, measuring ALA by the standard of a *native speaker* is also flawed. The common assumption that native speakers exist as a monolith is problematic because it ignores the variety of speakers and uses a non-existent standard to measure AL success. People hail from diverse educational backgrounds, places, countries, cultures, language aptitude (Dąbrowska, 2018), and language influences. Therefore, their use of their L1 is also equally diverse. Setting the goal of AL success as reaching the same language competence as the *native speaker* is tantamount to shooting an arrow at a non-existent target. For the purpose of this thesis, I will refer to *native language(s)* or *native speaker(s)* in italics when presenting literature, when participants refer to the concept, and when I challenge the notion of the *native speaker*.

2.2.2 Diverse ultimate attainment goals

The second assumption of the *native-like speaker myth*, which is made in past and current language acquisition literature, is that every adult language learner’s ultimate attainment goal is that of *native-like* proficiency. For decades, scholars have researched the factors contributing to why adults do not reach *native-like* proficiency as their ultimate attainment level but rarely ask about each individual learner’s initial ultimate attainment goal. Scholars have studied the causes of the inability to reach *native-like* proficiency. Some have hypothesized that the cause is a result of age of acquisition (Johnson and Newport, 1989; Bley-Vroman, 1990; Saito, 2015; Bylund, *et al*, 2021; Jia, 2022), maturational constraints, length of residence, aptitude (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam, 2008; DeKeyser, 2000), and instruction type (Bley-Vroman, 1990; DeKeyser, 2000) amongst other factors. Each of these studies assumes that the goal of each individual learner was to reach *native-like proficiency*. But, as Han (2004) questions, “Is the native speaker a reasonable goal for adult L2 learners?” This thesis seeks to address the assumption that all adult AL learners share the goal of wanting to speak like a *native speaker*. The problem with this assumption is that -- unlike children -- adults have to make a conscious decision

to learn an AL (Lenneberg, 1967; Bley-Vroman, 1990). Therefore, adult language learners have diverse motivations and goals for ALA. In this thesis, I will present findings that show adult additional language learners do not always share the same desired outcome level of speaking like a *native speaker*.

2.2.2.1 Age of Acquisition, Ultimate Attainment, and Proficiency. Research relating to adult additional language acquisition often relates the age of acquisition (AoA) to ALA motivation and proficiency. AoA refers to the beginning of the additional language acquisition process (Bylund, *et al*, 2021) whenever that is defined by the learner, and that all the factors that influence ALA such as education and motivation “only exert marginal impact compared to age of acquisition (AoA).” Other studies define AoA differently. Birdsong (2018) defined the term much more narrowly. This study suggests that “the term AoA refers to the age at which L2 learning begins in earnest and continues with *little or no interruption*, most often in immersion contexts such as immigration” (p. 2, *emphasis mine*). Although some studies (Flege, 2018; Birdsong, 2021) use the acronym AoA to refer to Age of Arrival, usually referring to immigrant situations, when the person moves permanently to a country where their AL is spoken, but for the purpose of this thesis AoA will refer to the age at which a person claims they began learning their additional language.

Another important concept in ALA is the notion of language proficiency or language competency. *Proficiency* or *competency* refers to the language ability of a person using either their L1 or AL. Davies (2003, p.173-174) states that “defining language proficiency is just as elusive as defining the native speaker. There is now considerable overlap between the notion of language proficiency and the term communicative competence.” For example, Coppieters (1987) claims that “competence” refers to the “underlying grammatical system” in the non-native speaker's AL (544). Johnson and Newport (1989) use *proficiency* as a level of language ability, indicating that “while the post pubescent learners did not reach as high a level of proficiency as the native or early learners, language had not become totally unlearnable for them” (64). Bley-Vroman (1990) uses *ultimate proficiency* to describe how children who begin learning an additional language early will “learn the language of the country well” while “adults do not.” Bley-Vroman (1990) changes the term to *native-speaker competence* to describe the same concept in the same paragraph (10), exemplifying the interchangeability of these linguistic terms. Birdsong (1992) uses the phrase *native competence* to refer to a nearly unattainable level

of ALA by post-pubertal learners (706). White & Genesee (1996, p. 234) define proficiency “as demonstrated by use of language.” Dąbrowska (2015, 2018, 2019) uses the phrase *linguistic competence* or *competence* to describe ability to use a language, specifically an L1. This thesis will use the term *proficiency* in reference to a person’s ability to use any language, simply for consistency throughout thesis.

When researching adult ALA, the concept of *ultimate attainment* is often used to describe the current state of AL proficiency, usually as measured by the degree of similarity to *native-like* proficiency. *Ultimate attainment* often refers to the final level of proficiency that speakers of a language attain. This term is used almost exclusively referring to ALA. Birdsong (1992, p. 706) uses the phrase *ultimate attainment* in the title of his study. He refers to *ultimate attainment* as having a “universal success in L1A [and] variable success in L2A.” He does address the fallibility of this concept in a footnote which says: “Ultimate attainment is therefore not an end point in any simple sense, but an asymptotic curve approaching some theoretical point of absolute completeness,” acknowledging somewhat the difficulty of targeting an “end point” of language acquisition (p. 706). Alternatively, to describe the same concept, other studies use the phrase *ultimate ability* (Johnson and Newport, 1989, p. 81) or *ultimate proficiency* (Bley-Vroman, 1990, p. 9). Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) uses *ultimate attainment* to mean when a person has reached “the level of asymptotic performance” (272). Similar to the concept of the *native speaker*, the notion of *ultimate attainment* is another commonly used, not-always-well-defined concept (Larsen-Freeman, 2005). In this present thesis, I will use the term *ultimate attainment* as defined as the final level of proficiency that ALA speakers desire.

2.2.2.2 Critical Period Hypothesis & Additional Language Acquisition. Language acquisition studies often used to compare child language acquisition, or L1A, to adult ALA. This comparison uses the child’s L1A as the standard by which adult ALA is compared. It assumes the child has *native speaker* linguistic intuition (Chomsky 1965) and that all adults learning an AL share the same language goals. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) has been the basis for first and additional language research since the mid-1900s. The use of the CPH in relation to ALA has been controversial amongst scholars with regards to its existence and the extent to which it plays a role in ALA.

Proposed by Lenneberg (1967), the CPH asserts that if a person learns a language prior to the end of the critical period, they can reach *native speaker* status. The CPH primarily relates to child language acquisition, or first language acquisition (L1A) and claims children can only learn their first language within a specific period of time. *Child language acquisition* is often interchangeable with *first language acquisition*. People are usually considered a *native speaker* of their L1. Lenneberg (1967) explained that aside from extreme cases L1A is never a choice because no child ever chooses not to learn their L1 language. Thus, children have no defined motivations or diversity of language goals as their L1A is naturalistic, not purposeful. After this Critical Period, for biological reasons, people can no longer learn their first language.

Despite being most well-known for his work on the biological aspects of child language acquisition and the CPH, Lenneberg does say that people “can learn to communicate in a foreign language at the age of forty” (p. 176) but that “automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear after this age” (p. 167). Using this theory, adults must acquire an additional language through explicit instruction or “through a conscious and labored effort” (p. 167). This means that they will never quite speak like a *native speaker*. This concession that adults can learn an additional language is consistent among past and current literature. But such claims tend to have an asterisk indicating that adults can learn to *communicate* but not like a *native speaker*. Although this publication is more than 50 years old, Lenneberg’s foundational study is still highly cited. From January 1, 2023 to December 12, 2023, at least 663 scholarly articles have been published on the topic of the Critical Period Hypothesis. The following section will demonstrate significant research regarding how CPH affects or does not affect ALA.

A number of research studies claim that the critical period does extend to ALA (Johnson and Newport, 1989; Long, 1990; Hartshorne, 2018; van der Slik *et al.* 2022). In a foundational study, Johnson and Newport (1989) found that age of acquisition (AoA) correlated to the ability of a person to become *native* or *near-native*. Their findings showed that people whose AoA is seven years or earlier can reach *native* performance, but their language performance declined throughout puberty. People whose AoA was post-puberty “performed on the average much more poorly than those who arrived earlier” (90). Similar to Lenneberg (1967), Johnson and Newport (1989) note that “while the postpubescent learners did not reach as high a level of proficiency as the native or early learners, language had not become totally unlearnable for them” (64). Their findings

have contributed to the field of linguistics the knowledge that adults can learn additional languages. However, they did not ask participants their goals or motivations for ALA. Although motivation and goals are not the focus of the study, their study assumes that the ultimate attainment goals of “postpubescent learners” is to reach *native-like* proficiency.

In a well-cited literature review, Long (1990, p. 274) claimed the existence of multiple “sensitive periods” or “critical periods” for ALA. The study states that most people who begin ALA beyond the age of 6 will be unable “to achieve native-like competence in phonology.” According to their findings, anyone who begins ALA after the age of 15 will be unable to achieve *native-like* competence “in morphology and syntax” along with other linguistic features. Based on his analysis of existing literature at the time, Long (1990, p. 274) alleges that multiple “sensitive” periods exist which limit language learners’ ability to “become native-like.” Although he does concede that the specific ages for the “sensitive periods” are still a bit unclear, he does not ask participants their desired outcome levels to confirm they were aiming to reach *native-like* competence. By not asking their goals, this study makes the assumption not only that *native-like* proficiency exists as a well-defined concept but that every language learner shares the goal of reaching *native-like* proficiency.

Other studies converge on the claim that the critical period does exist for ALA, finding that the later the AoA, the less likely a person is to reach *near-native* competence. DeKeyser (2000) tested Bley-Vroman's (1990) Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH: See Section 2.2.2.3, p. 35) to determine “the robustness of critical period effects in second language acquisition.” Their findings converge with the FDH and Johnson and Newport (1989) and find that if using implicit learning for ALA, then “there may very well be no exceptions to the age effect” (p. 518). Basically, “everybody loses the mental equipment required for the implicit induction of abstract patterns underlying human language.” Specifically, they find that “aptitude . . . is . . . necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for the ultimate attainment of near-native competence by adults” (p. 518). Therefore, DeKeyser (2000) concludes that if an adult attempts to learn an AL using only implicit learning, they will certainly be unable to do so, regardless of their language aptitude. Other studies find the role of aptitude plays a role in the ability of adults to learn an AL after the critical period. However, only those with “a high level of verbal analytical ability will reach near-native levels of L2 proficiency” (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008, p. 489; retesting DeKeyser, 2000).

To determine the extent of the influence of the CPH on ALA, Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) created a study to determine if the decline in ALA ability was a steady decline through puberty or a quick decline after the critical period. The study also sought to determine if the decline continued throughout adulthood or if at some point abilities stopped declining. Hartshorne, *et al*'s (2018) study surveyed over half a million participants and “the results support the existence of a sharply-defined critical period for language acquisition, but the age of offset is much later than previously speculated” (p. 263). Despite this innovative new research, Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) makes the assumption that the “non-native” participants were seeking “native speaker proficiency” as their goal in ALA. The article states: “Indeed, the question in the critical period literature has never been why adults are incapable of learning a new language—obviously they are—but why adult learners so rarely (if ever) achieve native-like mastery” (273). By asking the question “why adult learners so rarely (if ever) achieve native-like mastery” and not asking participants if they sought to “achieve native-like mastery,” the study assumes that adults' initial ALA goals were to reach “native-like mastery.” In this thesis, I seek to address this assumption.

Since Hartshorne *et al* (2018) published their findings and made their data publicly available, many have re-evaluated it and found different results. Van der Slik *et al*. (2022) in their re-evaluation agree that a critical period does exist for ALA. This study differed slightly from the original Hartshorne *et al* (2018) study by finding that the critical age for ALA was higher than reported. An important difference lies in their interpretation of the reasons behind the lack of ability to speak like a *native speaker*. While Hartshorne *et al* (2018) claim that maturational constraints are the basis for inability to gain *native-like proficiency*, van der Slik *et al* (2022, p. 87-88) propose the reasons are “personal and societal factors, including differences in living circumstances and socialization and not the outcome of cognition-driven developmental factors.” Despite the differences between the two studies, van der Slik, *et al* (2022) similarly does not ask participants their ALA goals. By failing to ask their goals, this study makes the same assumption that the ultimate attainment goal of adult language learners is *native-like proficiency*.

The conclusions of van der Slik *et al* (2022) regarding the reasons for failure to reach *native-like proficiency* support earlier findings. Stevens (1999) approached “second language proficiency” from a sociological perspective, correlating the age of immigration (AoI) with ultimate attainment. Their findings suggest that AoI does affect AL level of eventual attainment. Similar to van der Slik (2022), Stevens (1999) claims the reason for

not reaching *native-like proficiency* was due to sociological factors such as exposure to the AL, involvement in the culture of AL, formal education in AL, and marriage to an L1 speaker of their AL. Part of their conclusion is that “it is thus probable that most investigations of L2 learning underestimate the importance of social processes” (574-575). These findings support Flege’s (1999, p. 99) study, which sought to “evaluate the validity of the critical period hypothesis for L2 acquisition” and saw similar findings, where formal education and frequency of AL use contributed more to ALA than age factors.

Similarly, some studies claim that the critical period plays a role in ALA proficiency whilst also acknowledging other factors that underlie ALA. Birdsong (2018) reviewed the factors that affect the “outcome” of adult ALA including plasticity, variability, and age. He says, “It is commonly believed that L2 attainment to nativelike levels among adults is impossible because they have passed a critical period for successful learning” (4). But Birdsong (2018, p. 13) concludes that while age-related factors do contribute to “variation in L2 acquisition” they “cannot account for all varieties of non-nativelike outcomes in L2 acquisition.” Likewise, Flege (2018, p. 1) began the article “A Non-Critical Period for Second-Language Learning” by stating that “Early learners usually enjoy greater success in second language (L2) learning than late learners do.” His research, well-regarded since the 1980s, Flege (2018) argued that the age of arrival does not matter as much as the type of and amount of input that language learners have access to. Flege (2018), however, still focuses heavily on the idea of success in additional language acquisition. Both of these studies make the assumption that adults learning an AL are seeking native-like proficiency. Birdsong (2018, p. 2) made this assumption by studying the “(im)probability of nativelike attainment” for adult language learners and Flege (2018, p.22) by failing to define what “long-term L2 success” means. Regardless of the reasons that adults do not reach *native-like proficiency*, whether it be the Critical Period or sociological, educational, or input factors, the issue remains that many studies measure adult language learners according to the ambiguous goal of speaking like a *native speaker*.

The comparison of child language acquisition to adult ALA brings with it an underlying assumption that adults should learn an AL the same way children learned their L1. However, adults must make a conscious choice and effort to learn an additional language. They must have specific and diverse range of goals for learning their AL. This thesis

engaged participants who began ALA after the critical period to represent the individual experiences of adult language learners. Assuming that all adult language learners share the ultimate attainment goal of speaking like a *native speaker* in itself lends to a deficit approach to adult ALA. This deficit approach to ALA tends to focus on what adults cannot do in their AL rather than what they can do.

Although some studies have identified AL speakers who reach *native-like* proficiency in some domains (Birdsong, 1992; White and Genesee, 1996; Dąbrowska, 2020), others point out that these assessments do not prove these speakers have reached *native-like* proficiency “in all relevant aspects of the L2” (Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003, p. 336). If a person were to reach *native-like proficiency* “across the board” (Birdsong & Gertkin, 2013) in their AL, they would be “exceptional” (Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003), “rare” and “unusual” (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008), considered an “aberration” and “abnormal” (Birdsong & Gertkin, 2013). Such research focuses on the lack of linguistic intuition (Chomsky, 1965), lack of ability to make “grammaticality judgments” (Coppieters, 1987; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Bley-Vroman, 1990; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008), lack of ability to speak like a *native speaker* due to accent (Lenneberg, 1967; Bley-Vroman, 1990; Long, 1990; Flege, 1999; Derwing and Munro, 2013; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Saito, 2015), and lack of convergence on “phonology. . . morphology and syntax” (Long, 1990). However, by addressing the seeming deficits of adult ALA, many studies make the assumption that adult ALA is deficient in comparison to child language acquisition.

Some studies have problematized the deficit approach to ALA. Cook (1991) argued that those who speak an AL are not deficient but instead are simply multicompetent in more than one language. More than twenty years after the Cook (1991) study, Dewaele (2017, p. 239) suggested the use of “L1 user” rather than *native speaker* and “LX user” rather than non-native speaker or “L2 user.” The purpose of this claim is to create a more “balanced dichotomy” which “does not imply that one [language user] is superior to the other. They are equal and can be complementary.” This thesis attempts to add to the ALA literature by challenging the dichotomy of *native* vs. *non-native* speakers and to explain what adults can do in ALA rather than considering their language proficiency as a deficit.

The following section will describe the variation of goals in adult ALA to address the assumption that all adult language learners have the same ultimate attainment goal of *native-like* proficiency.

2.2.2.3 Varied Goals among Adult Language Learners. An important difference between L1A and ALA is the variation of goals. As previously noted, children do not choose to learn their L1, thus, do not have varied goals. By contrast, adults must make a conscious decision to learn an AL and, therefore, must have a specific reason or goal to learn an AL. For this reason, adults have varied goals for learning an additional language. The field of literature supporting the diversity of goals and motivations is vast. But the assumption that all learners strive to gain *native-like* proficiency remains even in present research.

One of the many differences between L1A and ALA is the variation of goals. Bley-Vroman's (1990) Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH) lists many “fundamental differences” between child and adult language acquisition. One such observation is that AL learners have a “variation of goals” and gives the example that some adult learners learn just enough “to wait on tables” or to “become skilled at cocktail party storytelling” (p. 8). He explains how some adults learning a new language excel at one domain such as pronunciation or vocabulary at the expense of other domains such as grammar. He goes on to say that, among the other goals, “some work at passing for a native speaker [sic]” (p. 8). Despite his acknowledgement that adults have different language goals, he considers anything other than *native speaker* level proficiency to be “general failure” (p. 7). DeKeyser (2000) re-tested Bley-Vroman's FDH (1990), finding that after the age of 17, adults must learn through explicit instruction while children can learn through implicit language acquisition. Due to the necessity of explicit instruction, adults must choose to learn a new language and, therefore, will have varied desired outcome levels.

Much ALA research makes assumptions of what adult language acquisition goals are without consulting the learner themselves. Birdsong and Gertkin (2013) acknowledge the assumptions of ALA goals of much ALA research:

When researchers refer to ‘target’, [regarding target language] they may presume to know what it is that learners are actually intent on learning. This practice overlooks the fact that second language learners choose their goals (Bley-Vroman

1989); their learning target is not necessarily the ambient language, in part or in whole. In a word, the target language perspective ignores the perspective of the learner (p. 113).

This recognition of the “folly of native/non-native comparisons” (Birdsong and Gertkin, 2013) converges with the argument of this thesis which challenges the assumption that all adults share the ultimate attainment goal of speaking like a *native speaker*.

Although it is generally acknowledged that adults have varied goals for learning an AL, Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) uses a metaphor of a footrace to describe adult goals for ALA:

People who began learning at a certain age reached native-like proficiency merely indicates that they learned fast enough, not that they learned as fast as a native speaker, just as the fact that two runners both finished a race indicates only that they both started early enough and ran fast enough, not that they ran at the exact same speed. (p. 264)

However, Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) assumes that all AL learners are running for the same finish line. Just as some runners begin a marathon and a half marathon at the same start line and at the same time but have a different finish line, some adult language learners may begin ALA early enough, but they may have a different goal for learning an AL and thus, would have a different finish line. These adult language learners may not be “incapable” but may just have reached their finish line, a different one than others, and earlier than some who are seeking a different proficiency level, including proficiency similar to a L1 speaker. Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) assumes that the language acquisition goal of every single adult language learner is *native-like proficiency*.

Research shows that adult language learners have goals that are sometimes “reaching near native proficiency” (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 65) but not always to speak like a *native speaker*. Some adults are “more focused on getting the message across” (Dąbrowska *et al* 2020). Some adults begin learning an AL because it is a “routine part of education” or for the purposes of community involvement (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017, p. 457) suggest there are three primary motivations for learning an AL. They are as follows: “the learner’s internal desire to become an effective L2 user; social pressures coming from the learner’s environment to master the L2 and the actual experience of being engaged in the L2 learning process.” Some learners aspire “to

be/become multilingual” (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, p. 4; Henry, 2017). This review covers some of the most prominent ALA research on motivation, and none indicates that adults have a uniform notion of ultimate attainment goal.

Outside the realm of scholarly research, the mass popularity of language learning apps such as Rosetta Stone, Duolingo and Mango, demonstrates how many people choose to learn an additional language for various reasons. These apps target learners with varied AL proficiency goals including “[i]f you just want to learn enough to order a coffee” (Nast, 2022).

Sometimes the motivation to learn a new language is not to speak like a *native speaker* but is for solidarity during a current world event. Duolingo reports a drastic increase – 1.3 million – of new learners beginning to learn Ukrainian after the Russian invasion in February 2022. Many of the learners were located in countries such as Poland, Chechnya, and Germany where Ukrainian refugees were moving in increasing numbers. The number of learners grew significantly worldwide as well. For example, two learners in the US report their goal is not to become fluent in Ukrainian but simply to “carry some light conversation” or simply to be ready to welcome any Ukrainian refugees who arrive to their area (Burt, 2022b). On other occasions, the motivation to learn an AL is to better engage with pop culture. Duolingo reports a 29% increase in learners taking lessons in Korean, many of whom were motivated by their love of the wildly-popular K-pop group, BTS. One learner even describes “how her standom [of BTS] spurred a deeper commitment to learning a new language [Korean]” (Burt, 2022a). Adult motivations to learn an AL are as diverse as the learners themselves, and with those diverse motivations come diverse ultimate attainment goals.

Furthermore, some studies indicate that learners may choose not to gain *native-like* proficiency so as to maintain their identity within their L1 group. Ogbu and Simons (1998) research on minorities shows that their motivations affect AL proficiency based on their reasons for moving into an immersion experience. Their research indicates that adults’ motivation to immigrate, specifically if it was voluntary or involuntary, often correlates to their choice either to maintain their cultural identities or to assimilate into the primary culture by seeking *native-like* proficiency. For example, adults who migrate to a country for temporary work “tend to learn only as much of their host’s culture and language as necessary to achieve their temporary goals” (p. 165). These adult language

learners do not have the goal of speaking like a *native speaker*, rather to accomplish their temporary goals while immersed in their AL.

Other studies indicate similar ALA choices to maintain identity within a language and cultural group. Gatbonton *et al.* (2005, p. 504) “suggests that L2 learning entails choices, in this case, perhaps between the reward of being efficient in the L2 (indicating the need for language ability best suited for communicative success) and the cost of not marking the right identity (implying a risk of being labelled disloyal).” This study indicates that adult language learners may learn enough of their AL to communicate effectively in their AL, but they do not attempt to speak like a *native speaker* so as to remain a part of their L1 language community. Although some adults certainly do attempt to lose any indicator of their L1, many purposefully maintain indicators of their L1 in order to maintain that part of their identity.

This thesis seeks to explore the “boundlessness of potentiality” (Larsen-Freeman, 2005), rather than continuing to identify the seeming deficits in adult ALA. I will emphasize the voice of the adult language learner, focusing on the concepts of motivation, attainment, and success from the perspective of the learner.

2.2.2.4 Research Question 1. Due to these aforementioned assumptions present in the field of linguistics, I will address the following research question in this thesis:

- At additional language onset, is the adult learner’s desired outcome level (DOL) comparable to native-like proficiency? If it is not, what is the adult learner’s DOL?

2.2.2.5 Summary. Past and current literature about ALA has disagreed for decades about whether some AL learners can reach *native-like proficiency* or if they cannot. But as noted above, most of the field of ALA research assumes that *native-like proficiency* is the ultimate attainment goal despite acknowledging the diverse goals of learners. This present thesis will challenge the assumption that all adult language learners share the ultimate attainment goal of *native-like proficiency*. It will attempt to fill a gap in the literature by proposing that diversity of AL proficiency goals creates diverse AL proficiency outcomes.

2.2.3 Assumption of native-like proficiency as the only measure of success

The third assumption of the *native-like speaker myth* is that the only measure of AL success is to reach *native-like proficiency*. Often reaching *native-like proficiency* and being “successful” at ALA are conflated in scholarly literature (ex. Lenneberg, 1967; Bley-Vroman, 1990; Hartshorne *et al*, 2018). The interchangeability of *native-like proficiency* and *success* is problematic because it assumes that even if adult language learners reach their personal ALA goals but not *native-like proficiency*, they have failed at ALA. This assumes that the only way to be successful in ALA is to reach *native-like proficiency*. Birdsong and Gertkin (2013, p. 113) ask the question “But what if not all L2 acquisition ended in “failure” vis-à-vis the native standard?” which is one of the questions this thesis seeks to address. This present thesis challenges the false dichotomy of failure v. success as presented in the ALA literature. The assumption of a singular measure of *success* and *failure* at ALA is flawed. This thesis argues that when a language learner reaches their AL proficiency goals, they should be considered *successful*.

2.2.3.1 Historical Measures of Success in ALA. Influential research for decades (eg. Selinker, 1972; Bley-Vroman 1990; Birdsong 1992; Hartshorne 2018) had conflated the idea of success in ALA with reaching *native* or *native-like proficiency*. Dąbrowska *et al*. (2020, p. 1) acknowledge the existence of this assumption within ALA literature: “There is a large literature showing that adult L2 learners, in contrast to children, often fail to acquire native-like competence in the second language.” Most literature considers *native-like proficiency* as the gold standard for ALA success without considering any variability of goals or outcomes.

Nearly every study on ALA includes reference to Selinker’s (1972) “flagship” study on “second-language learning.” Selinker (1972) states the assumptions that “must be made” (201) about “the ideal second-language learner” that they will “not succeed” and that they are “thus representative of the vast majority of second-language learners” (213). He poses the question:

How does a second-language-learning novice become able to produce [interlanguage] utterances whose surface constituents are correct, i.e. ‘correct’ with respect to the [target language] whose norm he is attempting to produce? This question brings us face-to-face with the notion of ‘success’ in absolute terms: productive performance in the [target language] by the second-language-learner

which is identical to that which is produced by the native speaker of that [target language] (p. 223)

While Selinker (1972) continues on to say that “‘success’ in second-language learning need not be defined so absolutely,” (p. 223), he then states that “as part of a definition of ‘learning a second language’, ‘successful learning’ of a second language for most learners, involves, to a large extent, the *reorganization of linguistic material* from an [interlanguage] to identity with a particular [target language]” (p. 224). This foundational study uses the phrases “failure or success” to describe individuals’ ALA, which is a false dichotomy. This thesis will attempt to offer additional definitions of success that do not rely on the *native speaker* as measurement.

Another influential theory in the field of linguistics is the Fundamental Differences Hypothesis (FDH) (Bley-Vroman, 1990). This hypothesis claimed that “foreign language learning is often a difficult and ultimately unsuccessful task” (p. 4), that “the lack of general guaranteed success is the most striking characteristic of adult foreign language learning” (p. 6), that “complete success is extremely rare, or perhaps even non-existent” (p. 6), and that “adults not only generally do not succeed, they also fail to different degrees” (p. 7). His assumption though, is that “communicative success” is still deficient as it is not like “that of a native” (10). The FDH states that “not only is success in adult foreign language learning not guaranteed, complete success is extremely rare, or perhaps even non-existent” (p. 7) and that “adults not only generally do not succeed, they also fail to different degrees” (p. 7). While Bley-Vroman does acknowledge that all learners do not have the goal of “passing for a native speaker,” the first two fundamental differences between L1A and ALA are “lack of success” and “general failure.”

Both differences, the “lack of success” and “general failure,” describe the adults’ inability to reach the same proficiency as “normal children [who] inevitably achieve perfect mastery of the language” (Bley-Vroman, 1990, p. 7). He claims that “complete success [for adult language learners] is extremely rare, or perhaps even non-existent, especially as regards ‘accent’ and the ability to make subtle grammaticality judgements,” (p. 7) which still seems to be measuring adult language learners against the measure of native speakers. Similarly, he does say that some speakers may gain “a level of competence which ensures communicative success, even though the grammar may be very unlike that of a native” (9-10). In 2009, Bley-Vroman recognized the abundance of new language acquisition

research and revised the FDH slightly, de-emphasizing the influence of Chomsky's Universal Grammar, and removing the binary idea of "success" and "failure" in language acquisition. However, despite these updates, the original FDH (1990) has still been cited 58 times since 2018, so its influence is still strong.

Although some research finds that adult language learners can speak like a *native speaker* (Johnson and Newport, 1989; Birdsong, 1992), others disagree (Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003). Birdsong (1992), in replicating Coppieters' (1987) study, begins his article declaring the failure of "native competence" for "postpubertal learners" and contrasting his results to Coppieters' (1987) findings. Birdsong (1992), unlike Coppieters (1987), found that some L1 English speakers could speak AL French within the same proficiency ranges as L1 French speakers. He asserts that "the question of whether some individuals can achieve native proficiency must be answered within each separate experimental context" (739-740), assuming that individuals are seeking native proficiency as their AL goals. Birdsong acknowledges some outliers can reach "native competence," but continues by saying "the outcome of first language acquisition (L1A) is success. . . Adult second language acquisition (L2A), on the other hand, results in varying degrees of success. Failure to acquire the target language grammar is typical" (Birdsong 1992, p. 706). Although he does use the term "varying degrees of success" indicating that adult AL learners can have some success, he immediately follows it by saying that they will typically fail to learn the grammar of the target language.

Birdsong (1992) assumes that the critical period, as theorized by Lenneberg (1967) is responsible for "the general failure of adults to acquire a second language" (706). Again, in 2018, Birdsong claims that the variations of "linguistic attainment. . . are not necessarily deficiencies" (p. 1-2) but still assumes "the (im)probability of native-like attainment" (2). While Birdsong (2018) says, "It is commonly believed that L2 attainment to native-like levels among adults is impossible because they have passed a critical period for successful learning" (4) and despite acknowledging variations in AL proficiency, he still appears to equate "native-like attainment" to "success."

Although a study by White and Genesee (1996) is complementary to mine in describing what adult language learners can do in their AL, they conflate the definition of *success* to mean *near native speaker* status. They claim that adult learners "can be fully native-like regardless of age of initial acquisition." They go on to say that the ability to reach "near

native speaker status is (not) typical . . . [and] that adult learners are often less successful than younger learners” (p. 259). This belief is pervasive throughout AL literature (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam, 2008). As Larsen-Freeman (2005, p. 189) states, “Most everyone has either experienced it or can readily accept the claim that almost all, at least older, learners fail to attain native-like competence and performance in, at least some, subsystems and aspects of a target language.” This statement affirms the assumption is present throughout ALA literature.

2.2.3.2 Current Measures of Success in ALA. Even recently, research has maintained the false dichotomy of success and failure in ALA. Hartshorne, *et al* (2018) study includes a few “metrics of learning success,” one of which is “the age at the end of the optimal period (the last age to start learning in order to reach native-like performance)” (274). This correlates the latest age a person can begin ALA to still reach “native-like performance” and “learning success” (274). However, the correlation between the “age at the end of the optimal period” and their “learning success” does not equal causation as some adult learners may not have intended to reach “native-like performance” and should not be considered unsuccessful.

The study of multicompetence does pose a number of the same questions as this present thesis. Murahata *et al.* (2016) presents the following question regarding the comparison of “L2 users” and *native speakers*:

So long as the native speaker is placed at the center of L2 teaching and is regarded as the standard model to emulate, the student’s goal is to emulate the native speaker. Many students quite realistically see this ultimate goal as almost impossible to achieve and so it gives them a feeling of failure. (p. 35)

These authors challenge the notion of using the *native speaker* as the ultimate attainment goal and of the measure of ALA success:

The ideal SLA research . . . should not see any part of these L2 user systems as an imperfect imitation of monolingual native speakers and that the norm for second language acquisition research is the L2 user, and not the native speaker. It does rule out any comparison that treats one as a defective version of the other, whether seeing monolinguals as lacking qualities of L2 users or L2 users as having defective versions of monolingual systems. Native-speaker-centered monolingual

perspectives on second language acquisition miss the unique qualities of L2 users and how they develop: comparison can only go so far. (p. 38)

This present thesis seeks to challenge the notion of using the *native speaker* as the ALA goal. The aim of this present thesis is to identify the “unique qualities of L2 users” by redefining success as a concept unrelated to the *native speaker*.

2.2.3.3 Research Question 2. To challenge the assumption of native-like proficiency as the ultimate attainment goal of adult language learners, I will address the following research question:

- In what ways do adult AL learners assess their AL proficiency?
Regardless, by what measures do adults assess their own AL success?

2.2.3.4 Summary. This assumption that AL success is only measured by reaching *native speaker* proficiency, which a number of research studies have proven to be “(im)probable”, (Birdsong 2018, p. 2) creates a scenario in which all adult language learners are failures. However, this thesis will present evidence that adults have diverse desired outcome levels and can successfully reach or exceed those goals.

2.2.4 Standards of measuring of ALA success

The final assumption of the *native-like speaker myth* is that ALA success can be measured objectively. Language assessment or language proficiency tests are useful for a variety of reasons including placement in a language class. However, they cannot assess the success of adult ALA. Additionally, the vast majority of publications using quantitative methods to gather objective data are not able to objectively measure success in adult ALA. This thesis will challenge not only the notion of measuring ALA success by nearness or distance from the *native speaker*, but it will also challenge the use of quantitative methods to determine ALA success.

2.2.4.1 Methods of Objective Assessment of ALA. Past and current literature (ex. Johnson and Newport 1989; Papi *et al* 2019) assume that *native-like* proficiency is something that can be measured objectively, a measurement that almost all AL learners have failed to reach.

In the aforementioned Section 2.2.3 (p. 39) regarding the assumption of native-like proficiency as the only measure of success, I demonstrated how ALA literature often

assumes that all adult language learners share the goal of speaking like a *native speaker*. The studies that adopt this assumption utilize a variety of tests to determine the nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. While these studies compare the *native speaker* to adult AL learners, they conflate *native like* proficiency with ALA success, making the assumption that ALA success is something that can be objectively measured.

For example, Johnson and Newport (1989) asked participants to “judge grammaticality of spoken English sentences,” and concluded that “for adults, later age of acquisition determines that one will not become native or near-native in a language” (81) and that “subjects who arrived in the United States after puberty performed on the average much more poorly than those who arrived earlier” (90). However, their use of a single objective measure of *native-like* proficiency and of AL success assumes that this was the learner’s initial goal and that this success can be demonstrated in an objective test. However, as discussed in Section 2.2.1 (p. 18), due to the vagueness of the notion of the *native speaker*, the ability to test a participant objectively is impossible. If there were an objective way to measure *native-like* proficiency, there would be an objective way to measure ALA success. But, since most linguistics research has concluded that *native-like* proficiency is almost universally unattainable, the assumption that ALA success can be objectively measured by this standard is flawed. Many of the studies previously mentioned in this chapter make the same assumption by measuring success as compared to a *native speaker* (eg. Coppieters, 1987; Birdsong, 1992; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Saito, 2015).

2.2.4.2 ALA Assessments for Multiple Competencies. In contrast to the objective measure of ALA success, some research has shown that people can assess their own language proficiency with moderate accuracy. Although the concept of self-assessment is not new (Flege, 1999), the use of self-assessments fell out of favor for a few years until more recently. Ma and Winke (2019) explore the role of self-assessment as a valid measurement of oral proficiency and found that accuracy of self-assessment correlated to Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) ratings and were moderately accurate. Allowing adult AL learners to assess their own AL proficiency does allow them some variation of goals but they are still “articulated against a proficiency-oriented backdrop. . . such as the ACTFL (2012) proficiency guidelines or the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages” (67). Winke, *et al* (2023, p. 434) note the progression from AL self-assessments of the past, which used to ask speakers to measure themselves

against “native-speaker norms”, now ask speakers to measure themselves using “positively worded L2-learning descriptors” (p. 418). Their study argues that the use of self-assessment for AL proficiency is able to contribute to “learners’ vision, agency, autonomy, and conceptualizations of their *possible selves* (i.e. realistic and goal-oriented visions of what they will be able to do in the language in the future if their learning continues positively).” However, while the self-assessment method has improved recently and does allow for greater agency for learners to determine their own success, some studies still ask participants to measure themselves against native speakers. Papi (2019) asks participants to measure themselves by whether they hope to “master the English language” or are able to “imagine a day when they speak English like a native speaker of English” (347). Despite the ambiguous measurement by which speakers are asked to self-assess their AL, the opportunity to self-assess, allows adults to regain some sense of agency in their own learning progress.

Using self-assessment as a way to measure AL proficiency is one way to address the assumption of an objective measurement of AL success. Another method of AL assessment is to “recognize not only language proficiency but also interactional skills” which can be considered “communicative competence” (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 62-63). Others suggest measuring AL proficiency by social interactions or, preferably, by measuring success by the progress made in the AL rather than an arbitrary measurement based on a *native speaker* (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 63) Although this measure of proficiency is not a standard method of AL proficiency measurements, it allows an adult AL to be successful by interacting in the AL rather than failing, by lacking ability to speak like a *native speaker*.

More recently, Dąbrowska *et al* (2020) used both Johnson and Newport’s (1989) Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) which tested “decorative” grammar,” and their own spoken GJT (sGJT), which tested “functional” grammar to identify any similarities between L1 and AL speakers on both “decorative” and “functional” grammar, asking the question “Is Adult Second Language Acquisition Defective?” Their results showed that adult ALA is, in fact, not defective. They find that many of the ALA language assessments, especially the GJTs test “decorative” grammar rather than “functional” grammar. However, they found that when testing for “functional” grammar, “75% of “adult L2 learners scor[ed] within the native speaker range on the grammatical comprehension task” (p. 2). Although this study compares *native speakers* to “non-

natives,” the important finding is that when addressing the abilities of adult ALA rather than the inabilities, many more adult AL may reach their initial language proficiency goals, which can be considered ALA success.

2.2.4.3 Research Question 3. The assumption that ALA success can be measured objectively is evident in the field of linguistics. To challenge this assumption, I will address the following research question:

- If additional language acquisition success is achieved by reaching their DOL, can adults be successful in ALA?

2.2.4.4 Summary. In this section, I addressed the assumption that success in ALA can be objectively measured. I presented the literature that makes this assumption and problematized the notion of adopting such an assumption. In the upcoming section, I will explain the methods I will use to address the research questions and explain why I chose a primarily qualitative approach for this present study.

2.3 Methodology: Past and present in additional language acquisition

This thesis aims to challenge the notion attached to the *native-like speaker myth*. This notion is primarily the idea that additional language acquisition success is measured by the subject’s closeness to or distance from that of the “native speaker” (see Chapter 1, p. 1). This thesis draws on research in the field of additional language acquisition (ALA), which is primarily conducted using quantitative methods. However, this thesis was primarily conducted using a qualitative life histories method, drawing secondarily on corpus studies. While significant research has been done to quantify adult ALA success, this thesis attempts to give individuals a role in determining their own ALA success. In doing so, this thesis challenges the assumptions inherent in past and current ALA research.

This section is organized into three (3) main sections. In the first section, it reviews historical and present methods in ALA. It covers foundational studies, both quantitative and qualitative in the field and traces the findings to date. In the second section, it reviews the life histories approach, how it has been traditionally used and why it was specifically chosen for this thesis. In the third section, it will give a brief overview of both methods of data analysis, including the qualitative data analysis and corpus analysis. The data analysis process is detailed in full in Chapter 4 (p. 92). Whenever relevant, I identify

where my research fits into the current field and how this thesis may contribute and extend the field.

2.3.1 Past and present methodology in language acquisition

For decades, the majority of ALA research has utilized quantitative methods to measure various aspects of language proficiency. This quantitative research has gathered significant knowledge of brain plasticity, maturational constraints, underlying grammars and much more. However, quantitative methods lead to broad generalizations of the complex phenomena of ALA rather than taking heed of the individual nature of adult ALA. In doing so, research makes the assumption that individuals are “relatively stable” rather than acknowledging that individuals “vary” (Rose *et al.*, 2013).

While there certainly is a place for quantitative methods within ALA, this thesis will use qualitative methods to explore the complexities of individual ALA experiences. Larsen-Freeman (2018, p. 63) argues that future research in ALA should pay closer attention to individual learners:

Be focused on the individual learner in relation to the social ecology. . .for too long researchers have been operating under the assumption that group averages reveal something about the population in which they are based. . .emphasis must be placed on the individual learner/person, a noteworthy. . .trend in these days of ‘big data’ across many different areas of inquiry. (p. 63)

The following section will present some influential studies in ALA and the quantitative methods used to research ALA.

2.3.1.1 Quantitative studies. Many studies on adult ALA use quantitative methods that measure proficiency based on set standards of language proficiency. Some used a mixed methods approach, employing both a qualitative and quantitative portion. This paints all language learners with a broad brush instead of considering the nuances of their ALA goals.

A number of studies assessed grammar or grammaticality judgments (Coppieters, 1987; Johnson and Newport, 1989; Birdsong, 1992; Yeganeh, 2013; Degani and Goldberg 2019). Two studies assessed “linguistic competence” by asking participants to judge the grammaticality of sentences and compared answers between “native” and “near-native”

speakers (Coppieters, 1987; Birdsong, 1992; DeKeyser, 2000; Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008). One study asked participants to rate grammaticality on a 5-point scale of grammaticality (Birdsong, 1992). Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson (2003, p. 329) used a grammaticality judgment test to determine “grammatical and lexical competence *and* processing” (emphasis theirs). This study used eight different tests to garner an in-depth assessment of *native, near-native, and non-native* speakers’ language proficiency with the grammaticality judgment test being only one of them. Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2008, p. 493) used a grammaticality judgment test to assess “grammatical intuition and processing ability” among other tests including a language aptitude test.

Another study assessed knowledge of syntax and morphology in participants’ AL by asking them to listen to a “native American English” speaker and judging sentences as either grammatical or ungrammatical (Johnson and Newport, 1989).

Other studies assessed verbal fluency or accent by eliciting a speech sample (Flege, 1984; Derwing and Munro, 1997; Munro and Derwing, 1999; Munro *et al*, 2006; Derwing, *et al* 2008; Cherciov, 2013; Derwing and Munro, 2013; Granena and Long, 2013; Saito, 2015; Leal *et al*, 2018; Magne, *et al*, 2019, Kim and Rah, 2019). Many of these studies asked raters or listeners to assess various domains of the participants’ speech. One study elicited speech samples from speakers with different L1s to “examine the ability of listeners to detect a foreign accent” (Flege, 1984), finding that listeners both accustomed and unaccustomed to accented speech detected a “foreign accent” almost immediately in both read and spontaneous speech samples. Similarly, Derwing and Munro (2013) used the same method to determine longitudinal progression of AL learners while they were immersed in their AL over a 7-year period, finding that AL development varied among participants. This method was used by multiple other studies (Munro & Derwing, 1999; Derwing & Munro, 1997; Munro *et al*, 2006; Derwing *et al.*, 2008). Saito (2015) used a similar method of eliciting spontaneous speech samples and asking “naive raters” to rate speakers on comprehensibility and accentedness.

Some studies assessed speech samples to analyse vocabulary knowledge (Hendriks and Hickmann 2015; Degani and Goldberg 2019; Hashimoto and Egbert, 2019). These studies measured vocabulary knowledge of additional language learners to *native speakers* finding that their usage and understanding of complex lexical variation do not converge.

Such studies do not address the comprehensibility of AL learners, simply the difference between the two groups of participants.

Some studies replicated other well-known studies to reexamine their data. For example, Flege *et al* (1999) replicated Johnson and Newport (1989). Birdsong (1992) replicated Coppieters (1987), and van der Slik (2022) replicated Hartshorne, *et al* (2018). Replicating a study serves to demonstrate reliability in the design of the study. However, the findings still group all learners into categories rather than individualize their learning experiences.

The above studies are a small sampling of the vast ALA research that uses quantitative methods. However, “quantitative methods can only take you so far” because they demonstrate only “what people are doing with language” while qualitative methods tell researchers “why people may be doing what they are doing (Levon 91 in Litosseliti 2010). While quantifiable data is valuable to measure various aspects of ALA, it does not always address the individual differences that can influence ALA proficiency outcomes. The choice to learn an AL is highly individualistic, and “individuals behave, learn, and develop in distinctive ways, showing patterns of variability that are not captured by models based on statistical averages” (Rose *et al.*, 2013).

Some scholars have challenged the use of quantitative methods for studying individuals. As Rose *et al.* (2013, p. 152) points out: “Traditional models often assume that insights about the population automatically apply to all individuals . . . This assumption is simple, it is understandable, and it is necessary to justify the use of averages to understand individuals. However, it is also wrong!” The reason it is wrong, according to “the science of the individual” is that individuals always vary and when this “variability is systematically ignored” then individuals are lumped in with the “statistical averages” meaning that “researchers lose the ability to account for the very processes that underpin the phenomena they seek to explain” (Rose *et al*, 2013, p. 153). While these questions of methodology are presented in an article using medical and educational research, they are important for the field of ALA, too. Larsen-Freeman (2015, p. 502) says that by “looking at the SLA process in the usual way, which is through investigating associations between variables across populations. . . Looking only at averages obscures the individual differences between learners and makes us overlook statistical ‘outliers’, whose behavior may be interesting and relevant.” When so many of the studies in ALA use quantitative

methods, adult language learners are grouped together as an average rather than as individuals. Every adult AL learner is an individual with varied experiences that should not be reduced to statistical averages but should instead be counted as individual experiences.

In addition to concerns about quantitative methodology, some studies have voiced concerns over the use of *native speakers* for such studies. Some scholars have stated that the “concerns about the notion and use of the monolingual native speaker is not that monolingual native speakers do not exist but that, in many regions of the world, they are in a minority” (Mack, 1997, p. 6). Others voice similar concern regarding using *native speakers* as participants due to the vagueness of the notion. Cheng *et al* (2021, p. 1) note that the lack of an objective definition of *native speaker* may exclude “certain populations,” may interfere with recruitment if participants are unclear of the definition of *native speaker*, and may inhibit analysis due to these factors. They state the following concerns:

From a research ethics perspective, it matters how participants are characterized and included: Excluding participants based on binary/essentialist conceptualizations of nativeness upholds deficit perspectives towards multilingualism and non-hegemonic modes of language acquisition. (p. 1)

For example, Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) identified participants by their “native-likeness through a short telephone interview” and then “people who sounded native-like were contacted for a second five-minute telephone interview, in which their native likeness was confirmed” (p. 328). In a later study, Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2008) allowed participants to self-identify as “potentially native-like in L2” prior to submitting speech samples to be rated by judges for native-likeness. This criterion for participants to be *native-like* was given no definition aside from that they sounded like a *native speaker*. This method of participant recruitment and assessment lends itself to an inaccurate set of results.

2.3.1.2 Qualitative studies. Although many of the aforementioned studies use quantitative methods for ALA research, a few have used mixed methods or qualitative methods. Coppieters (1987) used a mixed-method approach to study the differences between *native* and *near-native speakers*. To do so, he used both a quantitative

grammaticality judgment test and a qualitative interview. His findings show that “native and near-native speakers of French have strikingly different intuitions on French sentences” (Coppieters, 1987, p. 544). Although he states that some near-native speakers can “reach the highest levels of linguistic achievement in their L2” (p. 545), they still do not have the linguistic intuition of a native speaker. He said that the “qualitative analysis. . . shows that quantitative results still seriously under-estimate the extent of the gap separating native and non-native underlying grammars” (Coppieters, 1987, p. 544-545). While Coppieters (1987) used qualitative analysis to balance his quantitative study, his conclusions contribute to the deficit approach of ALA.

Other studies have also used a mixed method approach using a quantitative test plus a qualitative interview (Cherciov, 2013; Albarracin *et al*, 2019; Jia, 2022). Albarracin, *et al*. (2019) used a mixed method approach to determine the factors that “shape” ALA. This study employed interviews and a survey in which participants explained their motivations to learn their AL and then rated their comfort levels in their AL on a 4-point scale. Jia (2022) conducted a study to determine the effect of age on English Second Language (ESL) Learners. However, the study was conducted on children aged between 3-9 years old who had been learning ESL for multiple years. This researcher firstly conducted a standardized English test, and then interviewed 9 children to ask their methods for learning ESL. They found that “although the learners have learnt English from young, none of them can use it frequently as a native person” (Jia, 2022, p. 81). But, despite not using it “frequently as a native person,” the researcher finds that “After the critical period, learners can achieve a good second language level, but the time and energy spent will be much more than the time and energy spent to achieve the same level in the critical period” (Jia, 2022, p. 76). Therefore, despite not achieving native-like proficiency, language learners can still achieve their individual goals in the ALA.

A few studies have used qualitative methods to study various aspects of ALA including relationships to cultural groups, achievement gaps in specific populations, and motivations to continue in learning an AL. Marlow and Giles (2008, p. 56) used interviews and focus groups “to understand ideologies of Standard English and Pidgin, accommodation behavior and group-based communication interactions.” These authors chose this approach because it “privileges human agency [thus] is an appropriate method with which to study subjectivity, identity and communication, especially among language communities that have endured social, economic and political marginalisation.” Good *et*

al. (2010) used focus group interviews to study the reasons Hispanic ELLs have academic and cultural achievement gaps and to recommend how to bridge such gaps. Kim (2022), recently conducted interviews to determine why adult ESL students succeed or do not succeed in ESL classes. These qualitative studies in ALA, however, are not nearly as prevalent as quantitative studies are.

Unlike many ALA studies which employ quantitative methods, this thesis employs qualitative methods to challenge the *native-like speaker myth* and to determine the measures of adult ALA success. As previously mentioned, quantitative studies paint all individuals with a broad brush and do not allow for individualized experiences. Larsen-Freeman (2015, p. 502) says “that researchers must always remember to look at what a learner is doing from the learner’s point of view. The learner may not be thinking in terms of linguists’ units or linguists’ descriptions.” The following section describes the specific qualitative methods this present thesis uses along with the potential drawbacks of such methods.

2.4 Life histories approach

To address the research questions (Section 2.2, p. 17), I used a qualitative approach, specifically the life histories method. Few ALA studies, to my knowledge, have approached adult ALA from a life histories methodology. This allows me to approach adult ALA from a different approach than many other studies. The life histories method will allow participants to describe their own personal motivations to learn an AL and to define their own measure of AL success. The life histories approach as used in this thesis is discussed in depth in Section 3.2.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated the four assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth*, the literature surrounding these myths, and my intent to challenge these assumptions. Then, I explained the methods used by past and current ALA studies and explained how I am adding to the ALA field by using a qualitative life histories approach, which has never to my knowledge, been used in ALA studies previously.

In Chapter 3, I will explain the life histories approach and the literature that contributed to my choice to adopt this approach. The data analysis will be described in Chapter 4.

The findings and discussion of each assumption will be addressed individually in Chapter 5, 6, and 7.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to challenge the assumptions attached to the *native-like speaker myth*. Demonstrated in Chapter 2, past and current literature in the field of linguistics has developed this myth containing four separate assumptions. The *native-like speaker myth* is primarily the idea that language acquisition success is measured by the subject's closeness to or distance from that of the *native speaker*. This thesis problematizes the *native-like speaker myth* by detailing individual learners' additional language learning experiences and initial language acquisition goals in relation to their personal measures of language acquisition success. In this way, the thesis addresses the *native-like speaker myth*, which has dominated much of language acquisition research for several decades. The following specific research questions are asked in order to challenge the *native-like speaker myth*:

- At additional language onset, is the adult learner's desired outcome level (DOL) comparable to native-like proficiency? If it is not, what is the adult learner's DOL?
- In what ways do adult AL learners assess their AL proficiency? Regardless, by what measures do adults assess their own AL success?
- If additional language acquisition success is achieved by reaching their DOL, can adults language learners be successful in ALA?

This chapter details the methods used to address these questions. It does so by describing the life histories approach, the data collection processes and the data itself. In Section 3.2, I will explain the reasons for the use of life histories as the best approach for this thesis. In Section 3.3, I will then describe the data collection process, including an explanation of the use of interviews. In this section, I shall also elaborate on participant qualifications, the ethical review process, the interview process, and the tools used to interview each participant. In Section 3.4, I will relate background information pertaining to participants where it is relevant to the research questions. Section 3.5 will demonstrate how the research questions were addressed.

3.2 Life histories approach and adult language acquisition

This section will provide an overview of approaches to the study of adult language (AL) acquisition. To address the research questions (Section 2.2, p. 17), I used a qualitative approach, specifically the life histories method. Situated mostly in sociology (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and social sciences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), the life histories method is a qualitative method that can fill in the gaps quantitative research creates and complements the information that quantitative studies have left out. Few ALA studies, to my knowledge, have approached adult ALA from a life histories methodology. This allows me to approach adult ALA from a different approach than many other studies.

Many studies on AL oral proficiency have used a verbal production approach (Munro and Derwing, 1999; Derwing and Munro, 1997; Munro *et al*, 2006; Derwing *et al.*, 2008; Derwing and Munro, 2013; Granena and Long, 2013; Hendriks and Hickmann 2015). This method asked participants to provide speech samples. The speech samples were then rated by listeners to determine their comprehensibility, accentedness and fluency (See Section 2.3, p. 46 and Table 2.2, p. 48). Initially, I considered using a similar method to measure participants' English proficiency. This verbal production approach allows participants to speak freely, using grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of their choice. However, upon further consideration, I recognized that giving objective ratings for comprehensibility, fluency, and accentedness would contradict the overall aim of this thesis, which is to identify the diversity of goals in relation to ALA success. In addition to the objectivity required in this verbal production method, a comprehensibility rating is often influenced more so by the listener's own biases and experiences than their ability to objectively measure comprehensibility. Even using "linguistically naive judges" who "have been shown to be able to judge degree of accent reliably, are inclined to be less lenient than [native speakers] with linguistic experience" (Thompson, 1991 in Granena and Long 2013). Therefore, rating a speaker's accentedness is ineffective for my purposes because even *native speakers* (L1) have diverse accents as do non-native speakers. The only difference is that non-native speakers' regional accents may be influenced by their L1 in addition to their place of origin.

Given that my intent is to address research questions that focus on the relationship between the participants' own individual language acquisition goals and their additional language proficiency, the life histories approach enabled participants to be more

“participatory and gives the respondent more voice than other deductive methods” (Ssali *et al* 2015). Asking participants to relate their own individual stories, “empowers the respondent, giving them a more participatory role to decide what is significant, why it is significant and to locate themselves within the experience” (Ssali *et al* 2015), specifically in terms of their experience of learning an additional language as an adult.

For this thesis, participants are asked to detail their acquisition of their AL and the circumstances therein. The life history method is comprised of “the collection and interpretation of personal histories or oral testimonies, collected during an interview process, for the purpose of understanding ‘the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts 2002, p. 1 in Ojermark 2007, pg. 1). While quantitative methods have brought much value to the field of linguistics, the life histories approach can bring additional depth to what is already known about ALA. When describing the details of their life, people have opportunity:

to recollect the past and document change, especially where some events could have been missed out through other methods requiring simple recall of facts. People may not remember the actual details but remember the significant events. Furthermore, it is participatory and gives the respondent more voice than other deductive methods. We found that it empowers the respondent, giving them a more prominent role to decide what is significant, why it is significant and to locate themselves within the experience. (Ssali *et al* 2015).

The life histories approach has been used to study a wide range of topics. For example, Bosi (2021) used the life histories approach to identify participation in politics throughout individuals’ lives. Another study (Adima, 2022) used a life histories approach to study the intersection of race, class, and gender in Uganda in the 1950s and 1960s. Other studies use the life histories approach to explore life after conflict (Međedović, 2019), education (Johnson, 2002; Mogra, 2008), homelessness (Belloni and Massa, 2021), humanitarianism (Roberts, 2010), migration (Kazmierska, 2003), social work (Kumar-Nevo, 1996), behavior sequence analysis (Keatley, *et al.*, 2021), and feminist studies (Patai, 1988).

However, to my knowledge, few studies have approached ALA using a life histories approach. One study by Flowerdew & Miller (2008, p. 200) study the “social structure and individual agency in second language learning” by using the life histories approach. Their study employed a series of interviews of seventeen (17) university-level students who had studied English for twelve to thirteen (12-13) years. The method of data collection included focus groups, journals, and observations over a period of three (3) years. From this data, the researchers narrowed down their data to three (3) individual life histories. Stevens (1999) is possibly one of very few ALA studies that uses a qualitative approach similar to the life histories approach. The study examines ALA proficiency by considering both the sociological factors and linguistic theories that influence adult ALA. As I am challenging the assumptions made in previous, overwhelmingly quantitative studies, a qualitative life histories methodology may give better insight into each participant’s unique ALA experience.

The benefit of approaching adult ALA from a life histories perspective is that it allows participants to detail their own ALA motivations, desired outcome levels, and measures of success. This method “provides a rich source of data that enables researchers to explore the life course and to examine the relationships between cause and effect, and agency and structure” (Ojermark 2). Furthermore, the life histories approach “privileges voices often excluded in other forms of research, [and] the reflection of personal and social life that this method presents are not unmediated” (Ojermark 4-5). By sharing their own individual stories, participants are given the opportunity to have agency in determining their own ALA success, rather than their success be measured by the vague standard of the *native speaker*.

For those studying the human experience whether it be on topics about gender, politics, poverty, migration, or as is with this thesis on adult additional language acquisition, the life histories method allows research to focus more on individual experience rather than a broader perspective of many language learning experiences. Furthermore, “life history interviews allow individuals to discuss not only themselves, and their lives, but also the social, economic, and political spaces that individuals inhabit” (Ojermark 3). These interviews help contextualize these adult language learners ALA experiences within the spaces they exist.

The life histories method can also “help to show that lives are not free floating but occur in a social context, hence are socially constructed” (Ssali *et al* 2015). This method allows participants to “discuss not only themselves, and their lives, but also the social, economic, and political spaces that individuals inhabit. Thus, they can be used to communicate how structure and agency intersect to produce the circumstances of a particular person’s life” (Ojermark 3). This approach will allow me to examine how social experiences play a role in shaping participants’ ALA experience, setting their goals for using their AL, their current proficiency, and their perception of their own ALA success. In the same way that “feminist scholars employ the [life histories] method primarily to uncover the diversity of women’s experiences and to project women’s voices into areas where they have previously been ignored” (Ojermark 2), this thesis sheds light on the diversity of adult language learners’ experiences, on the diversity of adult language learners’ experience including diversity in L1, education, age of onset (AoO), age of arrival (AoA), and length of residence (LoR).

This thesis intends to challenge the assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth* by exploring each individual’s life history with regards to their AL. This method will allow participants to describe their own personal motivations to learn an AL and to define their own measure of AL success. This qualitative approach allows participants to be more “participatory and gives the respondent more voice than other deductive methods” (Ssali *et al* 2015). Telling their own individual stories “empowers the respondent, giving them a more prominent role to decide what is significant, why it is significant and to locate themselves within the experience” (Ssali *et al* 2015), specifically the experience of learning an additional language as an adult.

Although the life histories method is the best approach for this thesis, it does have some limitations. Using life histories as evidence can lend itself to subjectivity as each person is the agent of their own story. However, “rather than presenting the story as an objective reality to be verified and proved, researchers emphasize how the story is formed and shaped by narrative conventions and in collaboration with the researcher” (Ojermark, p. 15). Recognizing the potential for subjectivity is important, but allowing the participant to have a voice in the significance of their own ALA experience is valuable for the field. Attention to proving validity, trustworthiness and reliability in this thesis is paid in Section 2.5.2 (p. 62) and Chapter 4 (p. 92).

3.2.1 Life Histories Interviews

To use the life histories approach, I interviewed each participant individually to explore their AL experience. (See Ch. 3.3 and 3.4 for more details about each participant and interview information). I chose to use interviews rather than a survey because if I asked participants to fill out a survey about their ALA experience, AL proficiency goals, and AL success, I would first have to determine all the possible answers to ensure accuracy in the participants' answers (Rasinger, 2010). Furthermore, the risks of using the closed-question interview method are that participants may lean toward a more positive answer than they believe, or they may choose an answer they believe is the "right" answer even if it is not fully accurate (Rasinger, 2010, p. 60-63). Cherciov (2013, p. 15) claims that "interviews are indeed better able than questionnaires to capture the nuanced, non-linear relationships between emotional factors and language proficiency." By asking participants to describe their own ALA experiences, participants were able to have a voice in determining the significant parts of their own story. For these reasons, I used interviews as the primary data collection method for this present thesis. As I am challenging the assumptions made in previous, overwhelmingly quantitative studies, a qualitative life histories approach will give better insight into each individual participant's unique ALA experience.

Some have voiced concerns about using interviews for research. According to Edley and Litosseliti (2010), an interview runs the risk of introducing bias into the study (p. 157) if the interview is open-ended as it allows the possibility of the interviewer to guide the questions to a particular response. An additional concern is if researchers fail to understand that conversation is an interaction or that interviews can create a 'seminar interaction; where [the interviewee] is supplying what [they] imagine is the 'right' or 'sought after' response'" (p. 163). However, interviews can be useful in "examining participants' shared understandings of everyday life, and the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups," which was the goal of this current thesis. Despite concerns of introducing bias, interviewing participants to learn their life history regarding ALA with "open-ended questions . . . elicit more in-depth, introspective data that was otherwise more difficult to capture and assess through the questionnaire." (Cherciov, 2013, p. 7)

Using the life histories approach, I interviewed adults who had learned an additional language after the age of 12. I did so to better understand, in part, how the social processes of learning English affected their ALA experience (Stevens 1999) and to discuss their reasons for spending time in an immersion experience, their educational environments, and their individual ALA proficiency goals. By using the life histories method to delve into the aforementioned assumptions, I sought to investigate more variable measures of ALA success. I attempt to demarcate and distinguish between the concept of “ultimate attainment” from “native-like proficiency” and from “success.”

3.2.2 Sample Size

Many quantitative studies have a large number of participants. In many ALA studies, the number of participants ranged from 22 participants (Derwing and Munro, 2013) to around 670,000 (Hartshorne *et al*, 2018), for which the study went viral on Facebook and, therefore, recruited a huge number of participants. If Hartshorne *et al* (2018) is removed from calculations, the mean number of participants is 112. Although Hartshorne *et al* (2018) claims that “to provide reliable results about ultimate attainment, a study should have in excess of 10,000 subjects,” considering each individual participant, their individual ultimate attainment goals, and their individual measures of success would be nearly impossible with so many participants. Moreover, such a high number of participants creates a situation in which participants are generalized without being able to detail the nuances of each person’s life, goals, opportunities, and motivations, which would conflict with the purpose of learning each person’s life history of ALA.

This thesis uses a qualitative method. Therefore, my number of participants is much lower at 26 participants. My initial plan was to interview ten (10) participants in the first round of interviews and an additional ten (10) in the second round. However, after recruiting broadly via email, more people responded positively, so I interviewed them all. When I had interviewed 26 participants, I believed my study to be saturated meaning that “new data [began to] repeat what was expressed in previous data” (Saunders *et al.*, 2018, p. 1897). Although each participant had a unique story, their experiences gave a broad enough picture of the ALA process that I decided not to pursue further interviews.

3.3 Data Collection Steps and Data Analysis tools

Initially, I planned to recruit focus groups with similar language acquisition experiences to meet in person to answer interview questions. Focus groups allow participants to interact with each other about similar experiences and “to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1996, p. 2). However, early in the process of finalizing this data collection method, Coronavirus spread throughout the world. In March 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed all aspects of life, including the ability to host in-person gatherings. Worldwide, countries issued stay-at-home orders to mitigate the spread of this virus, and people quickly pivoted to video-call-based work, socialization and even fieldwork. Due to the difficulties associated with this period and the chaos many were experiencing, I decided to forego using focus groups for the sake of ease of organization. For this reason, I chose to conduct individual interviews using Zoom to adhere to state and local distancing guidelines. Additionally, by using Zoom, I was able to record and auto-transcribe each session for later analysis (similar to Good *et al* 2010).

Despite converting from focus groups to individual interviews, this method of data collection allowed participants to have a voice to detail their own unique ALA process. Additionally, research shows that “interviews reveal a greater degree of personal introspection and involve less conditioned and more spontaneous responses. . . and are indeed better able than questionnaires to capture the nuanced, non-linear relationships between emotional factors and language proficiency” (Cherciov, 2013, p. 730). The following sections detail the process of conducting these interviews.

3.3.1 Ethics and Confidentiality

To conduct the research for this thesis, I received approval from three (3) ethical review boards: two Institutional Review Boards (IRB) made up from each of the two universities where I am employed (See Appendices 1, 2, & 3, pp. 257-259) and one from the Ethical Review board at the University of Birmingham (Appendix 4, p. 260). To receive approval from two of the universities, I completed an ethical research course (Appendix 6, p. 262). I am therefore informed of the ethical procedures in social and behavioral research and can identify areas of potential conflict of interest related to research in the Humanities.

3.3.2 Interview Process

In the following sections, I will describe the recruitment process, the contact and consent process, the requirements of participants, the two rounds of interviews, the interview script and the tools used to conduct each of these processes.

3.3.2.1 Participant Recruitment. To recruit participants for my pilot round, I primarily contacted participants from the universities at which I teach. Recruiting from universities and/or places of employment is a common recruitment method (Degani and Goldberg 2019; Hashimoto and Egbert 2019; Hendriks and Hickmann 2015; Johnson and Newport 1989; Kim and Rah 2019; Leal, *et al* 2018; Oroji and Ghane 2014; Peters, *et al* 2019; Yeganeh, 2013) as students, staff and faculty members are an easy demographic to recruit from, given their proximity and diversity. Additionally, I recruited participants from my personal contacts for both my pilot study and my second round of data collection (similar to Dąbrowska, 2019).

As I had gathered sufficient participants via email, I did not need to use social media as did Hartshorne *et al* (2018), whose study went viral as a result of sheer curiosity appeal, and Saito (2015) who targeted a specific group of people in one location. I did not need to use Prolific Academic or other online services to recruit participants for academic studies (similar to Hulm, *et al* 2019). I had planned to use non-digital format in the form of fliers (similar to Albarracin *et al* 2019; Birdsong 1992; Cox 2017) if necessary to recruit more participants, but this also proved unnecessary.

For this thesis, participants were required to have begun learning their additional language after the age of 12. Recruiting participants whose L1 was English and who began learning after the age of 12 was quite simple because the United States' education system typically begins AL instruction in middle school when students are around the age of 12. Recruiting participants whose AL was English and who began learning after the age of 12 was more difficult because many countries worldwide begin AL instruction very early, often at kindergarten or age 5. Many of the potential participants I contacted were not eligible for the thesis due to early AoA. However, I was able to recruit an adequate number of participants with an AoA of 12 or later to participate in the thesis. (See Section 3.4.1, p. 72, for full participant requirements).

3.3.2.2 Participant Contact and Consent. Participants were contacted via email, informed of the purpose of the thesis and the eligibility requirements (Appendices 7 & 8, pp. 264-265) If in agreement, participants signed a consent form on Qualtrics. The eligibility requirements were that participants “must be 18 years of age or older and must have learned a language in addition to English no earlier than age 12 in any setting. Participants of all language abilities were included. Taking part in this research project is voluntary” (Appendix 9, p. 226).

3.3.2.3 Pilot Study Interviews. Initially, I planned to conduct a pilot study with participants whose L1 was English and who had learned an additional language after the age of 12. The pilot study was designed to test the reliability and validity of the questions to ensure that they were producing consistent results among participants and were eliciting responses that thoroughly addressed the research questions (Appendix 11, p. 272).

For the pilot round, I interviewed fifteen (15) participants in fourteen (14) separate interviews. One married couple consented to be interviewed together. The pilot round interviews occurred between August 26th, 2021, and November 4th 2021. These interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes and 23 seconds with the shortest interview lasting 13 minutes and 13 seconds and the longest lasting 36 minutes and 45 seconds.

I did not re-interview my pilot study participants for additional information to gather more data (similar to Derwing and Munro, 2013; Magne *et al*, 2019). However, upon analysis of the pilot round data, I decided to include pilot study interviews as part of my thesis as it became obvious their answers had depth and insight that would add value to my data.

3.3.2.4 Second Round Interviews. In the second round of interviews, I recruited participants whose additional language was English and who had begun learning English after the age of 12.

For the second round, I interviewed eleven (11) participants. The interviews in the second round took place between February 14th 2022 and April 22nd 2022. Second round interviews lasted an average of 24 minutes and 7 seconds with the shortest interview lasting 10 minutes 27 seconds and the longest lasting 38 minutes and 36 seconds.

After both rounds of data collection, I had two data sets, which I was able to analyse separately and collectively to address the research questions (Section 3.4, p. 72).

3.3.2.5 Interview Script. Upon signing the aforementioned consent form, I contacted each participant and set up the interview at a time that was mutually convenient. When each participant entered the Zoom meeting, I greeted them and thanked them for their willingness to participate. I asked their consent to begin recording, turned on closed captioning to enable auto transcription, and then reviewed the purpose of the thesis and consent form. I asked them to answer each question with as many details as they felt comfortable sharing but reminded them that they could also skip any question or cease the interview at any time. I read each interview question in order to elicit participants' answers (Appendix 10, p. 269). In Section 3.5 (p. 85), I will discuss how I arrived at each interview question and how they address the research questions.

3.3.2.6 Interview Tools. The following section will describe the tools used to conduct the interviews, the purpose of these tools, and how they were used.

Qualtrics. Prior to the interview, participants were asked to read the informed consent form (Appendix 9, p. 266) which was hosted on Qualtrics (Provo, Utah, USA). Qualtrics is basically an online survey platform. It advertises itself as an “experience management” software “that closes experience gaps.” Qualtrics is broadly used in quantitative research as it has powerful analytics software that not only collects participant data but sorts and analyses data for large quantitative research data gathering (see Mlodzinski *et al.*, 2023; Fialk *et al.*, 2022; Gerber *et al.*, 2023; Varshneya *et al.*, 2023). Although my thesis is not large or quantitative, Qualtrics was the best option for both the participant consent form and the post-interview survey. Qualtrics allowed me to easily send the link to participants and to access their responses.

Zoom. Zoom is essentially a web-based video conferencing software that advertises itself as helping “consolidate communications, connect people, and collaborate better together in the boardroom, classroom, operating room, and everywhere in between” (Zoom, 2023). Founded in 2011, Zoom became “one of the most unambiguous winners of this pandemic” (Aboulezz, 2022) as the world quickly switched to virtual working and socializing. Not only did Zoom become necessary for the workplace, but academics quickly converted in-person fieldwork and data collaboration to Zoom-based fieldwork,

using it for interviews (Khan and MacEachen, 2022; Żadkowska *et al.*, 2022), collaborative qualitative data analysis (Naganathan *et al.*, 2022), video call ethnography (Watson and Lupton, 2022), creating a “new normal” method of fieldwork (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022) and “resilient research” methods (Rahman *et al.*, 2021). I chose Zoom for my interview software because by using the paid version I could record and auto transcribe the interviews. Be that as it may, participants were still able to join the video call for free without needing to download any software or create an account.

After completing the interview, I thanked participants for their time and willingness to share their experiences. I reviewed each recording while reading the transcript and corrected any inaccuracies in the transcript. While the Zoom auto transcription software is excellent, it mis-transcribed words occasionally, which I corrected. For example, it incorrectly transcribed as “300 pieces” instead of “3 years.” The participant clearly said 3 years, so I changed the transcript to reflect the words of the participant. I also bracketed out my own utterances in the transcript to better analyse participant responses without my words.

In the next section, the tools used to analyse the data collected will be presented. These tools include computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), Microsoft Excel, and corpus analysis software. These tools allowed me to analyse the interview data effectively and efficiently.

Nvivo. After the transcription of the interviews was complete, I uploaded each interview transcript into Nvivo. Nvivo is a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) that researchers use to analyse qualitative and mixed method data. The software allows researchers to “ask complex questions of [their] data to identify themes and draw conclusions, employ advanced data management and visualization tools to uncover richer insights, and produce clearly articulated, defensible findings backed by rigorous evidence” (NVivo). Nvivo has been used for a variety of qualitative studies (Li *et al.*, 2022; Rossolatos, 2019; Rojas-Figueroa *et al.*, 2019) and was the most practical choice for this present thesis because it was made available for students at the University of Birmingham. With the ease of use and the features it provided, Nvivo allowed me to analyse the data thoroughly and discover high-level themes in the data. See Chapter 4 (p. 92) for details with regards to the coding method, the codes used, and the themes that emerged.

As discussed in Section 2.5.1 (p. 60), some critics of CAQDAS warn that use of software can “create distance” (Creswell and Poth 2018, p. 209), “neglects the human interpretation” (Kelle, 1995 quoted in Hutchison *et al*, 2009, p. 285), and is difficult and time consuming to learn to use and troubleshoot when it does not work properly (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 210; Di Gregorio and Davidson, 2009, p. 216-218). However, due to the nature of this thesis and its practicality, I chose to use Nvivo as the primary software for data analysis.

Microsoft Excel. After coding each interview using Nvivo, I did additional rounds of manual coding using Microsoft Excel to identify any missed themes, to confirm the themes codified in Nvivo, and to highlight specific quotes to represent each theme. While Nvivo was beneficial to my first level of analysis, I wanted to ensure I had extracted all potential data. Some researchers (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 209) suggest coding first using handwritten notes in the margins of paper transcripts prior to using a CAQDAS for further analysis so as to lessen the distance between the researcher and the data. However, this present thesis was undertaken completely digitally with video interviews, auto-transcription, and all transcripts written in Microsoft Word. Therefore, to print the transcripts to hand code them only to convert them to digital formats later seemed unnecessarily inefficient. But this manual coding method using Excel did allow me to get closer to the data and to see it from a different perspective.

Sketch Engine. To introduce rigor and validation into the thesis, after coding the interview data using Nvivo and Excel, I put the data through a corpus to confirm the Nvivo findings by observing if the keywords that the corpus had identified coincided with the Nvivo findings. Sketch Engine, an online corpus software using lexical computing and “the ultimate tool to explore how language works” (Sketch Engine, 2023) was easily accessible to me through the University of Birmingham and was the most practical choice for me. The software was straightforward with instructional notes throughout, so I did not need to earn an additional degree in Corpus Linguistics to do the very basic tasks I needed for this current project. Once the corpus had been compiled in Sketch Engine, I used its tools to identify word frequency and key words and to see examples of specific words in context and word combinations. Unlike Nvivo, which was directed by my own observation, I used a corpus to objectify the data and make my findings less subjective. Using a corpus, I was able to see if the corpus data correlated to the themes I found in the Nvivo analysis and to ensure I had gathered all the pertinent information. It also allowed

me to remove the potential for bias and increase the reliability and validity of the data. See Chapter 4 (p. 92) for details pertaining to the findings within Sketch Engine.

3.4 Data Description

This section presents the data from the life history interviews of twenty-six (26) participants. It will provide participant requirements, participant data, explanation and justification of interview questions, and the data analysis process via Nvivo and Sketch Engine.

3.4.1 Participant Requirements

This thesis required pilot round participants to meet the following qualifications:

- Must have L1 English,
- Must be eighteen (18) years of age or older,
- Must have learned an AL after the age of 12.

This thesis required participants in the second round of interviews to meet the following requirements:

- L1 must be a language other than English,
- Must be eighteen (18) years of age or older,
- Must have learned English after the age of 12,
- Must have English proficiency level sufficient to understand and answer interview questions in English.

This thesis uses “triangulation of data sources,” which is “the inclusion of individuals with varying backgrounds, diverse group of participants” (Lemon and Hayes, 2020, p. 606) to produce credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness of the thesis. Apart from these required similarities, participants were drawn from various ages with various L1s, ALs, had varied levels of motivation to learn an AL, came from varied learning environments, had varied levels of AL proficiency and relied on varied methods of measuring their own success in AL acquisition. The varied backgrounds and diversity of participants in this thesis created a credible, dependable, and trustworthy assessment of the measure of success for adult language learners.

In addition to the similar requirements for pilot round participants, the second-round participants were required to have an English proficiency level sufficient to understand and answer interview questions in English. The purpose of this requirement was to limit variables within the thesis. Although the research questions addressed in this present thesis can apply to people with any L1 or AL at any proficiency, taking into account these additional variables was outside the scope of this thesis (See Section 8.3, p. 216) for Limitations).

3.4.2 Participant Data

This section will present the demographic questions, the initial questions, the educational environment questions, and the interview questions that were asked specifically to address each of the research questions. This section will include justification for interview questions along with high-level overviews of the data from each question. Further discussion of each section can be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

3.4.2.1 Demographic Questions. Twenty-six (26) participants were interviewed for this thesis in twenty-five (25) separate interviews. One married pair consented to be interviewed jointly. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to keep their information confidential. Table 3.1 shows the demographics of participants.

Table 3.1 Demographic Information

Pseudonyms	Age	L1	L2	L3	L4	Country of Origin	Highest level of education
Alice	49	Polish	English	Russian	French	Poland	Masters
Amy	60	French & German	English	Russian	N/A	France & Switzerland	PhD
Angela	54	English	German	Spanish	N/A	United States	PhD
Anita	47	Hainanese/Thai	English	N/A	N/A	Thailand	Masters
Ann	45	Polish	English	Russian & German	N/A	Poland	PhD
Arthur	38	English	Spanish	Brasilian Portuguese	N/A	United States	PhD
Carol	49	Mandarin	English	N/A	N/A	Taiwan	2 Masters
Elaine	38	English	Spanish	N/A	N/A	United States	PhD
Elizabeth	40	Arabic (Tunisian dialect)	French	English	N/A	Tunisia	PhD
James	30	English	Mandarin	N/A	N/A	United States	Some graduate
Janet	31	English	Spanish	N/A	N/A	United States	Masters
Joan	39	Portuguese	English	Spanish	N/A	Brasil	Masters
John	46	English	Spanish	N/A	N/A	United States	Bachelor's
Joseph	33	English	Spanish	Brasilian Portuguese	N/A	United States	PhD
Josephine	26	Hindi	English	N/A	N/A	India	EdD
Kenneth	48	Arabic	French	English	Italian	Syria	PhD

Linda	42	English	French	Japanese	N/A	Canada	PhD
Nancy	27	Hindi	English	N/A	N/A	India	EdD
Natalie	69	English	Spanish	Italian	N/A	United States	PhD
Norman	36	English	Swahili	N/A	N/A	United States	Some college
Paul	40	Castilian Spanish	English	Italian & French	Mandarin	Spain	PhD
Rose	44	English	French	Spanish	N/A	United States	ABD
Ruth	36	English	Swahili	N/A	N/A	United States	high school
Shirley	34	English	Spanish	N/A	N/A	United States	Masters
Teresa	50	English	Spanish	N/A	N/A	United States	PhD
Thom	42	English	Japanese	N/A	N/A	United States	Juris Doctorate

Table 3.1 shows participants' pseudonyms, their age at the time of the thesis, their countries of origin, and their highest education level. (See Appendix 12, p. 274, for brief biographies of each participant). Participant ages range from 26 years to 69 years, with a range of 43 years and an average age of 42 years at the time of the interview.

Participants were asked "What is/are your first language(s)?" followed by "What additional language(s) have you studied/do you speak?" to elicit the answers shown. I chose to use the verbs *is* and *are* and the singular and plural of *languages* because some people have two or more first languages. I chose to ask what *additional* languages participants had learned. This was preferable to asking what their *second* language was. The term, a *second* language, could incorrectly indicate that participants have only have one first language, and that I only want to learn about their *second* language acquired chronologically and not about the additional languages acquired, or alternatively, that their *second* language may be subordinate to their first language or languages. Using the word *additional* language is also more consistent with phraseology I use in this thesis.

3.4.2.2 Initial Questions. Participants were asked the age they began learning their AL to determine Age of Onset (AoO) (Table 3.2), their age of arrival (AoA) into their immersion experiences if applicable (Table 3.3), and the duration they spent in their immersion experience to determine length of residence (LoR) (Table 3.4).

Age of Onset. Participants were asked "When did you begin learning your additional language?" I anticipated this question to elicit straightforward answers of specific ages of onset. Instead, AoO became more complicated than I had anticipated for two reasons. A number of participants did not remember a specific age but rather a specific grade in which they began ALA. Other participants were required to learn their AL in school but did not consider themselves to have *really* started learning until later.

Table 3.2 Age of Onset

When did you begin learning your additional language?	
During High School	11
Prior to High School	10
18 years - 24 years	8
25 years or older	8

The number of responses to the question is higher than the number of participants because some participants learned multiple ALs, beginning at different ages.

To address the issue of participants not remembering their specific age but rather answering “however old you are [in 9th or 10th grade],” I decided to display their ages in relation to estimated age by grade. Participants who learned after the age of 18, however, did remember their exact age because it marked not a grade but a specific reason for beginning to learn such as moving to another country or meeting a future spouse. Some had to do some math to determine their age in a specific year. With these age estimates, the range of AoO is 35 years and the average AoO is 18.72 years old.

To address the issue of participants who grew up in proximity to their AL, I display their AoO as the age they themselves considered as the AoO. For example, Joseph “kind of learned some (AL Spanish) off and on just by dint of growing up in Colorado in the southwest where 20% of the population is Chicano or Latino and did some little like after school programs here and there when I was young, of like the very basics of Spanish, but I *really began* studying Spanish in earnest in 10th grade.” (*Emphasis mine*) Another example is from Paul, who said “(AL) English is hard to tell (when he began learning), because for theoretically, in my country (Spain) the educational system. . . starts teaching English very early. However, ...when I was a child, the instruction was deficient. . . so I learned nothing until probably late high school, when I got a personal interest in it, and I pretty much did it by myself. Self-taught.” Although both participants were around their AL from a young age, they do not consider themselves to have *actually* begun learning until later in life.

It is important to note that two participants, Josephine and Nancy, agreed to the participant requirement of having begun learning an AL at the minimum age of 12 years.

However, during the interview, they each stated their AoO at 5 years. I continued the interview, knowing I may need to exempt their data from the thesis. But, once the interview progressed, I understood why they had volunteered to participate. Like Paul, they began learning their AL as required during elementary and secondary school, but the instruction they had was insufficient. They described their learning environment as primarily *spoken* in their L1, Hindi. Their teachers, including their AL English teacher only spoke in L1 Hindi throughout their entire school day and even for a significant part of their AL English class. While their textbooks were all written in English, they did not speak or hear English being spoken during their school or home life. Upon being asked as to when she considered herself to have started *speaking* English, Josephine said “when I was in high school, a little bit.” When asked the same question, Nancy clarified that she began learning her AL as a young child, but when asked if she spoke English in academic or social settings, she replied, “Not at all, even not in school is just good morning, good afternoon, ma’am.” For this reason, I decided to keep both participants in my data set as they do not claim to have begun speaking English until well after the age of 12.

Age of Arrival. Participants were asked how old they were when they first immersed in their additional language. Similar to AoA, I anticipated their answers to be straightforward. Participant responses demonstrated quite a range of experiences.

Table 3.3 Age of Arrival

How old were you when you were first immersed in your additional language?	
Childhood	1
High School (14-17 years)	2
College (18-21 years)	12
22-29 years	12
30 years or older	4

The number of answers exceeds the number of participants because participants with multiple ALs indicated multiple ages of immersion. Some participants were able to name precise ages at which they had their immersion experience. Some gave a specific year but not age. Others remembered only the grade at which they traveled for an immersion experience. Their responses are categorized above by their estimated AoA. I asked this question to confirm that all participants were immersed after the minimum required age of 12 years old. Information about the participant who answered “childhood” is discussed in the previous section, Section 3.4.2.2 (p. 77), with regards as to why she was included in the data despite being immersed earlier than the minimum required age.

Length of Residence. Participants were asked “How long did you spend in that immersion experience? If not continuous, describe how much time total you have spent in an immersion experience.” Some participants responded with specific time periods. Others had estimated periods of immersion. Some participants had one continuous period of immersion whereas others have had multiple periods of immersion.

Table 3.4 Length of Residence

How long did you spend in that immersion experience?	
Less than a year	7
1-4 years	10
5-10 years	8
10-20 years	2
20+ years	6

The number of responses is higher than the number of participants because participants with multiple ALs had different lengths of residence for each AL.

Pertinently, for this particular question, I was attempting to establish length of *residence*, but I deliberately did not ask participants specifically as to how long they *resided* in an immersion experience. The purpose of not defining the type of immersion experience was to gather broader data. For example, a participant may not consider a two week or two-month immersion experience to be residing immersed in an AL, but that experience was still influential in their AL acquisition story. I chose not to define what duration of a timeframe qualified as an immersion experience. Whether it was a one-week vacation or a 25 year long immersion in AL experience, I left it to the participants to define for themselves the immersion experience(s) they wanted to describe. The responses shown in the chart above denote the estimated combined time spent in immersion settings.

Participant responses revealed that AoA had an impact on language acquisition, and this could be attributable to social factors. The responses suggested that being around speakers of a person's AL does not facilitate meaningful language acquisition when L1 is still an option for communication, and that even formal schooling in an AL is not considered an immersive experience. Further discussion on these topics may be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

The diversity and verbosity of participant responses to these initial questions confirmed that using the qualitative, life histories approach was the appropriate method for this thesis. For a quantitative thesis, participants would have simply responded with an estimated AoO, AoA, and LoR without room for explanation or clarification, leaving out important parts of their language acquisition experience.

Environment of Learning Additional Language(s). After answering the above demographic questions, I asked participants about the environments in which they studied or learned their additional languages. Table 3.5 displays their answers, classified into nine (9) categories. Further discussion of individual answers may be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Table 3.5 Environment of ALA

In what environments did you learn your additional language?	
Formal classes before immersion	12
Formal classes during immersion	7
Primarily full immersion, some informal classes	5
Formal classes only, non-immersion	4
Self-study	4
Language learning apps (iTalki & Rosetta Stone)	4
Private tutoring then immersion	2
Informal Conversation	2
Immersion prior to classes	1

The number of responses recorded is greater than the number of participants as several participants had multiple ALs and learned each in a different environment. I chose to separate the environment of “self-study” and “language learning apps” because while using a language learning app could be considered as self-study, the reverse is not true. The participants who learned their AL via self-study specifically stated that they learned prior to the invention of or accessibility to language learning apps and used other methods such as reading, watching TV, or “a trifold laminated thing” (Thom, AL Japanese). Those who used language learning apps specified the apps as either Rosetta Stone or iTalki.

Participants were then asked to describe the methods they used to learn their AL(s). Answers to this question are shown below in Table 3.6, categorized into twelve (12) broad

categories. Further discussion of individual responses may be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Table 3.6 Methods of Learning

What methods did you use to learn your additional language?	
Immersion (friends, church, school, work)	11
Teacher-led instruction	11
Language instruction textbook	9
Transactional conversation	8
Movies/TV shows	8
Books/Newspapers in AL (Roald Dahl, Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie)	6
Flashcards/Memorizing	5
Language App (RS/italki/Duolingo)	4
Podcasts/Tapes	2
Growing Participator Approach	2
Listening to speeches in AL	1
Translation approach	1

The number of responses exceeds the number of participants as many participants used multiple methods to learn their ALs. Some of the categories are self-explanatory. Less-obvious responses are described below.

Some participants used the phrase “immersion” or “immersive” to describe their methods, but others described their method as “being out and using (AL)” (James, AL Mandarin), “learn by doing” (Shirley, AL Spanish), and being “very involved in church community” in AL (Joseph, AL Spanish & Portuguese), which I also categorized as immersion since these AL learning experiences happened within an immersive experience.

Some participants described their method of learning as a mutually beneficial language exchange, categorized as “transactional conversation.” In this situation, each person wanted to learn the other’s L1. For example, James (L1 English / AL Mandarin) explained that “a handful of [L1 Chinese] people reached out to us [and] wanted to learn English so we would take nights on and off and we would just sit with them, and we’d be only-Chinese hour or be only-English if we’re helping them out.” James consequentially

increased his AL Mandarin by helping L1 Mandarin speakers learn AL English and vice versa. Teresa (AL Spanish) described a similar situation except that she was still immersed in her L1 English and conversed with an L1 Spanish exchange student in her high school. She said, “there was one exchange student my senior year in high school who was from Colombia who I credit . . . with a lot of my earlier speaking ability, speaking with him a lot informally.”

Some participants described watching movies or TV shows as a method to learn their AL. Elizabeth (AL English) said she learned English “mostly through a TV show, and it’s *Friends*. *Friends* helped me a lot that TV show, and I like watching Korean drama. . . so reading the subtitle very fast . . . helped me read faster.” Alice (AL English) said, “when I was learning English, we would watch soap operas because they were super easy to follow, not much dialogue so bad movies are really good for learning language.” She goes on to say that she watches “really bad Russian movies for [her] daughter . . . because, like, they repeat things multiple times.” Anita (AL English) explained that she watches movies with her L1 Thai subtitles on and “later on [now] still do (AL) English captions” when watching movies in her AL English.

Two participants, Norman and Ruth, who are married and agreed to be interviewed together, used the Growing Participator Approach to learn their AL Swahili while immersed in Swahili. The Growing Participator Approach was created in 2003 by Greg Thomson, a linguist recruited by an NGO to be a language learning consultant. His experiences as a linguist intersected with his lived experience of learning and teaching languages and developed into the Growing Participator approach, which is a six-step approach (not a “language learning method” as clarifies the website) that allows people “to understand, participate and join the communities around them” (Growing Participator Approach, 2023). Norman and Ruth describe each of the six stages with the final one being “Alright, go out of here” because they “assume you know enough [to get around].”

One participant, Paul, described using “a very traditional method, but it’s the one that worked for me with (AL) English.” He describes this method as “literally taking Shakespeare plays on the left, a thick paper dictionary on the right, and spending hours and hours and hours and days and days and days and learning and no flashcards no grammar nothing.” He used other methods to learn his other ALs French, Italian, and Mandarin, but he explains that this method of direct translation worked best for him to

learn his AL English. Further discussion of the environments and methods of AL acquisition are found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

3.5 Analysis of Interview Data

Two methods of analysis were used after the interviews were recorded and transcribed. I used both methods of qualitative data analysis to identify common themes that arose from multiple participants and to add rigor and validity to the findings. The first and primary method of data analysis was conducted through a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software called Nvivo. This analysis process required that I comb through the interviews multiple times, marking or coding consistent themes that emerged. The secondary method of data analysis was using corpus linguistics to find word frequency and concordances to objectify the findings from the first round of analysis. These two processes will be described briefly in Sections 2.5.1 (p. 60) and 2.5.2 (p. 62), respectively. The data analysis process is detailed in full in Chapter 4 (p. 92).

3.5.1 Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software

The creation of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) along with the development of other new technologies have allowed researchers to analyse larger quantities of qualitative data (Rose *et al.*, 2013). However, since the emergence of CAQDAS in the 1980s, CAQDAS software such as Nvivo has not been without its fair share of criticism. These concerns are legitimate, and I address them below. I will also explain the reasons I chose to use CAQDAS, specifically Nvivo.

One concern about the use of CAQDAS is the separation or distancing it can create between the researcher and the data. This separation/distancing “creat[es] distance and hinder[s] creativity” (Creswell and Poth 2018, p. 209). However, research about this concern most often suggests the potential for separation/distance but that using CAQDAS does not guarantee such separation/distance (Welsh, 2002; Jackson, Paulus, and Woolf, 2018, p. 85). In fact, the “claim that QDAS creates a barrier between the researcher and the data, limiting his or her ability to become close to and familiar with the data” is “unsubstantiated” (Jackson, Paulus, and Woolf, 2018, p. 87).

Another concern about the use of CAQDAS is mechanization or dehumanization. Mechanization/dehumanization is defined as when CAQDAS has the “potential to turn qualitative research into a rigid automated process that neglects the role

of human interpretation and reflection (Kelle, 1995 in Hutchison, Johnston, and Breckon, 2009, p. 285). However, researchers have found that when used properly a CAQDAS such as Nvivo is a “powerful tool that, if used appropriately, can facilitate” a qualitative data analysis (Hutchison, Johnston, and Breckon, 2009). The CAQDAS works to assist the researcher in their data analysis not to remove the human element of the analysis process. CAQDAS like Nvivo does not “analyse data but rather [aids] the analysis process, which the researcher must always remain in control of” (Zamawe, 2015). As stated above, Nvivo can assist researchers analyse large amounts of qualitative data without doing the analysis for them.

An additional criticism is the time and frustration generated when deciding on which CAQDAS software to choose and learning how to use and troubleshoot when it does not work properly (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 210; Di Gregorio and Davidson, 2009, p. 216-218). Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 210) explain that while the process of qualitative data analysis is the same whether manually coding or using a CAQDAS, one disadvantage of using a CAQDAS is that choosing the appropriate software, learning a new software, using the software, and attaining technological support can take time and cause frustration. While this is a worthy criticism of CAQDAS, deciding to use Nvivo was quite simple for me. The University of Birmingham maintains a site license, which allowed for me to have access to “a community of users . . .for support” (Di Gregorio and Davidson, 2009, p. 234). However, Nvivo was user-friendly and provided sufficient training through their website and LinkedIn learning that I was able to navigate the software with ease and without needing to collaborate with other Nvivo users. This allowed me to focus primarily on analyzing my data rather than spending too much time learning the software.

Despite the aforementioned disadvantages, using CAQDAS to assist in qualitative data analysis has more advantages than disadvantages. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 208-9) affirm some of these advantages stating the benefits of ease of organization of files and data, ease of sorting and locating materials, ease of linking memos and notes to files for simple reviewing, and availability of visual representations of codes and themes. CAQDAS also introduces transparency, rigor, and validity to the qualitative research process. As “the use of [QDAS] becomes the standard in a future world,” (Salmona and Kaczynski, 2016, p. 247), transparency in the research process allows more visibility and “sloppiness will be painfully apparent” (Di Gregorio, 2008, p. 40). Rigor

and validity are added to the data analysis process when using a CAQDAS because the software allows the researcher to search for terms, phrases, and key information quickly and accurately (Di Gregorio and Davidson, 2009, p. 54). Research says that using a CAQDAS “increased [researchers’] confidence in the rigor of the analysis” (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). However, cross-checking the search results manually is recommended “so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated” (Welsh, 2002). While I did not print out and manually code my data after using the Nvivo search function as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), I did manually review every keyword or phrase search to ensure that I had not missed any relevant data.

For the reasons described above, I chose to use Nvivo as the method of analyzing the interview data from participants. The accessibility through University of Birmingham along with the organizational features included made it an easy choice. However, to triangulate my data, I confirmed my findings by using corpus analysis. The following section will briefly explain corpus studies and my reason for choosing to use it as a secondary analysis tool.

3.5.2 Corpus studies

At its most basic, corpus linguistics comprises a variety of methods of studying language in written form whether it was in written form originally or transcribed from spoken language. However, it is a diverse field in and of itself. As Gries (2009) says:

Corpus linguistics is not a monolithic, consensually agreed set of methods and procedures for the exploration of language. While some generalisations can be made that characterise much of what is called ‘corpus linguistics’, it is very important to realise that corpus linguistics is a heterogeneous field. (p. 1)

When using a corpus, the researcher analyses data sets that otherwise may be too large to analyse manually. As the data for this present study is small, I analysed it manually using Nvivo. However, I chose to upload my data to a corpus using SketchEngine to validate the themes already identified in the primary analysis using Nvivo. This present thesis does not use corpus linguistics to drive my data analysis but rather to inform the analysis.

Using a corpus method allowed me find word frequencies and concordances within the data to identify any findings I had missed in my primary analysis using Nvivo but also strengthened the previously identified findings. According to Gries (2009, p. 2),

“concordances and frequency data exemplify respectively the two forms of analysis, namely qualitative and quantitative, that are equally important to corpus linguistics.” However, what a corpus lacks is the contextual information that qualitative analysis provides. As described above in Section 2.3.1 (p. 47), the necessity of relying on statistics rather than individual data can lend itself to broad generalizations rather than individual stories. Nevertheless, corpus analysis allowed me to probe the data further after my initial analysis. This probe into the data by using word frequency analysis confirmed the thematic development I identified in the initial analysis. These findings assured that I was letting the words speak for themselves and not simply creating themes I wanted to see. This corpus methodology as a secondary analysis method added rigor, validity, and reliability to this present study.

3.6 Addressing the Research Questions

3.6.1 Motivations, Attitudes, and Cultures

The first Research Question addressed in this thesis is as follows:

- At additional language onset, is the adult learner’s desired outcome level (DOL) comparable_to native-like proficiency? If it is not, what is the adult learner’s DOL?

To address this RQ, participants were asked interview questions (Section 5.4, p. 122; Appendix 10, p. 269)) about their motivations to learn their AL and to immerse themselves in their AL. They were asked their attitudes toward the language and the culture of their AL. Additionally, they were asked their desired outcome levels (DOLs). The impetus for asking these interview questions will be described below. The participant responses and the analysis are presented in full in Chapter 5 (p. 118).

3.6.1.1 Motivations. The role of motivation for learning ALs has been studied extensively. For example, Bley-Vroman’s (1990) Fundamental Difference Hypothesis compares “child language development” (L1A) and “adult foreign language learning” (ALA) (4). Of the many differences he observes, one difference is that AL learners have a “variation of goals,” explaining that some adult learners learn just enough “to wait on tables” or to “become skilled at cocktail party storytelling” (8). He explains that some adults learning a new language excel at one domain such as pronunciation or vocabulary at the expense of other domains such as grammar while “some work at passing for a native

speaker. [sic]" (pp. 8). Furthermore, the mere existence of the multitude of language learning apps such as Rosetta Stone, Duolingo, Babbel, Mango among others demonstrates how many people want to learn a new language. However, most of these apps keep in mind the variation of ALA proficiency goals including "[i]f you just want to learn enough to order a coffee" (Nast, 2022). (See Section 2.2.2, p. 27; Section 5.5, p. 123). To address this RQ, participants were asked to explain the reasons they began learning their AL, their DOLs, what they hoped to gain from learning an AL, their attitudes toward the language and its speakers, and if they believe they lost or gained any part of their cultural identity by learning an AL. Participants' responses and the data analysis are discussed in Chapter 4 (p. 92).

Motivation for moving to an immersion experience. Participants were asked why they moved to or spent time in an immersion experience. This was to identify factors that affected their language acquisition process. This question was informed by research that describes the ways motivation for immersion correlates to AL proficiency levels (Ogbu and Simons, 1998).

Frequently, when people move to a place where the primary language is different from their own primary language, the motivation is rarely as simple as "to learn an AL." Often, people travel to or move to an immersion experience for various reasons, and learning an AL is a byproduct of existing in that space. Research on why people immigrate explains how the motivation for moving informs how well they acclimatize to the primary language and culture (Ogbu and Simons, 1998). For example, those who voluntarily immigrate "do not experience . . . long-lasting cultural and language problems" (pp. 164) while refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers who flee their countries due to "civil war or other crises in their place of origin" can maintain a "tourist attitude" knowing that they need to acclimate to the primary language and culture to "accomplish the goal of their emigration. . . without fear of losing their cultural and language identity" (pp. 165). An additional classification from this thesis is for involuntary (nonimmigrant) minorities such as Native Americans and those who were enslaved by the transatlantic slave trade. People who were involuntary minorities became minorities by force, against their will, and the language and culture of the colonizers was also forced upon them (pp. 165-166). Understandably, involuntary (nonimmigrant) minorities do not have a positive attitude toward the AL or its speakers and thus are unlikely to set or reach any language acquisition goals. For these reasons, I asked participants their reasons for moving to

identify if they would be considered a voluntary or involuntary minority. Participants' responses are detailed below in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 Motivation for Immersion

Describe your motivation to move to/ spend time in [your immersion experience]	
University/college/study abroad	11
Faith	5
Language learning	5
Visit family/friends	4
Travel	3
Adventure	2
To get out	2
Jobs	1
Just wanted to	1

The number of responses exceeded the number of participants because some participants had multiple motivations for moving to or spending time in an immersion experience. Participant responses show that all participants fell into the voluntary minority category. Each individual chose to immerse themselves and was not forced to immerse against their will. The voluntary nature of participants' immersive experiences indicates that their AL acquisition would not be hindered by the reasons for their immigration experience.

Attitudes. Participants were asked how their attitude toward the language and its speakers affected their language learning and if their attitude towards speakers of their AL has changed since learning it. I asked this question to identify any correlation between a positive attitude toward their AL and its speakers to a higher level of success and vice versa. As an example, among voluntary minorities, their motivation was to learn the AL as a form of necessity to communicate with others. Conversely, involuntary minorities such as Native Americans and those enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade have an understandably negative view of the AL and its speakers. Thus, involuntary minorities learned as little of the AL as possible to maintain their own identity and culture (Ogbu and Simons, 1998). As shown above in Table 3.7, the participants were all voluntary

minorities and as shown in Table 3.8, nearly all have a positive attitude toward their AL and its speakers.

Table 3.8 Attitudes toward Language

How do you believe your attitude toward the language and its speakers affects your learning?	
Positive attitude	19
Negative attitude	0
Neutral	4

The number of responses is lower than the number of participants because some did not specifically answer the question either due to misunderstanding or due to diverging to a parallel topic. Pertinently, for this particular question, many participants asked me to reword it for clarity. When I reworded the question, I omitted focusing on the part of the question about attitude change because this was addressed in the previous question. The few participants who said they had a neutral attitude toward the AL and its speakers clarified that they simply did not know enough about the culture to have any sort of attitude and commented along the lines of “I don’t think I had enough base knowledge for [my attitude] to affect one way or another” (Janet, AL Spanish).

The participants who did answer the question regarding any change in their attitude about the AL and its speakers, answered primarily about observations they had of others with poor attitudes who chose not to learn the AL. One participant, Rose, described her positive attitude toward her AL French but added that the cultural barriers she faced were too much for her to break through in order for her to learn AL Arabic. She said she found it difficult to “make good friendships” due to so many differences and thus, “was never able to get very far in Arabic.”

Cultural Identity. Participants were asked if they felt any loss of cultural identity when speaking an AL or experienced a sense of gain of cultural identity, or both. Research shows that sometimes when people migrate to an immersion experience, as either involuntary minorities, voluntary minorities, or refugee/migrant workers (Ogbu and Simons, 1998), they feel “a loss of cultural identity and cultural foundation” and do “not feel connected to the new culture, school, or community” (Good *et al*, 2010, pp. 330).

This feeling of loss of cultural identity could affect how people learn an AL because they reject learning the language due to “a need, or perhaps a desire, to be different from the mainstream culture to maintain their own identity” (Good *et al*, 2010, pp. 334). Participants in this thesis were not involuntary immigrants or children of immigrants. This means they had agency in their move into each immersion experience. However, to determine if participants felt any loss of identity when speaking their AL and identify any correlations, I asked participants if they felt any loss or gain of identity when they speak their AL. Their responses are shown below in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9 Cultural Loss and Gain

Do you feel any loss of cultural identity when you speak your additional language? Or gain of a new identity? Or both?	
No loss	23
Experienced loss	1
Some loss	2
Gained identity	12

The number of responses is greater than the number of participants as twelve (12) participants said they did not feel loss of cultural identity but had gained a new additional identity or felt that their identity had evolved.

3.6.2 Perceptions of proficiency

The second RQ addressed in this thesis is as follows:

- In what ways do adult AL learners assess their AL proficiency? Regardless, by what measures do adults assess their own AL success?

To address this RQ, participants were asked interview questions (Section 6.3, p. 160; Appendix 10, p. 269) about their own measure of AL proficiency, if they had successfully reached their DOLs and if they had further ALA goals.

3.6.2.1 Perception of Proficiency. Participants were asked how proficiently they spoke their AL currently. Rather than administering an AL proficiency test, I asked participants to rate their own AL proficiency. I deliberately did not offer participants a scale with which to measure their proficiency as I wanted them to self-evaluate their AL

proficiency. Research shows that when asked to rate their own language proficiency, people are able to rate their own proficiency “realistically” (Flege *et al* 1999 in Flege 2018 p. 20) Additionally, Ma and Winke (2019) confirmed that many studies have “addressed the reliability and validity of self-assessment as a measure of language proficiency” (Brown *et al*, 2014; Butler & Lee, 2006; Chen, 2008; Dolosic *et al*, 2016; Tigchelaar, 2018). These authors proposed that self-assessments of oral skills can be seen as valid and reliable to the extent that the self-assessment scores, which indirectly measure oral skills, are highly associated with scores from other direct measures, such as actual measures of speaking proficiency” (Ma & Winke, 2019 p. 67). Therefore, in this present thesis, it may be assumed that their self-evaluation is accurate in gauging their additional language proficiency. Their responses to these interview questions and the analysis thereof are detailed in Section 4.4.3 (p. 111). The discussion of participants’ self-defined measures of AL proficiency will be presented in Chapter 6 (p. 158).

3.6.3 Measures of success

The third RQ addressed in this thesis is as follows:

- If additional language acquisition success is achieved by reaching their DOL, can adults language learners be successful in ALA?

To address this RQ, participants were asked interview questions (Section 7.3, p. 190; Appendix 10, p. 269) regarding how they measure their own AL success. They were asked if they were to measure their AL success by reaching their DOLs if they would consider themselves successful.

3.6.3.1 Measure of Success. Participants were asked to describe how they measure their success or lack thereof in speaking their AL. The aim of this question was to challenge the notion that native-like proficiency is the only measure of success. Bley-Vroman (1990, pp. 274) uses the phrasing “lack of success” and “general failure” to describe the “adult foreign language” learner, and Hartshorne (2018, pp. 274) correlates “native-like performance” with “learning success.” Birdsong (1992, pp. 706) acknowledges “varying degrees of success” though always considers “L1A [a] success.” To identify additional measures of ALA success, I asked participants to describe if they would consider themselves successful if their success were measured by reaching their DOLs, rather than measured by nearness to *native* proficiency. A detailed analysis of

participant responses is found in Section 4.4.3 (p. 111). Discussion of participant responses can be found in Chapter 7 (p. 188).

3.7 Conclusion

The data in this thesis is drawn from twenty-six (26) participants' interviews. In total, the interviews consist of just over 10 hours of interview time and just over 84,000 words. The data was analysed using two main approaches to data analysis. The methods are qualitative data analysis using Nvivo and corpus analysis using Sketch Engine. The qualitative data analysis approach is used to identify common themes among individuals. The corpus analysis approach is used to validate and discover additional themes. Chapter 4 reports on the data analysis, findings, and emergent themes.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the processes undertaken to analyse the data, to triangulate methods of analysis to increase rigor, and to identify emerging themes which address the research questions in the thesis. These themes are then further discussed in greater detail in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 provide a rich view of the participants' lived experiences of learning an additional language.

4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis using Nvivo

To begin analysis, I uploaded the interview transcripts to Nvivo (See Section 3.3, p. 66, for information about Nvivo). I then analysed the interview transcripts using the following steps:

- Reading and coding the interviews in full and then by interview question
- Creating memos of reflections, summaries, and emerging ideas
- Analyzing interview data through corpus analysis
- Identifying emergent themes

Each step shall be described below.

4.2.1 Reading and Coding

The first step to identifying the key themes in the data began with coding the transcripts from the interview data. First, I coded each participant interview as a whole. Agar (1980, p. 103) described the need to “read the transcripts in their entirety several times” so that the researcher can “immerse [themselves] in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts.” To code each transcript, I followed two steps:

1. I read through the entire interview and assigned “a short, descriptive word or phrase of meaning to the data related” (Lester *et al*, 2020, pp. 94). For example, when a participant said they “really enjoyed” learning their AL, I highlighted the sentence or sentences around it and coded it “enjoyment.” Or, when a participant said the reason they began to learn an AL was that it was “compulsory,” I highlighted the sentence or sentences around it and coded it “required to learn.”

2. I read through each transcript multiple times. I labeled words and phrases which related to the keywords in the interview questions and words which related back to the RQs in my study (for e.g. *proficiency, goals, success, communicate, native, etc*). For example, every time a participant mentioned desiring to read the literature or to enjoy the music of the culture, I coded it *culture*. I also coded abstract ideas such as “bridging gaps” or “expanding horizons” as *metaphors*.

Multiple rounds of coding allowed me to spend significant time engaging with the data. Some research suggests “no more than 25 to 30” codes (Creswell and Poth, 2018, pp. 190). Others suggest no specific number of codes but recommend at least three phases of coding (Lester *et al*, 2020, pp. 104). Still, other researchers advise against counting the number of codes, saying that it is “quite the debated topic!” because it “goes against the spirit of qualitative inquiry” (Hays and Singh, 2011, pp. 310). In this study, after multiple rounds of coding, I had created well over 100 codes (Appendix 14, p. 284). In my opinion, the number of codes represents the thoroughness of the analysis process and the richness of the data. Some codes were used many times; others were used only once. However, all codes were important as even a code used once represented an individual participant’s language learning experience. Other codes used more frequently demonstrated common experiences among the individual participants. The top-15 most used codes are displayed in Table 4.1 below. These codes are ordered by the highest frequency and were mentioned by more than half the participants.

Table 4.1 Most Common Codes in Full Transcripts in the Dataset

Codes	Frequency of codes	Participants
Culture	78	23
Effective methods	67	23
Converse or Communicate	49	21
Different domains	43	21
Short-term travel	43	14
Classroom	40	20
Success	31	25
Total Immersion	31	13
Connection to culture	27	13
Abroad	25	12
Long-term immersion	25	12
Reached Original Goals	24	19
Multiple ALs	21	14

Each of these codes represents snippets of data, which eventually lead to the development of the themes discussed later in this chapter.

4.2.2 Creating Memos

In addition to coding each interview, I created memos of observations, ideas, or common themes that arose as I coded. The purpose of creating memos is “creating a digital audit trail” and “lend[ing] credibility to the qualitative data analysis process” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, pp. 188-189) because my thought process is documented throughout the coding process. An excerpt of a memo is below:

Some people have high proficiency levels in multiple additional languages but in different domains. For example, Arthur has high academic proficiency in Spanish but high social proficiency in Brazilian Portuguese. Rose has high overall proficiency in French but high political/social proficiency in Spanish. Linda had

to learn L2 French throughout her K12 years, reluctantly, but she spent a year in Japan where she learned enough to get around because it was short, limited period of time. She does not consider herself a failure at learning Japanese because she didn't set out to become *native-like*.

This memo was written after coding multiple interviews and contributed to the overall development of the themes discussed later.

Upon multiple rounds of coding the interview data and writing memos, I was able to gather a big picture of common notions that arose. These first rounds of coding and the memos gave early insight into the individuality of the participants but also allowed me to begin to see themes emerging across the data. Excerpts from these memos will be given in the following sections to show how they contributed to the development of each of the themes.

4.3 Corpus Analysis with Sketch Engine

To add rigor and validity to the qualitative data analysis process, I converted the interview transcript data into a corpus and analysed it using Sketch Engine. This added a degree of objectivity to my data analysis and validated the themes I had identified in the Nvivo analysis. Corpus analysis was not the primary method of analysis in this study because it does not give the individual the relevant context needed for a life histories methodology. The specific ways in which the corpus analysis was used are detailed below.

The corpus consists of twenty-five (25) interview transcripts or 84,018 words. Each transcript includes introductory information and the interview questions along with the participants' responses. Each transcript was auto transcribed by Zoom and corrected manually by me (Chapter 3.3.2, p. 67). During corpus analysis, I removed my words from the data and only retained the participants' words. Sketch Engine tools such as word frequency, concordance, and keywords allowed me to confirm the codes I had created in the rounds of qualitative data analysis in Nvivo. Specific examples of how the corpus analysis was operationalized as a method of adding objectivity to the qualitative data analysis will be demonstrated in the sections below.

The previous sections describe the process used to analyse the interview data which included the qualitative data analysis method of coding and creating memos and the

corpus analysis to add rigor and validity to the method. The following sections will present how the themes from the data analysis were identified.

4.4 Emerging themes

The process for identifying emerging themes is as follows. I begin with a general description of the different stages and then provide the detail for each theme.

Step 1: Each participant's interview was coded as a whole using words/phrases linked to the RQs.

Step 2: Each interview question across all participants was extracted. Each interview question was then coded individually to address specific RQs. This step involved identifying any new codes along with the codes from Step 1 that addressed the RQ. The codes were then rationalised to make the number of codes more manageable.

Step 3: Corpus analysis using SketchEngine was used for each interview question to double-check and verify the codes from the frequency analysis of keywords.

Step 4: From the convergence of the most frequent codes, the context data, and the word frequency, the theme was identified.

Below I provide the interview questions that relate directly to the RQs in the thesis. I illustrate how the interview question data was coded, showing the most commonly used codes. Then, I present the findings of the corpus analysis. Finally, I identify the themes that emerge from the data analysis.

4.4.1 Development of Themes 1 and 2

After a number of demographic questions to give context to each participants' individual life history of ALA, participants were asked to describe their DOLs, motivations, and what they had hoped to gain from an AL. As explained elsewhere in this thesis, this question was to probe if participants were keen to speak/sound like a *native speaker* and is related to RQ1, which is concerned with adult language learners' ALA DOLs and if their DOLs are related to the *native speaker*. The interview questions and the analysis of the data elicited from the interview questions are as follows:

- When you began learning your additional language, what were your proficiency goals (i.e. what did you want to do with the language)?

- Why did you start learning your additional language?
- What did you believe you would gain by learning your additional language?

The words/phrases which were repeated in the data gleaned from this interview question included the following *converse*, *conversation*, *communicate*, *communication*, *talk*, *connect with people*. Each time words such as these were used, I coded these instances as CONVERSE or COMMUNICATE. All the codes used in the data analysis of these interview questions are displayed in Table 4.2, Table 4.3, and Table 4.4.

Table 4.2 Codes within DOLs interview question

Codes	Frequency of Codes
Communicate/Converse	13
Fluid / Fluent	10
No Initial goal	5
Good grade	4
Native Speaker	2
Culture	1

Table 4.3 Codes within Motivations Interview Question

Codes	Frequency of Code
Enjoyment	12
Required	8
Connect to people	8
Culture	8
Job	6
Global influence of English	4
Good challenge	3
Travel	3
Good teacher	2
Horizons	2
To be cool	2
Immersion	1

Table 4.4 Codes within Gains Interview Question

Code	Frequency of Code
People	11
Culture	10
Education	10
Communication	8
Enjoyment	7
Job / Career	7
Travel	4
Open doors	2

In reviewing the codes used in analyzing the data of these three interview questions, I saw a number of codes that overlapped among the three questions.

For example, in the data, the context of the code *communicate/converse* are as follows:

- “It really is just about can I *converse* with the other person.”
- “The feel-good goal was to be able to get around and hold *conversations* and get to know people in a very, you know, basic level.”
- “As long as we can understand each other and *communicate*, I think it's fine.”

Each of these three examples were coded as *converse or communicate or connect with people*.

A few examples of the context of the code *connect to people* are as follows:

- “I really want to engage with people from these cultures.”
- “We wanted to get to know people.”
- “I want to know people from different cultures.”

Each of these three examples were coded as *connect to people*.

To identify the common codes, I combined the overlapping codes and created the following Table 4.5 to visualize the most common codes in these three interview questions and the frequency of these codes.

Table 4.5 Most-Common Codes Combined of Three Interview Questions

Code	Frequency of Code
Required / Education	22
Communicate/Converse	21
Connect to People	19
Enjoyment	19
Connect to Culture	19
Job/Career	13

These six (6) codes are the most-commonly used codes among the three aforementioned interview questions. These codes are all related to RQ1.

In the following section, I will explain how these codes contributed to the identification of Themes 1 and 2.

4.4.1.1 Theme 1. As shown in Table 4.5, one of the most common codes was *communicate/converse*. This code was used twenty-one (21) times. This code was used anytime a participant said the word “converse,” “conversation,” “communicate,” “communication,” or “talk.” Another common code was *connect with people*. This code was used nineteen (19) times. Participants used the phrases *communicate*, *converse*, and *connect with people* interchangeably. Some participants specified a person or group they desired to connect with. Others simply said they wanted to *connect with people* or *engage with people*. After coding these questions, I created memos to give insight into the overall message of the interview.

The following is an excerpt of a memo I wrote as commentary after interviewing James (AL Mandarin) and completing two rounds of analysis:

He mentions being able to ‘converse’ often and the ability to communicate his needs to people whose L1 is Chinese. He talks about ‘bridging the gap’ between him and L1 Chinese speakers, giving a nod to the relational purpose of learning an additional language. He uses the simile of speaking ‘like a preschooler’ or ‘like

a toddler' to explain his level of proficiency at times but he also admits to being able to understand and communicate at his desired level most of the time anyways.

This memo demonstrates the overall summary and notes written after interviewing and coding this interview. It demonstrates the theme of desiring to connect with people and to communicate with others in the AL.

The following section will demonstrate the development of theme 2. Then, the corpus analysis using SketchEngine will be presented to confirm the qualitative data analysis. Finally, themes 1 and 2 will be identified.

4.4.1.2 Theme 2. Theme 2 was identified in the data analysis of the same three aforementioned interview questions. As shown in Tables 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 above, one of the most common codes was *culture*. Table 4.5 shows that the code *culture* was used nineteen (19) times. This code was used anytime a participant said the word “culture,” “human culture and thought,” “literature,” “poetry,” “opera,” “art,” “philosophy,” “TV shows,” and the metaphor used by two different participants, “broaden/expand horizons.” To gather additional context of the idea of learning an ALA for culture, I consulted the memos written after each interview.

A few examples of the context of the code *culture* are as follows:

- “So I want to be able to really immersing to the culture.” (sic)
- “The best way to be the most impactful and accepted within the culture is going to be through the language.”
- “I think it would just make my marriage healthier if I knew about [my spouse’s] language and culture.”

Each of these three examples were coded as *culture*. Although culture is a complex, broad notion, participants specifically mentioned wanting to learn both the culture in general and the culture in particular.

An excerpt of a memo that demonstrates the context of the notion of learning an AL for the purpose of connecting to the culture of an AL is below. This memo was written after interviewing Linda (AL French/Japanese):

“When she was about 25, she moved to Japan to teach English for the sole purpose of adventure and learning a new culture for one year. She knew at the time that it would be only one year, so they spent a little time in semi-formal Japanese language training but eventually quit the classes so they could just be a part of the culture and learn as they go. Although she lived with a native English speaker (her husband), they spent a lot of time out in the culture and teaching in a school where Japanese was spoken.”

This memo goes insight into the initial impression given after the interview and coding of Linda’s initial motivations and desires to learn AL Japanese. The purpose of these memos was to give the context of participants’ motivations, DOLs, and what they hoped to gain from ALA.

These previous sections describe the qualitative data analysis of three interview questions related to RQ1. The most frequent codes identified in each of the interview questions were presented along with memos related to the codes. The following section will present the corpus analysis of the interview questions related to the RQ.

4.4.1.3 Word Frequency in Interview Questions Related to RQ1. To confirm the qualitative data analysis of the interview questions related to RQ1, I used SketchEngine to identify the most commonly used words in the interview question about desired outcome levels. The results are as follows in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Frequency list of Desired Outcome Levels

WORDLIST

word (621 items | 3,007 total frequency)

Word	Frequency ? ↓	Word	Frequency ? ↓
1 know	43 ...	11 language	11 ...
2 really	24 ...	12 understand	10 ...
3 wanted	22 ...	13 well	10 ...
4 think	17 ...	14 goal	10 ...
5 want	14 ...	15 kind	10 ...
6 then	13 ...	16 french	9 ...
7 fluent	13 ...	17 said	9 ...
8 speak	12 ...	18 people	9 ...
9 started	11 ...	19 by	8 ...
10 english	11 ...	20 yes	8 ...

As the SketchEngine word frequency results show, participants used a range of words, but when considering this list of most frequent words with words from the interview question and RQs for the participant, the words “know”, “wanted”, “fluent”, “speak,” language”, “understand” “goal” and “people” stand out as some of the most common words in response to the interview question. This confirms that participants desire (“wanted”) to connect (“know”, “speak”, “understand”) with people (“people”) who speak their AL and, as seen through the memos, the culture of the AL is a primary way in which participants understand their DOLs.

As a result of the number of times the code *communicate/converse, connect with people, and culture* were used along with the context described in the memos and confirmation from the corpus analysis, the following two themes seemed to represent the data:

- Adults learn language to connect with people, not to be like native speakers.
- Adults learn language to connect with cultures, not to be like native speakers.

This section described in detail the data analysis process used to identify themes 1 and 2. It included the qualitative data analysis and the most common codes used in the interview questions related to RQ1. It also included the memos written in reflection of the coding process. Finally, it demonstrated the corpus analysis that added validity and rigor to the qualitative data analysis. These first two themes will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 (p. 118).

4.4.2 Development of Theme 3

The previous set of interview questions explored adult language learners DOLs, their motivations, and what they had hoped to gain from ALA. After asking participants to identify these things, I asked another set of questions which asked them to self-determine if they had reached their DOLs, to self-describe their current proficiency, and to identify any additional further DOLs.

The purpose of these questions is detailed in Section 3.5.2 (p. 89) and Section 6.3 (p. 160). They are related to RQ2, which is concerned with AL proficiency and ability to reach DOLs. The interview question and the analysis of the data elicited from the interview questions are as follows:

- How well would you say you speak your additional language now?
- Do you believe you have reached your original goal for learning your additional language? If not, do you believe you can reach your original goal for learning your additional language?
- Do you have further goals for learning your additional language? Do you have anything you'd like to accomplish that you will need to improve [your additional language]?

All the codes used in the data analysis of these interviews are displayed below in Table 4.7, 4.8, 4.9.

Table 4.7 Self-Determined Measure of Proficiency

Codes	Frequency of Use
Specific Test Score	1
Numbered Scale	5
<i>Native speaker comparison</i>	4
Can-Do Statements, including can speak <i>fluently</i>	16

The one participant who identified his AL Spanish proficiency based on a test score had taken the ACTFL OPI previously, so his response was coded as *specific test score*. I created this code because two other participants had mentioned taking a proficiency test in the past and stated their proficiency rating as given by that test, but when asked how well they spoke their AL now, they did not include their proficiency score, so I did not code it as such.

Here are a few interview excerpts that demonstrate the utterances that were coded *numbered scale*:

- “I think from 0 to 10, I would say, I'm maybe 6”
- “I think enough for people to understand. but they have to kind of use to my accent so I would say I don't know maybe 6.”
- “I would say on a scale from 0 to 10. I probably speak 8 in English. in Italian I would say the same. In French, I would say a 7, probably in Chinese, 4 or 5.”

Each individual indicated a personal scale of proficiency, but all were coded *numbered scale* to better quantify their responses.

There were other codes emerging from the data set for this particular question. For example, below are a few lines that were coded *native speaker comparison*:

- “I can sound more like a native speaker almost in [AL] Spanish. So, both I would say very, very high level of proficiency nowhere near native like, but very, very high.”

- “I would say I speak [AL] German fluently, but not like a native speaker”
- “I had a French speaker who asked me one time, ‘So where are you from?,’ and I said, ‘Louisiana,’ and he said, ‘No, I meant were not where you living now. Where you from in France?’”

Two of these individuals explained how their AL proficiency is unlike a *native speaker*, but another participant explained that they have been mistaken for a *native speaker*. The context of these responses is important as they do compare themselves to the *native speaker*. However, the majority of participants measured their own proficiency as unrelated to the *native speaker* whatsoever, which lends credibility to the claim that not all additional language learners are seeking *native-like* proficiency.

In fact, rather than measure their AL proficiency as nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*, the majority of participants described their proficiency as what they can do in their AL. Below are a few interview excerpts that were coded as *can-do*:

- “I can still converse a lot. . . I've translated a lot for [AL speakers] and they're always a boost in my confidence whenever I translate.”
- “I got sworn in for my [US] citizenship [which included an interview in AL English]. I managed to write a dissertation in [AL English]”
- “I can carry on the conversation, writing my writing isn't perfect, but it's doable I mean I got my masters [in AL Spanish] with an A minus.”

The above responses represent the wide variety of participant responses to their own AL proficiency with regards to what they can do with their AL. Additional discussion on what participants *can do* in their AL is available in Chapter 6 (p. 158).

The next section details the analysis of the data elicited from the following Interview question:

- Do you believe you have reached your original goal for learning your additional language? If not, do you believe you can reach your original goal for learning your additional language?

Some words/phrases commonly-used in response to this interview question were “yes,” “yeah,” definitely,” and “I think so.” For each of these instances, I coded YES. Other common responses included words/phrases such as “even more,” and “more than I ever thought I would,” and “beyond what I expect,” which were coded EXCEED. Other common words were “not yet” and “not quite,” which I coded OTHER. Additional common responses were “yes and no” and “there is no fixed level.” In these instances, I coded the response as ONGOING. One participant simply responded, “never,” which I coded NEVER. The frequency of the codes used in analyzing this interview question are shown in **Table 4.8**.

Table 4.8 Reached DOLs

Code	Frequency of Code
Yes	14
Exceed	6
No	7
Other	5
Ongoing	3
Never	1

As discussed in Section 3.5.2 (p. 89), the purpose of asking participants if they had reached their DOL was to address RQ2. The participants’ responses overwhelming suggest that they can reach or exceed their DOLs. These findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (p. 158).

The next section details the analysis of the data elicited from the following interview question:

- Do you have further goals for learning your additional language? Do you have anything you’d like to accomplish that you will need to improve [your additional language]?

A few responses for this interview question were “I feel pretty comfortable” and “No, nothing hardset” and “I have goals but not plans.” All of these were coded *no*. All of the codes used in the response to this interview question are shown in Table 4.9 and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Table 4.9 Further Goals

Codes	References
No	10
General Improvement	7
Writing	6
Professional Goals	4
Speaking	3
Comprehension	2
Academic Ease	1
To get Comfortable	1

As shown by the most common codes in Tables 4.7, 4.8, and 4.9, participants most frequently measure their AL proficiency by what they *can do* (16), by having *reached* (14) or *exceeded* (6) their DOLs, and many do not have *further ALA goals* (10).

4.4.2.1 Frequency in Interview Questions Related to RQ2. To confirm the qualitative data analysis of the interview questions related to RQ2, I used SketchEngine to identify the most commonly used words in the interview question about reaching DOLs. The results are as follows in Table 4.11.

Table 4.10 Frequency list of Reaching DOLs

WORDLIST




word (492 items | 2,257 total frequency)

Word	Frequency ? ↓	Word	Frequency ? ↓	Word	Frequency ? ↓
1 think	42 ...	11 been	7 ...	21 feel	5 ...
2 know	27 ...	12 oh	6 ...	22 original	5 ...
3 goal	17 ...	13 people	6 ...	23 actually	5 ...
4 no	13 ...	14 reach	6 ...	24 say	5 ...
5 english	10 ...	15 reached	6 ...	25 probably	5 ...
6 better	9 ...	16 still	6 ...	26 some	5 ...
7 able	9 ...	17 then	6 ...	27 something	5 ...
8 really	8 ...	18 thought	6 ...	28 right	5 ...
9 goals	8 ...	19 understand	6 ...	29 sure	5 ...
10 yes	8 ...	20 language	5 ...	30 time	5 ...

As the SketchEngine word frequency results show, participants used some commonly-used words such as “think” and “know.” Importantly, however, the word frequency list shows the word *no* used thirteen (13) times while the word *yes* was only used eight (8) times.

The concordance of the uses of the word “no” is shown below:

Table 4.11 Concordance of the word *no*

<i>Responses to interview question about Reaching DOLs</i>
<i>Coded ONGOING</i>
“Yes and no . . . My goal was something that will ever be fully reached in my lifetime, because . . .the goal is to continue to improve.”
“Yes and no . I think I would love to always be better but that's just who I am as an individual or striving and challenging myself to be better.”
“I think, for language there is no fixed level, so it's always there's always better and better so there's no room for me . . . even in my native Arabic I'm learning still a lot of things.”
<i>Coded YES.</i>
“I got a lot of opportunity to travel actually, opportunity to see the world, advance in the career. I am not sure that it's no longer my goal but it is no longer my goal”
“I want to have that accent, you know right now. No , I think it's sufficient to be able to work to do work.”
<i>Coded NO</i>
“ No , not yet”
“ No , no , I have not reached the level in Spanish that I would like to be but anyway that's good because it means I've got you know places to go.”
“ No , with Mandarin I am still, my goal is actually spending some considerable time in China to be able to reach fluency.”
“ No , because I can't really speak or understand any of them”
“ No , yeah, I think that, um, yeah I think my goal was unattainable”

As the concordance shows, the word *no* was used thirteen (13) times by nine (9) participants and how their responses were coded. Not every instance of the word *no* in the responses were saying that they had not reached their DOLs. Additionally, although the word *yes* was only used eight (8) times, participants used other affirmative words such as “I think so” and “yeah” to respond to the interview question. When considering this list of most frequent words with words from the interview question and RQ2, the words “know,” “goal,” “better,” “able,” and “really” stand out as some of the most common words in response to the interview question. This confirms the qualitative data analysis codes which suggest that most participants can successfully reach or exceed their DOLs.

4.4.2.3 Theme 3. As a result of the frequency of the code *reached* and *exceeded* along with the context of how participants measure their AL proficiency and further goals, the third theme began to emerge. Along with the confirmation from the corpus analysis and the context described in the memos and the concordance, the third theme emerged:

- Adults can successfully reach and exceed language goals and do not always fail.

This section described in detail the data analysis process used to identify theme 3. It included the qualitative data analysis and the most common codes used in the interview questions related to RQ2. It also included the memos written in reflection of the coding process. Finally, it demonstrated the corpus analysis, both word frequency and concordance, that added validity and rigor to the qualitative data analysis. The third theme will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6 (p. 158).

4.4.3 Development of Theme 4

The previous sections described the process used to analyse the data concerning participants' motivations, DOLs, what they had hoped to gain from ALA. It also described the process of analyzing the data concerning individual measures of AL proficiency, if participants had reached their DOLs, and if they have further AL goals. This section will detail the process of analysing the data regarding RQ3 specifically with regards to participants' self-defined measures of AL success and if reaching their DOLs could be considered successful. The interview questions and the data elicited from the interview questions are as follows:

- How do you measure your success or lack of success in speaking your additional language?
- If the measure of [your additional language]-speaking success were "to reach the goal that you set when you originally began learning," would you then consider yourself a success?

The following codes, shown in Table 4.12, were used in analyzing the interview question regarding personal measure of success or lack of success, which is related to RQ3. The most commonly-used code is *communicate/converse*, which correlates also to the first theme (See Section 4.4.1, p. 96).

Table 4.12 Codes used in Measure of Success Interview Question

Code	References
Communicate / converse	16
Mistaken for a <i>native speaker</i>	2
Job or career	2
Dreamed in AL	1
Evangelism	1
Understood phone call	1
Grades	1
“ <i>Verdammt gut</i> ”	1

A few examples of the code *communicate* or *converse* in the context of this interview question are as follows:

- “Just being able to communicate”
- “If people who I talked to understand me and understand what I'm trying to say”
- “When I was able to be conversational with a native speaker that did not necessarily. . . know my language.”

After coding the interviews, I created memos to give insight into the participants. The following is a memo about how one participant measured his own success:

Thom considered himself to be successful based on practical, daily self-assessment such as being able to read the menus at the good restaurants where the menus were fully in Japanese, talk to the ramen ladies, to get around and make connections on the train. Additionally, he took a phone call from someone in Japanese and understood exactly what they meant, which was a huge anecdotal success.

This memo demonstrates how participants have very individual measures of ALA success and addresses the RQ3, which concerns how adult language learners can be successful in ALA.

To confirm the qualitative data analysis of the interview questions related to RQ3, I used SketchEngine to identify the most commonly used words in the interview question about measures of success. The results are as follows in **Table 4.13**.

Table 4.13 Frequency of Words in Measure of Success Interview Question



word (628 items | 2,903 total frequency)

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
1 know	40	11 really	11	21 successful	7	31 any	5	41 better	5
2 think	33	12 being	10	22 guess	6	32 ability	5	42 other	4
3 success	21	13 able	10	23 measure	6	33 felt	5	43 actually	4
4 english	17	14 understand	10	24 much	6	34 back	5	44 way	4
5 kind	13	15 communicate	9	25 speaking	6	35 conversation	5	45 every	4
6 probably	12	16 need	9	26 maybe	6	36 program	5	46 talk	4
7 spanish	12	17 say	9	27 right	6	37 little	5	47 might	4
8 people	12	18 speak	9	28 level	6	38 make	5	48 learned	4
9 language	12	19 want	8	29 then	6	39 them	5	49 our	4
10 feel	11	20 going	8	30 bit	6	40 learn	5	50 german	4

As the SketchEngine word frequency results show, participants used a range of words, but when considering this list of most frequent words with words from the interview question and RQs, the words “fluent,” “success,” “people,” “feel,” “understand,” “communicate” and “speak” stand out as some of the most common words in response to the interview question. This confirms that participants measure their success in many ways, primarily by ability to communicate.

The final interview question, as shown in Table 4.14, was posed as a “yes or no” question. For this reason, the responses were coded as YES, NO, and OTHER. All the codes used in the data analysis of this interview question is displayed below in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Codes used in DOLs as Success Interview Question

If the measure of AL speaking success were “to reach the goal that you set when you originally began learning,” would you consider yourself a success?	
Yes	25
No	1
Other	1

As Table 4.14 clearly shows, the vast majority of participants responded “yes” to the interview question. This interview question and the responses address RQ3 and contribute to the emergence of the fourth theme.

4.4.3.4 Word Frequency in Interview Question Regarding DOLs as Success. Although the interview question was posed as a “yes or no” question, participants added additional context in their responses. To identify the context and to confirm the qualitative data analysis of the interview questions related to RQ3, I used SketchEngine to identify the most commonly used words in the interview question about desired outcome levels. The results are as follows in **Table 4.15**.

Table 4.15 Frequency List of DOLs as Success



word (388 items | 1,579 total frequency)

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
1 think	26	11 still	5	21 whole	4	31 being	4	41 going	3
2 know	21	12 read	5	22 kind	4	32 write	4	42 need	3
3 yes	18	13 language	5	23 able	4	33 feel	3	43 original	3
4 success	14	14 also	5	24 guess	4	34 successful	3	44 learn	3
5 never	7	15 definitely	5	25 consider	4	35 again	3	45 fine	3
6 goal	7	16 then	5	26 always	4	36 interpreting	3	46 probably	3
7 say	7	17 through	5	27 myself	4	37 level	3	47 process	3
8 right	6	18 really	4	28 having	4	38 another	3	48 time	3
9 said	5	19 good	4	29 well	4	39 russian	3	49 qualities	2
10 your	5	20 english	4	30 where	4	40 satisfied	3	50 goals	2

As the SketchEngine word frequency results show, participants used a range of words, but when considering this list of most frequent words with words from the interview question and RQs the word "yes" and "success" stand out as some of the most common words in response to the interview question. This confirms that participants affirm their ability to succeed when the measure of success is to reach their DOLs.

4.4.3.5 Theme 4. The qualitative data analysis revealed the primary method of measuring success was ability to *converse/communicate*. The qualitative data analysis also revealed the number of participants who affirmed their belief in their success when measured by DOLs.

Due to the varied nature of participants' individualized measures of ALA success, it was necessary to capture this diversity in a theme. Both the qualitative data analysis and the corpus analysis revealed that adults measured their success differently, but that being like a *native speaker* was never one of those success measures.

The fourth and final theme that emerged is as follows:

- Adults have varied measures of AL success, which are not always measured by nearness to native-like proficiency.

This section described in detail the data analysis process used to identify theme 4. It included the qualitative data analysis and the most common codes used in the interview questions related to RQ3. It also included the memos written in reflection of the coding process. Finally, it demonstrated the corpus analysis that added validity and rigor to the qualitative data analysis. This fourth theme will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7 (p. 188).

4.5 Unused Themes

The themes presented above were derived from a vast amount of interview data which was put through qualitative data analysis and corpus analysis. Although four themes emerged, the amount of data produced more than four potential themes. For example, as shown in Table 4.1 (p. 94), the code *effective methods* was used sixty-seven (67) times in the full transcripts. This code represented multiple methods that participants used to learn their AL. However, the responses did not address the research questions and, therefore, the theme was not analysed further. Other potential themes included the code *enjoyment*, which as shown in Table 4.5 (p. 100), was used nineteen (19) times in the full transcripts. However, the notion of enjoyment, while important in literature surrounding motivation, does not directly relate to the RQs in this thesis. "Foreign language enjoyment" is, however, discussed briefly in Chapter 5 (p. 118) in relation to motivation for learning an AL. The four themes presented in this chapter and in the following discussion chapters are not only derived from the data but also most closely address the RQs set out as the primary focus of this thesis.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the steps taken to analyse the participants' interview data. It presented the methods used to triangulate the data to increase rigor and identified the themes. It demonstrated how the themes that emerged addressed the RQs. The process of analysing the data included multiple steps including quantitative data analysis and corpus analysis. The quantitative data analysis was comprised of coding the transcripts by interview, coding the transcripts by individual question, and creating memos. The common codes were identified in response to each of the interview questions and connected to the RQs. The corpus analysis provided word frequency data and concordance data that was used to confirm the codes from the qualitative data analysis.

From these steps, the themes were identified. theme which was then confirmed using frequencies from a SketchEngine application.

The four main themes which emerged from the data are:

- Adults learn language to connect with people, not to be like *native speakers*.
- Adults learn language to connect with cultures, not to be like *native speakers*.
- Adults can succeed at reaching or exceeding their additional language goals.
- Adults do not always fail at ALA; instead, they have varied measures of AL success, which are not always measured by nearness to *native-like* proficiency.

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, these themes will be discussed in turn with data presented from the interviews. I will combine some of the data in a quantitative way. I will also add some of the individual life histories to enable a full understanding of the key issues in this thesis.

CHAPTER 5:

“I don't want to sound like an idiot”:

Native-like proficiency and desired outcome levels

“I don't want to sound like an idiot when I'm working at the university so I would like to get my academic ease a little bit higher.” - Arthur, AL Spanish / Brazilian Portuguese

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the first two themes that emerged upon analyzing the individual life histories of participants who learned an additional language after the age of 12. The themes discussed here are as follows:

- Adults learn language to connect with people, not to speak like a *native speaker*.
- Adults learn language to connect with cultures, not to speak like a *native speaker*.

As noted in the previous chapter, these are the first two of four themes that emerged from multiple rounds of analysis (See Chapter 4, p. 92). The themes discussed in this chapter address Research Question 1, which asks the following question:

- At additional language onset, is the adult learner's desired outcome level (DOL) comparable to native-like proficiency? If it is not, what is the adult learner's DOL?

This chapter describes the motivations, attitudes, identities, and DOLs of the participants. It discusses the notion that many adult AL learners do not seek to speak like a *native speaker*. It discusses the data which represents the diversity within adult ALA.

This chapter briefly reviews research relevant to adult language learners' ALA motivations, attitudes, and desired outcome levels (DOLs). It discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 by delving deeper into the interview data, analysis, and the multiple DOLs that adults identified as their initial AL goals. It also gives a few excerpts of participants' individual life histories. The chapter concludes with consideration of the findings and the contribution they can make to the scholarly ALA field.

Chapter 6 will discuss the third theme that emerged and will respond to Research Question 2. Chapter 7 will discuss the fourth theme that emerged and will respond to

Research Question 3. Together, these themes challenge the *native-like speaker myth* and the false dichotomy of failure and success in ALA through the use of the *native speaker* as the standard measure of failure or success.

5.2 Background

The research question addressed in this chapter sought to challenge the assumption that *native-like* proficiency is the ultimate attainment goal of every adult language learner. The literature surrounding this assumption is fully detailed in Section 2.2.2 (p. 27). In brief, many years have been spent researching the reasons adult language learners do not speak like a *native speaker*. These reasons include age of acquisition (Johnson and Newport, 1989; Bley-Vroman, 1990; Saito, 2015; Bylund, *et al*, 2021; Jia, 2022), aptitude (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam, 2008; DeKeyser, 2000), or type of input (Bley-Vroman, 1990; DeKeyser, 2000). While some studies have questioned if “the native speaker a reasonable goal for adult L2 learners” (Han 2004), no studies to my knowledge have directly asked adult language learners if their DOL is to speak like a *native speaker*. This assumption of *native-like proficiency* as the uniform ultimate attainment goal for all adults still remains in current literature (Hartshorne, 2018; Birdsong, 2018; Flege, 2018).

The use of qualitative methods for this present study is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (p. 64). Chapter 3 addresses one potential reason that ALA literature makes these four assumptions. The use of quantitative methods, often employing large data sets, paints adult ALA with a broad brush rather than giving voice to the individual stories of adult language learners. One study (Dewaele *et al.*, 2023, p. 42) on the correlation between “foreign language enjoyment” and intrinsic motivation for ALA states that “the main limitation of the present study is [the lack of] the voices of participants.” This current thesis seeks to give voice to each of the twenty-six (26) adult language learners. This current chapter asks them to share their motivations for learning and immersion, their desired outcome levels (DOLs), and their attitudes toward their AL and its speakers. It discusses in detail the first two themes that emerged from the data and analysis (Chapter 4, p. 92). I will then undertake to show how the data fits into and extends current ALA literature and implications for future research.

5.3 The assumption of a homogenous native speaker

As discussed in Section 2.2.1 (p. 18) and Section 4.2 (p. 92), the assumption of the existence of a homogenous native speaker has been prevalent in ALA literature despite being frequently debated and debunked by ALA scholars. This assumption of a singular definition is still present in current literature. For example, Suzuki and Kormos (2020, p. 144) define the *native speaker* as “nativeness is typically operationalized as ‘accent’ or ‘accentedness’ and is measured based on listeners’ judgments on how the pronunciation of L2 speech deviates from that of native language norms.” Another study (Dollman *et al*, 2020, p. 804) finds that some adult language learners can have “exceptional outcomes” in ALA and state that there is a “need to study the preconditions that are necessary to achieve native-like outcomes among late learners.” Nonetheless, multiple other studies have questioned, criticized, and problematized the concept of the *native speaker* (Rampton, 1990; Davies, 2003; Kamhi-Stein, 2016; Dewaele, 2017; Cheng *et al*. 2021). Therefore, this thesis will not attempt to replicate these challenges in depth.

However, it is essential to address this assumption in order to challenge the three subsequent assumptions in this thesis. The findings in this thesis concur with previous challenges to the existence of a *native speaker*.

Participants were asked to identify their first language or languages. Their responses indicate that most have only one first language. In fact, twenty-four (24) participants answered they only have one first language. However, two (2) participants indicated they had multiple first languages. Their responses are detailed below.

Table 5.1 First Language(s)

Mandarin	1
Tunisian Arabic	1
Syrian Arabic	1
Castilian Spanish	1
Brasilian Portuguese	1
Hindi	2
Polish	2
English	15

Table 5.1 represents the multiple first languages as reported by participants. However, two (2) participants responded that they have more than one first language, which concurs with the claim that a singular definition of a *native speaker* does not exist. For example, Anita responded that her L1 was Thai, but then she added further clarification:

When I was younger, growing up in my house, I also [spoke] another dialect of Chinese is called Hainanese. That was spoken at home with my grandparents and my parents. But as I was growing up, you know I lost that.

Anita's experience of learning a language first at home and then losing it when she began school in another language is not unique. Her experience concurs with current literature in L1 attrition and in ALA. Furthermore, it serves as a challenge to the assumption of one single definition of a *native speaker*. By every definition, Anita would be considered a *native speaker* of Hainanese. She learned it first. She learned it in an environment surrounded by others who used it as their primary language. However, she no longer can speak the language and, thus should not be used as a standard measurement of ALA success.

The second participant who had a less defined first language is Amy, who grew up on the border between France and Switzerland. In the excerpt below, Amy describes her own L1 history:

We lived in France on the French side. So, everything school- wise and official language was French there. But we live so close to the border [of Switzerland] that we had French and German television, Swiss television, radio, newspapers.

and my dad was more comfortable with German because he was Swiss during World War II. . . So, when we watch TV at home it was usually German TV and German radio and German newspapers. So, that was kind of immersion in both.

Although Amy still uses both of her first languages, her experience in learning two languages from birth contributes to the diversity of what it means to be a *native speaker*. Both Anita and Amy's life histories surrounding their first languages converge with previous ALA research on the problematic nature of the *native speaker*.

As stated above, previous ALA literature has debunked the myth of the homogenous *native speaker*. This thesis affirms previous findings that the idea of one native speaker is much more subjective than was previously believed.

In the next section, I will describe that despite being disproven, the *native speaker* is often assumed to be the ultimate attainment goal of all adult language learners. As detailed in Section 4.4.1 (p. 96), adult language learners do not all seek to speak like a *native speaker*. In the following sections, this theme will be discussed in greater detail.

5.4 Interview Questions to Address RQ1

The theme discussed in this chapter emerged after analysis of the interview questions related to Research Question 1. A detailed explanation of the related data and the subsequent analysis can be found in Section 4.4.1 (p. 96). The following section will provide a discussion of the findings and the themes that emerged.

Participants were asked the following interview questions in order to address Research Question 1:

- Describe your motivation to move to/ spend time in [your immersion experience].
- Was the move voluntary v. involuntary?
- Why did you start learning your additional language?
- What did you believe you would gain by learning your additional language?
- What do you believe you have gained by learning your additional language?
- When you began learning your additional language, what were your proficiency goals (i.e. what did you want to do with the language)?

- How do you believe your attitude toward the language and its speakers affects your learning? Has your attitude changed since learning your additional language?
- Do you feel any loss of cultural identity when you speak your additional language? Or gain of a new identity? Or both?

The purpose for asking these questions is detailed in Section 3.5 (p. 85). In order to challenge the assumption that adult language learners share the ultimate attainment goal of speaking like a *native speaker*, participants were asked the above questions to determine if their DOLs were to speak their AL like a *native speaker*. The interview questions allowed participants to define their own desired outcome levels (DOLs). Participants' motivations for learning and immersion and attitudes toward AL speakers and their culture contributed to a diversity of the DOLs. In Chapter 4, we arrived at two themes from the investigation of the interview data. The following sections will describe in greater detail participants' responses to these interview questions and how they correlate to the ultimate attainment goals of adult language learners.

5.5 Diverse Motivations

In response to the interview question regarding motivations to learn an AL, participants indicated multiple motivations to learn an AL. The data analysis of their responses can be found in Table 4.3 (p. 98) which demonstrates the codes used to analyse the data elicited from this interview question. Participants presented a wide range of motivations both for beginning to learn an additional language and for spending time in or living in an immersion experience. In summary, the primary reason participants began learning an AL was due to *enjoyment* followed by *requirement to learn*, *connect to people*, and *connect to culture*. It is important to note that no participants said their motivation to learn an AL was to speak like a *native speaker*.

Additionally, to add depth to the discussion of participants' motivations to learn an AL, I asked participants what they believed they would gain by learning an AL. The data analysis of their responses can be found in Table 4.4 (p. 98). In summary, participants responses trend toward gaining relationships, cultural knowledge, and education.

According to the corpus data (Table 4.6, p. 103), when responding to questions about their motivations for learning an AL, motivations for immersion, potential gains of learning an AL, no participants used the words *native* or *native speaker*.

To give further insight into what participants have actually gained from learning an AL, as opposed to what they hoped to gain, their responses revealed that they had gained *spouses, family, friends, careers, and connection to culture*. None reported having gained *native* or *native-like proficiency*.

The qualitative data analysis of these interview questions did not reveal any motivations for participants to speak like a *native speaker*. However, although the word frequency chart produced in Sketch Engine did not reveal the word *native* as one of the most common words, the corpus analysis of the responses to these interview questions showed the words *native* or *native speaker* were actually referenced 3 times. The concordance lines of their mentions of *native* or *native speaker* are below.

One participant used it in the following context:

I had a nun and a male teacher, and they both were just great, and they both were **native** speakers and I just had to learn more.

As shown in this concordance, the participant used the phrase *native speaker* to refer to their teachers, not to their own AL goals.

When asked their reasons for learning an AL and for immersing themselves in the language, participants used the phrase *native* or *native speaker* in the following two contexts:

I didn't really have a clear plan, but I just wanted to be very, very far away from my **native** place.

. . . a level where I could read advanced literature without resorting to dictionaries or **native** speakers

As shown above, participants used *native* to describe a place, not a speaker. The other instance it was used was again in describing other speakers, not themselves. In fact, this

participant was describing a desired outcome level of AL proficiency that allowed them to “read advanced literature,” not to speak like a *native speaker*.

This lack of references to a *native speaker* is indicative that participants were not motivated by speaking like a *native speaker* nor did they anticipate gaining *native like* proficiency. Their motivations for ALA were much more related to what they could do and gain from the AL than to speaking like a *native speaker*.

These diverse motivations for learning an AL represent the diversity of learners. Over 75 years ago, Gatenby (1948) stated: “If you ask students why they want to learn a foreign language, you will get many different replies, among them being “I want to pass an examination in English”; “I want to get an increase in salary”; “I want to read English books”; and even “I want to be a teacher of English” (p. 134). Throughout the next decades multiple others studied the various motivations of adult language learners (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Gardner *et al*, 1975; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Dörnyei, 2003; Macintyre, 2007; Birdsong, 2014; Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017). Many studies have addressed individual motivations (Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Cocca & Cocca, 2019; Al-Hoorie & Hiver, 2020), individual attitudes (Gardner, 1973; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Ogbu and Simons, 1998), individual goals (Gatenby, 1948; Burt, 2022a; Burt, 2022b).

Some studies have found that motivation contributes more to ALA achievement than other variables (Gardner, 2000; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003, p. 205). However, the reasons a person begins learning a new language are diverse and in “flux” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 46) as shown in both this thesis and in past and current research. These individual differences of motivations are not present when a person learns their L1 as they do not choose to acquire their L1 (Lenneberg, 1967; Bley-Vroman, 1990, Rothman and Treffers-Daller, 2014). But, individual differences exist in L1 linguistic competence (Dąbrowska, 2012, 2015; Hulstijn, 2015, Farmer, *et al* 2012). As demonstrated by the participants in this thesis, adult AL learners do not have only one motivation to learn an AL, nor do they have only one desired learning outcome. To my knowledge, only a few studies (Dąbrowska, *et al* 2020), have considered the connection between these motivational variables and individual measures of success, which is the aim of this thesis.

The data elicited from these interview questions demonstrates that participants have a variety of motivations for learning an AL. However, while the claim that adult language learners have individualized motivations to learn is nothing new, this thesis argues that these individualized motivations lead also to individualized desired outcome levels (Section 5.7, p. 133) and individualized measures of ALA success (Section 7.4, p. 191).

In the section below, I will describe the participants' diverse motivations for ALA and how they correlate to the literature in the field of linguistics. In Section 5.6, I will discuss how participants' attitudes and identities contribute to their individual DOLs. In Section 5.7, I will discuss how these diverse motivations, attitudes, and identities lead to diverse desired outcome levels, in which not every participant desired *native speaker*.

5.5.1 Motivations other than Native Speaker

As demonstrated in Tables 4.2 (p. 97) and Tables 4.3 (p. 98) and discussed in Section 5.5 (p. 123), participants expressed various motivations to learn an AL, none of which were to speak like a *native speaker*.

These findings concur with a study conducted by Dąbrowska *et al* (2020). This study found that adult language learners can be “very successful” in some aspects of ALA even without speaking like a *native speaker*. Their study relates specifically to the aspects that relate to “functional” grammar, which are the grammatical structures that contribute most heavily to creating meaning. Their study also concludes that motivation contributes to ALA success:

There is considerable evidence that individual differences in L2 attainment are partly due to motivation, and in particular, integrative motivation (see e.g., Masgoret and Gardner, 2003). Children may be better at learning “decorative” grammar because they are more focused on fitting in, while adult learners are more goal-directed, i.e., more focused on getting the message across, and hence attend more to those aspects of language which contribute to meaning. It is interesting to note that other aspects of language where adult learners often fail to reach native-like levels, viz. collocational choices and pronunciation, are, like “decorative” grammar, more relevant for displaying affiliation than for getting the message across (in the sense that a slight accent or a somewhat unidiomatic word choice will usually not impede communication, but immediately marks the speaker as an outsider).” (Dąbrowska *et al.*, 2020, p. 12)

The important part to their findings is that adult motivation, specifically the type of motivation in which people attempt to integrate into the culture and its speakers, contribute to adult ALA success.

In the next section, I will describe participants' motivations to learn an AL and show that they are not comparable to speaking like a *native speaker* thereby expanding the theme identified previously in Section 4.4.1 (p. 96).

5.5.2 Integrative, Instrumental, and Experiential Motivations

As evidenced by the above discussion, motivations to learn an AL are quite diverse. These motivations can be divided into three types: integrative, instrumental, and experiential motivations. Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie (2017, p. 457) describe motivations as follows: “the learner’s internal desire to become an effective L2 user; social pressures coming from the learner’s environment to master the L2; and the actual experience of being engaged in the L2 learning process.” No matter the type of motivation, however, adults who have high motivation to learn and a good attitude toward the language are more likely to gain AL proficiency (Cocca and Cocca, 2019, p. 79). The participants’ motivations to learn an AL are discussed below within the context of the relevant linguistics literature.

5.5.2.1 Integrative or Internal Motivations. The reasons participants began ALA were often internally-motivated. As shown in the Table 4.3 (p. 98), participants described many integrative motivations for learning an AL including “challenge” and “travel.” One participant said he “always had a high interest in language.” Another said that he began learning an AL “because it was cool.” Another said she began ALA so she could “broaden [her] horizons.” Such motivations have been described as “internal” (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017), intrinsic (Dewaele *et al.*, 2023), and “integrative” (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Masgoret and Gardner (2003, p. 172) define “integrative motivation” as “an openness to identify, at least in part, with another language community” (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003, p. 172). Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017, p. 460) define the internal motivation for ALA as “the ideal multilingual self” in which participants begin learning an ALA to become a better version of themselves. Despite these varied definitions, the commonality is that the motivation is internal desire to learn.

Over six decades ago, Gardner and Lambert (1959) claimed that “achievement in a second language is dependent upon essentially the same type of motivation that is apparently necessary for the child to learn his first language.” They specify that people with

integrative, or internal, motivation are most likely to succeed. Those with “integrative motivation” are those whose “aim in language study is to learn more about the language group, or to meet more and different people (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, p. 2). Although many studies have now proven that child language acquisition and additional language acquisition are not the same (Bley-Vroman, 1990; Bley-Vroman, 2009), the theory that integrative motivation is a reliable predictor of ALA success has remained strong throughout the years of research (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie, 2017; Henry, 2017).

Research shows that becoming the “ideal multilingual self” is a strong motivator for ALA (Henry, 2017; Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017). For example, one participant said that he began learning an AL “because it was cool.” Another participant’s motivation is certainly representative of the “ideal multilingual self.” She says “I started learning German because the kids that took German in high school were the kids that I wanted to be hanging out with. They were way cooler than I was.” In fact, positive attitudes toward the AL, specifically “foreign language enjoyment” and emotions have been shown to correlate to intrinsic motivation to learn an AL (Gardner, 2000; MacIntyre and Vincze, 2017; Dewaele *et al.*, 2023; Dörnyei, 2020) and to willingness to communicate (Khajavy *et al.*, 2018).

The responses of the participants in this thesis align with the types of “integrative motivations” which indicate that interest in the AL and “its associated culture” can “positively influence second foreign language proficiency by stimulating a learner’s interest” (Zhang *et al.*, 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, Yu (2019, p. 528) found that not only does “integrative motivation” play a “significant role in determining the learning outcomes” of AL students, but it also leads to “high levels of interaction” and “enhances learning outcomes.” This internal or integrative motivation has been correlated with higher learning outcomes due to participants communication with speakers of their AL.

Participants in this thesis, while having multiple motivations for learning an AL, tended to “just eat it up,” or to just enjoy learning. This intrinsic motivation as reported by participants in this thesis does not relate to speaking like a *native speaker* or ALA success.

5.5.2.2 Instrumental or External Motivation. The majority of participants in this thesis report their initial motivation to begin ALA is that it was required by school.

This external motivation of school requirements seems to relate more to “the ought-to L2 self,” meaning that participants did not necessarily have strong internal motivation to learn an AL, but they did choose to learn the language once given the opportunity. As shown in Table 4.5 (p. 100), twenty-two (22) participants reported that they were required to learn an AL for school. They said it was “compulsory,” “required,” and that the AL they chose was “the only language offered in [their] tiny little high school.” This external motivation is described by Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017, p. 460) as “the ought-to L2 self.” The description of “the ought-to L2 self” overlaps with the “ideal multi-lingual self” in some ways, but the key difference is where “someone’s ideal and ought-to self-images . . . originally initiated.” In these cases, participants’ motivation began with the external motivation of a school requirement but evolved into an “ought-to-self” motivation.

Describing this type of external motivation as “instrumental motivation,” Zhang *et al.*, (2020, p. 3) says that this external motivation can “positively influence second foreign language proficiency by strengthening a learner’s desire to gain recognition, promote their career development, and satisfy particular needs such as going abroad after graduation.” Somewhat similarly, Masgoret and Gardner’s (2003, p. 175) definition of “instrumental motivations” suggests that learning an AL is for a specific purpose, not necessarily because the adult language learner has “any interest in getting closer socially to the language community.” For those who learned an AL simply to get a good grade or to get a job and did not evolve into an integrative motivation, they did not necessarily reach as high as high AL achievement (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003, p. 175).

Although Zhang *et al.* (2020) are focused primarily on “second foreign language” acquisition, the learning of a third language, their findings still apply to this thesis. Multiple participants in this thesis describe their motivation to learn an AL as initially motivated by school requirements, future jobs, travel, and/or living abroad. However, the key factor in current research and in this thesis is that both intrinsic/integrative and extrinsic/instrumental motivations positively contribute to ALA success (Yu, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

An additional external motivator that two participants mentioned was “to get out.” They were required to begin learning an AL in school, but they continued learning so they could disconnect from their place of birth. Sometimes people learn an AL so they can disconnect with painful elements of their childhood or their country. One famous example of using

language to disassociate with one's childhood, Jerzy Kosinski, a Polish immigrant to the US who won the National Book Award for writing, stated the following motivation for learning an AL: "English helped me sever myself from my childhood, from my adolescence. In English ' I don't make involuntary associations with my childhood" (Teicholz, 1993, p. 27). Although the participants did not mention childhood trauma, they did have the motivation of getting out of their home city or country, which adds additional layers of complexity to the motivations for learning an AL.

5.5.2.3 Experiential Motivation. A number of participants in this thesis reported having experiential motivation for ALA, which Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) describe as "related to the immediate learning environment" including teacher and peer influence. Earlier research (Zarrinabadi, 2014) concurs with these participants' descriptions, which suggests that adult language learners are much more "willing to communicate" when they have supportive and accommodating teachers in the ALA classroom. The experiential motivation overlaps with the external motivations in that the motivation to learn is not strictly personal, internal reasons. However, experiential motivation could be described as motivation as by the experiences afforded those who learn an AL such as ability to travel, ability to communicate, to work in an environment where the AL is required.

Participants describe multiple experiential motivations for learning their AL including desire to travel abroad and earn higher education. One participant, Joseph, said, "There was a teacher who was just very involved and very encouraging." Another, Angela, said "the [German] teacher was a really good teacher and I learned a lot from her." Still another, James, reported he began learning AL Mandarin because he was going to take "a gap year and go overseas and study, and then language is a benefit." Each of these participants were motivated by a teacher or the experience of learning their ALA. They did not indicate that they were motivated to speak like a *native speaker*.

In this section, I described the multiple different types of motivations of the adult AL learners who participated in this study. I provided discussion regarding how these motivations challenge the assumption that all adult language learners share the ultimate attainment goal of speaking like a *native speaker*.

In next section, I will describe how the attitudes and identities contribute to the diversity of adult language learners. Then, I will demonstrate how the diversity of motivations,

attitudes, and identities contribute to multiple desired outcome levels that are not always to speak like a *native speaker*.

5.6 Attitudes and Identities

5.6.1 Attitudes.

Research has shown a correlation between motivations for immigration (Ogbu and Simons, 1998), motivations to learn, attitude toward the language and its speakers (Good *et al.*, 2010) and ALA outcomes (Gardner and Lambert, 1959). Gardner and Lambert (1959, p. 2) claimed that adult language learners “attitudes towards [speakers of their AL] will at least partly determine [their] success in learning the new language.” As described in Section 1.2.2 (p. 2) and Section 3.4.2 (p. 73), people who are involuntary minorities or temporary migrants in a place where AL is the primary language often have different desired outcome levels than those who voluntarily immigrate and who plan to stay in the AL space long term (Ogbu and Simons, 1998).

To give a fuller picture of participants’ motivation for learning and immersing in an AL, I asked them how their attitude toward their AL and its speakers affected their ALA. Participants reported having either a positive attitude (19 participants) or a neutral attitude (4 participants) toward the AL culture and its speakers. As indicated in Table 3.7 (p. 87), all participants in this thesis were all voluntary minorities or temporary travelers, not migrants, in their immersion experience. All participants had either a positive or neutral attitude toward their AL and its speakers. This is not to say that their positive or neutral attitude toward their AL causes participants to strive to speak like a *native speaker*, but it does mean that their attitudes toward AL was not a hindrance in their ALA experience.

5.6.2 Identities.

Research has also shown that sometimes those who learn an AL feel a sense of loss of connection to their identity, which can affect their DOLs (Pavlenko, 2006, Good *et al.*, 2010). In order to learn more about participants’ identities within the context of language, I asked them if they felt a loss of identity, a gain of a new identity, or both. Their responses are displayed in Table 3.9 (p. 89). In sum, participants reported having no loss of cultural identity (23), experienced loss (1), some loss (2), or gained identity (12) upon learning an AL.

Research has found that people sometimes feel a loss of identity or loss of connection to their own culture when they learn an AL (Gatbonton *et al.*, 2005; Pavlenko, 2006; Good *et al.*, 2010). Participants who reported experiencing loss (1) or experiencing some loss (2) of identity parallel the findings of Pavlenko (2006). The participants in Pavlenko (2006, p. 12) said that “speaking a different language means being a different person belonging to a different community” (p. 7).

One participant, Joan (AL English, Spanish), explained how she feels some sense of loss when speaking her AL English:

“I definitely feel loss of identity because I even tell my husband that I don't belong in Brasil anymore, and I don't belong in the US. Here I'm too different. and there I'm too different to be you know fully American or fully Brazilian anymore. So it's almost like I'm always in a limbo state of you know like I don't belong a 100% anywhere. I'm just like this unique person now that like it doesn't belong anywhere.”

Another participant, Alice (AL English, Russian, French), reported:

“I feel like some part of me is lost when I live in an English-speaking country. There is something that's not to be understandable here. . . There is a kind of like a national character. Kind of loss. But then you gain also by speaking another language and another culture. So I always feel like I live in a spirit like I'm no longer like 100% Polish but I'm not like 100% American you know. I mean like I lost something, and I gained something some kind of like a mix not completely assimilated here”

Both participants have lived primarily in an AL English setting for multiple decades now, and despite living and working in their AL, they feel a loss of their own identities by using their AL English. These two participants are consistent with Pavlenko (2006, p. 18), who reports that some people feel “less [themselves] when speaking a language other than [L1] but not in a bad sense.”

Most participants (23) reported that they did not feel a loss of cultural identity when speaking their AL. Many participants in this thesis indicated that they actually gained an identity when learning their AL. Pavlenko (2006, p. 24) found that some AL learners

indicated they were “unaffected by the change in language.” This is true of participants in this thesis too. One participant, James (AL Mandarin), said “you feel almost like you're part of something that you've never been” when you learn a new language. Another participant, John, said, “Language for me it's just the vehicle that you have to communicate.” The participants in this thesis primarily reported a gain of identity rather than a loss. Their perspective of gaining or losing part of the identity can influence their DOLs and their self-described measures of success, which will be discussed in Section 5.7 (p. 133) and Chapter 6 (p. 158), respectively.

The above-mentioned research about motivations, attitudes, and learner agency with regards to ALA confirms the findings of this thesis. Participants have multiple motivations, and these motivations and attitudes are representative of diverse learners. The research concerning motivations, attitudes, and identities however often do not connect these factors to desired outcome levels. The following sections will discuss the adult ALA DOLs and how they relate to their AL success.

The purpose of exploring participants' motivations, attitudes, and identities is to show the diversity of their life histories. Sections 5.5 (p. 123) and 5.6 (p. 131) described the various reasons adults learn an AL and how their attitudes and identities do or do not affect their AL experience. The importance of presenting this diversity, however, is to show how varied motivations, attitudes, and identities lead to diverse desired outcome levels. This will be explored further in Section 5.7.

5.7 Desired Outcome Levels

As discussed in Section 2.2.2 (p. 27), the field of linguistics often assumes that adult language learners are seeking to speak like a *native speaker* or to reach *native-like proficiency* as their ultimate attainment goal. Section 2.2.1 (p. 18) and Section 5.3 (p. 120) challenge the assumption that a homogenous *native speaker* exists, showing that the notion of a singular *native speaker* is non-existent and should not be used as the target for adult language learners. Section 5.4 (p. 122) described the varied motivations of adult ALA, presenting multiple reasons for beginning ALA and multiple gains in learning an ALA. Section 5.5 (p. 123) described the attitudes and identities of participants concerning their purpose of immigration and personal identities when speaking an AL. The purpose of exposing all of these varied details of each individual's ALA story is to show the

diversity of participants and to show how these varied motivations and attitudes lend themselves to varied desired outcome levels.

5.7.1 *Desired Outcome Levels.*

Participants were asked to describe their initial desired outcome levels (DOLs), to express if they had reached their DOLs, and to detail any further ALA goals they have. The aim of these questions was to address Research Question 1 (Section. 5.1, p. 118; Section 5.9, p. 154) and to challenge the notion of *native-like* proficiency as ultimate attainment goal (Section 2.2.2, p. 27; Section 3.5.1, p. 85). Their responses, as analysed using Nvivo, are detailed in Table 4.2 (p. 97). In summary, the most commonly-coded DOLs are *communicate/converse*, *fluid/fluent*, *no initial goal*. Participant responses, analysed using corpus analysis, are detailed in Table 4.6 (p. 103). In summary, a few of the most frequently used words in the corpus analysis are *know*, *fluent*, and *speak*.

The analysis shows that the DOLs as identified by the primary analysis in Nvivo are similar to the DOLs displayed by the single-word. It is important to note that in Table 4.2 (p. 97) two (2) participants do state their desired outcome level is related to the *native speaker*. Their responses are discussed below in Section 5.7.2 (p. 134).

Many studies in the field of linguistics demonstrate what adult language learners cannot do, i.e. speak like a *native speaker*. They often focus on the motivations or the proficiency level of adult language learners instead of identifying what they want to do by asking participants' individual DOLs. In the following sections, I will describe the varied desired outcome level as described by participants.

5.7.2 *Native or Native-like Proficiency as a Desired Outcome Level*

As shown above in Table 4.2 (p. 97), participants did not all report *native* or *native like proficiency* as a desired outcome level. Arthur (AL Spanish and Portuguese), for example, said that he “never said goals like ‘I want to be a native speaker.’ It never occurred to me to set a goal to be a native [or] like a near native.” However, one participant, Paul, responded to the interview question by saying: “I have always been very exigent with myself, and my goals are always near-native or native.” He uses the present tense to describe his goals likely because he has many ALs and his goals are always “near-native or native.” Paul explained that his motivations to learn AL English, which are integrative. He sought to learn more about the English-speaking culture, specifically “to understand the music, to understand movies.” His motivations to learn AL French, Italian, and

Mandarin are the same: he seeks to be able to better understand the cultures in which these languages are spoken by reading the literature and poetry. With AL Mandarin specifically, Paul explains that he has always been “an admirer of Chinese culture and philosophy and civilization” and has the additional goal of “establishing a cultural bridge” between English speakers in the United States and Mandarin speakers in China. Although this chapter is challenging the assumption of that all adult language learners seek *native-like proficiency*, it is essential to recognize that some adult language learners do desire to speak like a *native speaker*.

While no other participants in this thesis said that speaking like a *native* or *near native* was their DOL, Paul is hardly alone in this desire. One study of 1039 bi- and multi-lingual participants (Pavlenko, 2006, p. 12) found that adult language learners felt the need to conform to “native culture norms.” Participants in Pavlenko’s (2006) study reported that “a ‘true’ command of a second language requires conformity: non-native speakers have ‘to assume certain cultural perspectives’, to ‘act according to the behavioral norms of the corresponding culture’, and to ‘conform to the way the native speakers talk’.” Participants in Pavlenko’s (2006) study, however, did not necessarily say their desired outcome level was to speak like a *native speaker* but that they perceived “language and culture to be a unified ‘package’” in which they must adhere to the mannerisms of “native speakers” in order to have “true command” of the AL. Conforming to the norms of *native speakers*, however, and speaking like a *native speaker* are two different concepts. Conforming to mannerisms such as hand gestures and emotionalism is much different than conforming to the ambiguous *native speaker* standard of speaking.

5.7.3 Communication and Fluency as a Desired Outcome Level

In analyzing the interview data from participants with regards to their desired outcome levels, the most common code was *communicate* or *converse* (coded 13 times). The second most common code was *fluid* or *fluent* (coded 10 times). Although these were coded separately, they convey the same desire, which is to interact with people who speak the AL. These desires are not the same as speaking like a *native speaker*.

Fluency, as defined by one participant, is “used by the general public to mean able to converse with other people at a high level.” Derwing and Munro (2013) define fluency as “listeners’ perceptions of the flow of the speaker’s language output, for example, whether there are frequent pauses, false starts, or other dysfluencies.” Suzuki and Kormos, (2020,

p. 146) define it as “the interlocutor’s inference of the efficiency of linguistic processing system underlying the given speech.” Although participants may have varied definitions of AL fluency, the main key is that fluency refers to the desire to use an AL to communicate with others in the AL. Research shows that fluency and, relatedly, comprehensibility are both more about being understood by listeners rather than the speakers’ specific linguistic intuition (Derwing and Munro, 2013; Suzuki and Kormos, 2020). By using the word “fluent” or “fluency” in their DOLs, participants desire the ability to communicate effectively as their primary goal, which does not require speaking like a *native speaker*.

5.7.4 Additional DOLs

Despite the fact that most participants began learning their additional language due to school requirements, eighteen (18) reported learning a third, fourth, or fifth additional language, which were not necessarily required for school. Shedivy (2004) explored why some people continue to study their language – or an additional language – after the required time spent learning had passed. One of the reasons identified in their study is a “spark” (p. 109), in which participants were encouraged by others to learn an AL whether it be by a teacher or by simply meeting someone who spoke an AL.

Angela (AL German and Spanish) described this “spark” as motivation for learning AL German. When learning German, she explained that her initial goal was “to make a good grade” and then evolved to “please the people [she] was learning from.” Her motivations for learning AL German were integrative, meaning she wanted to connect with people in the German-speaking culture. Whereas with AL Spanish, Angela’s motivations could be better described as “pragmatic” (Shedivy, 2004, p. 109) or “instrumental” (Gardner (1985). Angela needed to learn AL Spanish to obtain a job. Her motivation was never to get a specific proficiency level but to continue her career as a language professor. She says she still has “a very passive attitude towards” Spanish but enjoys “having places to go” with regards to future proficiency levels in AL Spanish. Her differentiated motivations for each individual AL certainly influences her DOLs and ultimately her individual measure of success.

Another participant, Rose (AL French, Spanish, German), also describes differentiated DOLS for each of her ALs.

“when I learned French I wanted to be French, and I still have this little trauma that when if I you know if I'm make a mistake I just go into conniptions, but when I learned Spanish, I didn't have those stringent requirements. And, in German, too I didn't have those stringent requirements.

She explains that when she learned her first AL, French, she “had to be perfect” but with Spanish and German she “just gave [herself] a break so [she] just had more fun with it.”

Similarly, Alice (AL English, Russian, French) describes her DOLs as a “spark” (Shedivy, 2004, p. 109). She explained that for both French and English her goal was to be “fluent.” For French, she desires to learn enough to travel to visit a friend in the Democratic Republic of Congo and be able to “help there and go there for a couple of months, so I would like to you know, not to be a burden, good enough [at AL French] not to babysit me.” However, for English, Alice’s motivation could be better described as “desire to blend in” (Shedivy, 2004, p. 109). She said: “my accent really bothered me, and I wanted to get rid of it.” But, eventually, she accepted her accent as “who she is” and does not obsess about it anymore. Although her DOLs for both languages include “fluency,” for French her DOL tends to be to communicate with French-speakers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but for English her DOL was more to fit into the primarily English-speaking culture she lives in.

Finally, Paul (AL English, French, Italian, Mandarin) describes varied DOLs for each individual AL. He said he had a different perspective on his accent in AL French, Italian, and Mandarin than he did for AL English:

With French and Italian, I know I could get better with my accent if I lived in those countries. Since I don't practice them on a daily basis, I get rusty, but I have checked for a fact that when I go, and I spend a couple of weeks I just regain it. So, I . . . would say I've reached my goals of being able to understand all the media that I need, and to have a conversation with somebody if the need arrives. With Mandarin, my goal is actually spending some considerable time in China to be able to reach fluency.

What is important with regards to each of these participants delineating their different DOLs for their different ALs is that even a single person can have different motivations for each AL which lead to different DOLs which also lead to different measures of DOL

success. These examples of varied DOLs for each AL supports the claim of this thesis which is that participants do not always have the same goal of speaking like a *native speaker* and can have varied DOLs that are more focused on what they can do with their AL.

5.7.5 Summary of Desired Outcome Levels

The highest number of participants (13) responded to this interview question by saying their DOL was to *communicate* or *converse* with speakers of their AL. Only two (2) participants specifically said their DOLs were related to the AL culture; however, in context with their life histories, they indicated a strong desire to connect to AL culture. Other participants (3) said they had no specific goals when they began learning their AL. They knew they were required to begin taking a new language in school, and thus had no specific goals when they began. Participants added additional non-specific DOLs that included travel, adventure, simply to be a “higher [proficiency] than now, and to be “not terrible.” One participant wanted “to be French.” Another participant had wanted to pass the HSK, a Mandarin proficiency exam but never got the chance. Each of these DOLs are quantified in the above charts, but each person has a qualitative, individualized DOL. The following sections (5.8) demonstrate the themes represented in the data, which are that most participants desire to connect with people and culture and do not all desire to speak like a *native speaker*. These themes were derived from participant responses to the questions regarding their motivations to learn, their attitudes toward AL speakers and their culture, identities, and desired outcome levels in the context of their individual life histories.

5.8 Discussion of Themes 1 and 2

The data elicited from participants in this thesis revealed varied motivations for learning and AL, for immersing themselves in an AL. The data revealed what participants believed they would gain from learning an AL and explored how their attitudes and identities influenced their ALA. Finally, the data revealed diverse desired outcome levels, influenced by participant motivations and attitudes. All participants in this thesis, aside from Paul, reported desired outcome levels that are not related to *native-like proficiency* or to speaking like a *native speaker*. The two themes discussed below are relating to the desire to connect with people of the AL and to connect to the culture of the AL. These themes were consistently woven into the participants’ explanation of motivations and DOLs. Throughout their interviews, twenty-five (25) participants mentioned “people”

two hundred thirty-six (236) times. When asked about their connection to culture, twenty-three (23) different participants mentioned the word “culture” eighty-nine (89) times.

These sections below, 5.8.1 and 5.8.2, show the pervasiveness of the desire for connection with people and with culture in ALA. In the following section, I will give voice to the participants to describe their desired outcome levels. As their voices say, they do not seek *native-like* proficiency or to speak like a *native speaker* but rather to engage with people in their AL and the culture of their AL.

5.8.1 Theme 1: Connect with speakers of AL

As Table 5.2 shows, many participants learned their AL in order to connect with people who spoke the AL. They did not seek to reach *native-like* proficiency or to speak like a *native speaker*.

Table 5.2 Connect with speakers of AL

Theme 1: Adults learn language to connect with people, not to be like native speakers.	
<i>Participant</i>	<i>Quote</i>
Carol	I want to be able <u>to talk to anybody</u>
Paul	The main motivation is <u>just talk to people and know people.</u>
Rose	I love to <u>communicate with people</u> and I think that that is my motivation.
Thom	Because you end up being able to really <u>connect with people</u> in a different way. Just wanting to be able to fit in a little bit better and <u>to be able to speak to people</u> in their own language.
Teresa	Being able to speak well, to be able to have <u>conversations with people.</u>
James	I really was in love with the country and <u>the people.</u>
Norman	We started learning because we wanted <u>to talk with the people</u> that were around us.
Linda	It was really just for the purpose of functioning and <u>connecting with people</u> in a country where that was the dominant language.
Shirley	To be able <u>to accept people</u> for who they are.
Angela	I was wanting <u>to please the people</u> I was learning from.
Ruth	So, we learned Swahili, we could learn to live life, and we could buy things we could survive there, we could make <u>relationships with our neighbors.</u>
Natalie	Just to be able <u>to communicate</u> really.
Elizabeth	So, I can communicate in a way that <u>people can understand</u> what I'm saying.
Joseph	I really want <u>to engage with people</u> from these cultures.
Amy	I have more chance to work around abroad anywhere, <u>to communicate more with people.</u>

Research shows that desire to connect to others is a common motivator. Shedivy (2004, p. 108) calls this motivation the “spark” saying that the “motivator that took the form of a person who was admired by the participant who had engaged in immersion, or a suggestion by a professor to study abroad, or meeting someone from another culture who was bilingual.” This thesis confirms this finding. Participants’ individual life histories surrounding their ALA experience give greater insight into the context of why adults begin learning an AL.

Many people described the desire for making friendships and building relationships with people in their AL. As Gardner (2000, p. 14) asked, “how [could you] truly learn another language if you didn't like the people who spoke the language and wanted to communicate with them.” Participants in this study seemed to agree that they learned their AL because they liked those who spoke their AL and desired the ability to speak with them.

For example, Paul illustrated this concept of gaining relationships and how that gives him freedom to move around the world as he pleases:

“What I get from all of the languages, and it's a strong motivation for me: a sense of independence, of cultural independence and freedom, being able to go to many places, being able to be understood by many different people. And, that always has provided me with a great sense of freedom.”

Another participant, Shirley, described how a trip to the Dominican Republic when she was a teenager allowed her to use her AL Spanish to connect with others:

“Eighteen (18) years later, I still keep in contact with several of the people that I met when I was 16. So, I've built those relationships and have been back to visit them. I'm a godparent to one of their kids. So, that was the motivation to continue to go back [to the Dominican Republic] was friendship and relationships.”

Some participants described relationships that have lasted decades and include traveling internationally to spend time with each other. What participants do not describe is their need to speak like a *native speaker* in order to build these relationships. In order to connect with people, each person needs only to be able to communicate with each other, not to be able to speak like a *native speaker*.

The types of relationships that participants made with speakers of their AL varied a bit but could be categorized into three categories: relationships with people in general, relationships with specific people such as a potential spouse, and relationships with people for the sake of evangelism. Their stories of connecting with people in their AL are below in their own voices.

5.8.2 Individual Stories of Connecting with People

The following section will highlight a few of the individual stories about learning an AL for the purpose of connecting with people. While the previous section quantified participant responses, the following section will give more in depth stories of individual goals in learning an AL.

5.8.2.1 Connecting with People in General. James (AL Mandarin) learned an additional language to build relationships with any and everyone who spoke his AL Mandarin. He first became interested in his AL when he was 13 and had the chance to visit a childhood friend in China. He said he “kind of fell in love with [China]” and began learning the language informally on his own. As a teenager, he traveled to China to study Mandarin. Because he lived in an international dorm, James was forced to speak Mandarin with his dormmates as it was the only common language among them. He said his daily educational life was building the formal classroom foundation of Mandarin, but that likely his Mandarin acquisition was “50/50 from gaining a foundation through what I was learning my books, and then having to almost being forced to reuse it from anytime outside of the classroom,” exemplifying how his desire to connect with people drove his AL Mandarin acquisition. James expresses how his motivation to learn AL Mandarin was fully related to connecting with people:

I am outgoing and like meeting people, and it was the intrigue of being able to communicate with people that don't expect to be communicated with from you know the Westerner. . . So, I think that that was probably the biggest thing . . . bridging gaps and being able to build relationships . . . that learning Chinese would benefit.

Throughout his interview, James frequently mentioned the relationships he had made due to learning Mandarin, saying that even decades later he maintains many of those relationships.

In contrast to James, Thom (AL Japanese) did not have much interest in traveling to Japan or learning Japanese until he was 25 years old. Thom and his spouse were looking for adventure and decided to spend a year in Japan. Thom says he did not begin learning AL Japanese until he was “probably on the plane to Japan.” He began taking formal, community-based language classes, but, after a few months of lessons, he wanted to focus on learning by “being out and about. . .just picking up little things in a grocery store.” He knew his time in Japan was very limited, so he wanted to spend time communicating with people in their L1, “as broken as [his AL Japanese] may have been.” But, in many ways, Thom’s motivation to learn his AL Japanese was like James’ because he really wanted to use it “to be able to speak to people in their own language,” using the example of wanting “the ability to interact with the little ladies a little ramen shop that didn’t speak a lick of English.” Thom explained how, by learning AL Japanese, he gained friendships that have lasted nearly two decades:

You end up being able to really . . .connect with people in a different way. . . We still have really good friends that we met through a super random encounter just trying to ask somebody what was in a tin can in a grocery store. So, we’ve been friends for 18 years, and they’ve come to the United States and visited us and we have plans to visit them next year.

While Thom does express some dissatisfaction with how much Japanese he was able to learn, he had no goal of becoming like a *native speaker*, but simply wanted to communicate with people in their L1 for the limited time period he was in Japan.

As evidenced by multiple participants, adult language learners do not always seek to speak their AL like a *native speaker* but instead desire to connect with the people who speak that AL.

5.8.2.2 Connecting with specific people. Some participants learned their AL to connect with specific people, specifically their now spouses. Of twenty-six (26) participants, eleven (11) specifically mentioned they are now married to someone whose L1 is their additional language. For example, Anita (AL English) married someone whose L1 is English, and John (AL Spanish) married a person whose L1 is Spanish. Although many participants are married to someone who does not share their L1, not all of them learned an additional language for the purpose of building a relationship with their future

partner. However, it is unlikely many of them would be married if it were not for having learned their additional language.

A few participants did, however, have the motivation of a specific relationship for the purpose of learning their additional language. Joseph married a person whose L1 (Brazilian Portuguese) is his AL but did not indicate whether he learned his AL Portuguese to spend time with her or vice versa. Arthur, however, learned an L3 (Brazilian Portuguese) in order to date his now wife. He said: "Portuguese, I learned it because . . . its close ties to Spanish but my main motivation was to go to talk with my girlfriend, and my now wife and her family." Arthur joked that his now wife once said: "I thought you kind of like were just dating me for my language for a while." Both Joseph and Arthur have an AL (Spanish) that is closely related to their next AL (Brazilian Portuguese), but much of their motivation to learn their AL Portuguese was to connect with people whose L1 was Brazilian Portuguese.

5.8.2.3 Connecting to people for evangelistic purposes. Both Joseph and Arthur also mentioned a desire to learn their additional language for evangelistic purposes. Arthur said he "felt an intrinsic motivation to learn more, because he felt called by God to go to Guatemala," which gave him an internal purpose to develop his AL Spanish for a higher good.

In fact, in many religious practices, evangelism, or "spreading the gospel" is a common practice and is even required in some faith traditions. Since evangelism often takes place in the "uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8) or places far from one's home, people need to learn an AL, the language of the people, to get to know people to teach them their belief system. Those who are evangelizing often do not focus on becoming like a *native speaker* but on learning enough of the AL to complete their mission. Including Joseph and Arthur, five people said that some or all of their reasons for learning an AL was for evangelism. Three of the participants were not required to learn an AL in school but learned their AL for the primary purpose of connecting with people in order to evangelize.

Ruth and Norman, married to each other, both learned the same AL Swahili with the main language learning goal of connecting with people to teach them their religious beliefs. They had no exposure to the language prior to their decision to move to Tanzania. Upon their arrival, they began learning AL Swahili. In describing their desire to learn AL

Swahili, Norman said, “For me, my goal wasn't so much about learning the language to a certain point; it was more about getting to know the people.” Ruth described her motivation to learn Swahili saying that “we wanted to get to know people and share what God has taught us.”

While they described their different learning method preferences, Ruth and Norman shared the same goal of using AL Swahili “because [they] wanted to talk with the people that were around us” and “make relationship with [their] neighbors.” Both Ruth and Norman reached the proficiency level of “capable high,” but Ruth believes Norman has a higher proficiency than she does because he has “spent more time with people” and that she “can notice some holes in [her] understanding.” Norman explains his learning goals: “For me it’s in my relationships, how they’re going and how I’m understood in my relationship or not understood.” For Ruth, being able to tell people about God in their own language was a motivator: “I saw a lot of confusion about God and who He is and knowing the language really benefited me so really there so that was a motivator.” Basically, while Ruth and Norman wanted to gain as high a proficiency as possible, their main goal in learning AL Swahili was to connect with people to share their faith.

Similar to Ruth and Norman, John also learned an AL (Spanish) in order to connect to people to teach them his religious beliefs. Despite being married to an L1 Spanish speaker and taking a few classes in high school, therefore, having some exposure to the language, he did not begin learning AL Spanish until he was planning to move to Costa Rica where Spanish is the primary language. In describing what he hoped to gain from learning Spanish, he said:

So, for me. . .when you're looking at it from the standpoint of ministry, if you're here to invest your life into somebody but you can't communicate then, what are you doing? So, it was just . . . an absolute must for me. So, the motivation [to learn Spanish] was to be able to minister and to remove as many barriers as possible that would prevent ministry from happening.

John believed that in order to fully connect with people and to minister to them in their own language, he needed to learn AL Spanish. He does not mention needing to speak like a *native speaker* in order to fulfill his calling, simply that he needed the ability to communicate in his AL.

Multiple participants stated their DOLs were evangelistic or religious in nature, which has been explored in previous research. Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) performed a qualitative study of AL learners with “unusually high motivation to learn” and whose motivation for ALA is connected to the use of “sacred texts” such as the Bible or Q’uran. The participants in this thesis who cited evangelistic motivations for ALA paralleled the findings of Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013). These authors explained their participants motivation for ALA:

Their decision to learn language(s) as a part of their overall spiritual call . . . entailed a significant change of direction in their lives. . . this decision involved relocating from their home country to a culture significantly different than their own. . . .Most of them learned minority languages without written codes for which resources such as language instructors, classes, and course materials were minimal, unavailable, or non-existent, thus requiring significant initiative on their part to put such scaffolds into place for themselves. (p. 181)

This particular study by Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) is one of the few that connects motivations to learn to AL language proficiency. Although it did not ask participants their specific desired outcome levels nor did they “measure interviewees’ L2 proficiency levels,” the authors described the rigorous AL requirements to be a Bible translator, which many of their participants were. As one of their participants said, Bible translation “requires a much higher level of fluency” than other “cross-cultural work” (p. 183). Important to note, however, that participants in the Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) study, despite giving their livelihood, security, and safety (p. 182-183) and have demonstrably high AL proficiency (p. 183), they do not indicate desire to reach *native-like proficiency* or to speak like a *native speaker*. Similar to the participants in this thesis, their DOLs were related to sharing their faith with those who spoke their AL and not to *native-like proficiency*.

Some researchers, however, would argue that religious motivation is still primarily social motivation. Ushioda (2012) argues that part of the “L2 motivation” to learn an AL is social. This study argues that “the inherently social nature of Christian faith communities” (p. 227) contributes to the social contexts that encourage ALA. Ushioda (2012) cites the number of married couples “engaged on a long-term basis in mission and Bible translation work (and thus in L2 learning” in Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) as evidence that,

while their desire to learn an AL was motivated by their faith, they were engaging in social practices within that desire that enhanced their ALA engagement. However, for this thesis, participants can identify their own motivations as they wish, and likely a religion-driven motivation overlaps in many ways with a social-driven motivation.

Additionally, Ushioda (2012) raises questions about the positionality of the researcher with regards to qualitative interviews when conducted by a “Christian researcher” who has “the empathetic and ‘insider’ perspective” (p. 228). For details on my own positionality statement, see Ch. 2 Literature Review, Section Positionality statement. In brief, I identify as Christian and gained my “awakening” (Dörnyei, 2000) or “spark” (Shedivy, 2004) for ALA during a religious missionary trip to the Dominican Republic when I was a teenager. It is important to note that the participants in this study who specified evangelistic DOLs are my personal acquaintances who I knew were living overseas as missionaries. However, the interview questions were the same for all participants, no matter my prior knowledge of their language and lifestyle knowledge.

In this section, I have discussed Theme 1, which describes adult language learners desire to learn an AL for the purpose of connecting with people who speak their AL. In the next section, I will discuss Theme 2, describing the individual life histories of those who learned an AL for the purpose of connecting to the culture of their AL.

5.8.3 Theme 2: Connect with Culture of AL

The data analysis of the individual participants’ life histories revealed four themes related to the research questions. This section will discuss the second theme, which is that adult language learners learn an AL for the purpose of connecting with the culture of their AL. This theme is demonstrated below in Table 5.3. Participants did not seek to reach *native-like* proficiency or to speak like a *native speaker* but rather to create a connection to their AL culture.

Table 5.3 Connect with culture of AL

Theme 2: Adults learn language to connect with cultures, not to be like <i>native speakers</i>.	
<i>Participants</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
Josephine (AL English)	I love learning about new culture .
Carol (AL English)	I want to be able to really immersing to the culture .
John (AL Spanish)	Language for me, it's just, it's the vehicle that you have to communicate and be accepted more maybe into a culture as to a person who doesn't speak it at all. They're always just going to be kind on the outside looking in, that's going to be harder for you to understand the culture where they're coming from
Arthur (AL Spanish/ Portuguese)	I realised there was a world out there, but I hadn't met anybody from it. And so I never imagined that language would take me farther. . . I've expanded my cultural horizons .
Paul (AL English, French, Italian, Mandarin)	I want to know people from different cultures . Now, as I'm a little older it's more I want to understand people of other languages, and I want to understand why sometimes they would not understand me. If that makes sense, Yeah, I want to understand the cultural reasons and implications.
Alice (AL English)	Understanding the culture , the way of thinking
Rose (AL French)	I thought I would gain Europe, access to Europe, access to the culture ,
Thom (AL Japanese)	I probably gained just by, you know, just having a broader understanding of people in language and culture
Elaine (AL Spanish)	Exposing me to a different language to a different culture to different people
James (AL Mandarin)	You feel almost like you're part of something that you've never been.

Norman (AL Swahili)	We would gain an insight into their world
Linda (AL Japanese)	Respect and appreciation for another culture ,
Shirley (AL Spanish)	I wanted to expand my horizons . . . I've now traveled to 37 countries, and just have loved learning about how other people do life and function
Angela (AL German/ Spanish)	I liked the culture and the people
Janet (AL Spanish)	I feel connected to [AL] Hispanic culture
Ruth (AL Swahili)	I think that just getting to this point is what really has just opened up a whole new door, culture and it's like you've gained access into a whole 'nother world.
Natalie (AL Spanish)	When you learn the language, you don't learn just the language itself... but you learn culture to learn about how other people live.
Elizabeth (AL English)	Make me understand the culture more.
Joseph (AL Spanish / Portuguese)	To engage with the culture outside of my own
Amy (AL English)	I think the ability to understand people of different meet people of different cultures learn about culture , not just the language, but the culture associated with it.

Research shows that desire to connect to culture is a common motivator. Zhang *et al.* (2020) states that “integrative motivation positively influences second foreign language proficiency by stimulating a learner’s interest in the selected language and its **associated culture**, as well as their demand for related entertainment” (emphasis mine). Participants’ individual life histories confirm this study, by giving insight into their ALA experience and into the context of why adults begin learning an AL.

5.8.4 Individual Stories of Connecting to the Culture

The following section will highlight a few of the individual stories about learning an AL for the purpose of connecting with the culture of their AL. While the previous section quantified participant responses, the following section will give more in depth details of each individual person’s goal in learning an AL.

Multiple participants expressed how learning an additional language gave them access to a world they would otherwise have no access to. For example, Teresa (AL Spanish) said: “[Learning AL Spanish helped] to broaden my worldview. It’s a cliché, but it’s really true. I have a wider view of the world.” Amy (AL English) reported her enjoyment of connecting to the AL culture:

[Learning additional languages gives people] the ability to understand [and] meet people of different cultures, learn about culture, not just the language, but the culture associated with it. Understand how people are different, kind of have more of an openness and understanding the differences that people have across the world, that they might not just say things differently, but also view things differently and process things differently. And just what is considered the right way to do things in one might not be the right way to do so and another one. So just that openness and that interest and just learning how they do things differently than we do.

For Amy, learning her AL does not just give her the ability to connect to an additional culture but to open her mind to additional ways of living.

Finally, Natalie (AL Spanish and Italian) explained how she does not need to be “perfect” to appreciate the culture of an AL: “When you learn the language you don’t learn just the language itself. . . you learn culture to learn about how other people live, and it’s just such

a beautiful thing. . . Whether [your additional language is] perfect, or good or anything, they don't care. The effort is worth it to them.” Her purpose in learning an AL to connect with an additional culture gave her the ability to show the people of her AL that she cared enough to learn their AL.

Each of these participants described how learning an additional language can and does broaden a person’s horizons and view of the world, all of which can be accomplished without attaining native-like proficiency in the language itself. As Natalie said, “they don’t care” if a person speaks perfectly or not because learning any parts of an additional language can give insight into other cultures, other thought processes, and other worlds.

In fact, many participants fell in love with the culture, which in turn motivated them to learn more of the language to have a more in-depth understanding. Angela (AL German, Spanish) described her love, though complicated, of the German language and culture. She explains this complex understanding:

I think one of the things that's always saved me with German is that I've always had a love/hate relationship with the culture and that means that I'm never ambivalent about it." What she means is that due to the German role in the World Wars, she often fields questions about why she would continue to study German. But, she says her love of the culture is what “saved” her because it gives her insight into the complex nature of humanity. She says she loves all things German: “I love the German language, and a lot of the literature, I think it’s pretty fabulous. And, then there's a lot of the music that's wonderful to so I mean it's just sort of a big package. . . [after a pause she continued] wait, did I mention art? yes. So, there's a lot of things to love.

Her explanation of her love for the German culture gives insight into how the culture influenced her desire to learn.

In continuation, Angela also described her love of Spanish culture. She had already gotten a PhD in German and began learning Spanish at age 40 in hopes of landing a new tenured professorship in Spanish. Although the field of linguistics often focuses on what adult language learners cannot do, Lenneberg (1967) did concede that “a person can learn to communicate in a foreign language at the age of forty” (p. 176), which is exemplified by Angela’s ALA experience learning Spanish. But, despite having already learned German

and loving that culture, Angela found herself falling in love with the Spanish-speaking culture as well: “I started really liking not just the language but aspects of the Spanish-speaking culture.” She continued saying “I feel like an idiot for not going into this [learning Spanish] earlier because I’ve loved all of the [Spanish] literature. I can’t say I’m crazy about all the music, but [at a recital I sang] a bunch of Argentinian songs.” Angela does say she wishes she could improve her Spanish but that she is pleased that she has learned Spanish: “I mean it’s just I feel with Spanish I’m just lucky to have the opportunity to learn something later in my life that has so much possibility.”

As an adult learning an AL, Angela recognized the differences between her younger self and her then self, noting that when she went to Germany, she was single and was forced to socialize whereas she was married when she was studying Spanish and spent her evenings with her L1 English husband rather than going out dancing, meaning she was not building language skills or to connect socially to the culture as quickly as she could have.

Similar to Angela, Paul’s (AL English, Italian, French, Mandarin) motivation to learn multiple ALs was because he wanted to learn more about the culture. He said, “I choose a language because I already am attracted to their culture.” His motivation for learning an additional language is “always because of an attraction to the to the cultural channels that the language can open.” When Paul was in elementary school, he was exposed to English instruction, but he does not believe he actually began learning English until high school. In describing his motivation for learning English, he explained:

When I was early adult, like a young adult, I saw [learning AL English] as a way of being able to travel and see the world because . . . many people speak English out there in the world. So, it was a useful language; then, in college I fell in love with English poetry, so I wanted to reach a level where I could read advanced literature without resorting to dictionaries or *native speakers*.

His desire to engage with the English-speaking culture drove his desire to improve his English proficiency.

Furthermore, Paul expressed how his love of French and Italian culture drove his acquisition of each of those languages. He said, “French and Italian were so close to me in a sentimental way and cultural way that main reason was just reading their literature. I

remember for Italian was understanding opera without having to use a libretto. And, with French just reading literature.”

Similar to his other additional languages, Paul’s primary motivation to learn Mandarin was because he wanted to engage with the culture and understand it more fully. He details this motivation:

I am very interested in being able to read the literature and the poetry of the [Mandarin] language. But with Mandarin it has a stronger feeling of urgency. When I came to the States, I noticed that there was a lot of aversion or a lot of prejudices about China in general. So, learning Chinese is a way to kind of like establish cultural bridge.

I mean it's a very humble contribution, but I would be learning the culture, and you know, dispelling stereotypes when I have a chance in the United States about that and I'm also a great admirer of their culture and philosophy, and their civilization.

So, while Paul’s motivation for learning Mandarin was to be able to read the literature and philosophy, he also sees a need to “establish [a] cultural bridge]” between those in the US and those in China, which he can do when he has an understanding of the language and culture.

Paul was an outlier among the participants when he acknowledged that he had “always been very exigent with [himself], [so his proficiency] goals are always near-native or native.” And, though he recognized that setting such a goal may be too stringent, he did express some “dismay because [he doesn’t think he’s] improving anymore,” detailing that his accent is still present and that he has “not been able to erase it completely” so he says he is “done with English in that way.” His personal reflection on his disappointment with still having an accent reminiscent of his L1 Spanish parallels research that says adults can learn another language later than childhood but cannot erase all traces of their L1.

However, despite what Lenneberg (1967) asserts, which is that adults can learn another language well past puberty, some aspects of their L2 such as “foreign accents cannot be overcome” (p. 176), meaning that they will never quite speak like a *native speaker*. Flege *et al.*, (1999) in examining how the CPH extends to ALA, found that the longer people

speak their AL the stronger their “knowledge of ungeneralizable aspects of L2 morphosyntax (as well as the ability to pronounce an L2) . . . [and that] knowledge of generalizable aspects of English morphosyntax, on the other hand, may be influenced more importantly by amount of formal education” (Flege *et al.*, 1999, p. 100). Although Paul earned his PhD in his L1 Castilian Spanish, he has educated himself extensively in English, which supports Flege *et al.* (1999)’s hypothesis that increased education in the AL increases knowledge of morphosyntax but may not influence pronunciation as strongly.

As demonstrated in Sections 5.7 and 5.8, adult language learners do not all desire to speak like a *native speaker*. Rather, adult language learners desire to connect people in their AL and with the culture of the AL. In Section 5.9, I will explain how these participants’ life histories address the research question. In Section 5.10, I will challenge the assumption that all adult language learners seek *native-like proficiency* as their ultimate attainment goal. Finally, in Section 5.11, I will describe how these findings fit into and expand the current field of adult ALA.

5.9 Addressing RQ1

The purpose of the interview questions to elicit information from participants was to address Research Question 1, which states the following:

- At additional language onset, is the adult learner’s desired outcome level (DOL) comparable to native-like proficiency? If it is not, what is the adult learner’s DOL?

To respond to the first question concerning adult language learners’ DOLs, the findings discussed in this chapter suggest that adult learners’ desired outcome levels are almost never comparable to *native-like proficiency*. In fact, for twenty-six participants, they identify six (6) different categories of desired outcome levels. While one participant said their DOL was “always near-native or native,” the rest of the participants identified desired outcome levels unrelated to speaking like a *native speaker*. Participants described both integrative, instrumental, and experiential motivations including desiring to connect to the culture, earning a good grade, or simply having a good classroom experience. However, the most consistent themes that emerged regarding participants DOLs were as follows:

- Adults learn language to connect with people, not to be like *native speakers*.
- Adults learn language to connect with cultures, not to be like *native speakers*.

By demonstrating that participants have diverse motivations and DOLs, this thesis challenges the assumption of *native-like proficiency* as their ultimate attainment goal.

5.10 Challenging the Assumption of native-like proficiency as ultimate attainment goal

As shown in Section 2.2.2 (p. 27) and in Section 5.2 (p. 119), the field of linguistics tends to assume that adult language learners share the ultimate attainment goal of *native-like proficiency*. The literature tends to focus primarily on what adult language learners *cannot* do in their AL rather than what adult language learners *want* to do. However, the themes discussed in this chapter challenge this notion by showing that participants have varied motivations to learn and to immerse themselves in the AL. These lead to varied desired learning outcomes, most of which are not comparable to *native speakers* or *native-like proficiency*. A potential reason for the presence of this assumption in the field of linguistics is that many studies are conducted using quantitative methods, which paint participant experiences with a broad brush, rather than using qualitative life histories methods that give individual voices to adult language learners. The discussion presented in this chapter seeks to challenge the assumption by showing that, in fact, adult language learners have many DOLs, almost none of which are to speak like a *native speaker*.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the first two themes that emerged from participant data concerning the assumption of *native-like proficiency* as all adult language learners' desired outcome levels. It is important to note that one participant did report that his DOL was always "native or near-native." But as the data demonstrates not all adult language learners share this ALA goal. The interview data suggests that participants' diverse motivations, gains, attitudes, and identities contribute to diverse desired outcome levels. The interview data demonstrates that adult language learners do not always learn an AL to speak like a *native speaker*. Instead, they seek to learn a new language for the purpose of connecting with the speakers of their AL and connecting with cultures of their AL.

The latter portions of this chapter discuss the response to the research question and challenges the assumption that all adult language learners seek *native-like proficiency* as

their desired outcome level. The data from participant interviews overwhelmingly demonstrates that adult language learners do not all seek to speak like a *native speaker*.

This discussion shows the convergence with previous studies that question the existence of a homogenous *native speaker* (Davies, 2003; Han, 2004; Dąbrowska, 2015). The discussions in this chapter also converge with previous research that problematizes the use of the *native speaker* in research (Dewaele, 2017; Cheng *et al*, 2021).

This thesis extends current research, however, by using a qualitative method in a field that often relies on quantitative methods (Coppieters, 1987; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Hartshorne *et al*, 2018). The discussion in this chapter approaches ALA from an individualistic perspective (Larsen-Freeman, 2017 and 2018) to create a more “holistic” approach to studying ALA. As Larsen-Freeman (2017, 2018) suggests,

More research will examine the individual learner. . . focusing on individual learners in context redirects research to a more person-centered frame of reference, which I expect to herald a new phase in SLA research that addresses what language learning affords for the transformation of self. . . A disavowal of the “universal learner” and promises to usher in a new person-centered era in SLA research. (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 59-60)

At the initiation of this thesis, this challenge was published, and it contributed to the development of the methodology used for this thesis.

By using the life histories approach, participants could detail their own ALA experiences and define their own motivations and initial language goals. Although individual differences in motivations and ultimate attainment is very common in ALA literature, many studies do not use qualitative methods to allow participants to define their own experiences in their own words.

This chapter underscores the need to allow participants to tell their own life histories. It underscores the need to reject the broad-brush approach to ALA research, which has led to the assumption that all adult language learners desire the same AL proficiency. This assumption made in ALA literature has also led to additional assumptions that create a false dichotomy of success and failure in ALA.

Chapter 6 will discuss the third theme that emerged and will respond to Research Question 2. Chapter 7 will discuss the fourth theme that emerged and will respond to Research Question 3. Together, these themes challenge the *native-like speaker myth* and the false dichotomy of failure and success in ALA through the use of the *native speaker* as the standard measure of failure or success.

CHAPTER 6:

“Verdammt Gut”:

Self-defined measures of current proficiency and ALA success

“He said, ‘Your German is verdammt gut,’ which is damn good. I’m at the verdammt gut level.” - Angela, AL German

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the third theme that emerged upon analyzing the individual life histories of participants who learned an additional language after the age of twelve. The theme discussed here is as follows:

- Adult language learners can successfully reach or exceed their additional language goals.

As noted in Chapter 4, this is the third of four themes that emerged from multiple rounds of analysis (See Chapter 4, p. 92). The themes discussed in this chapter address Research Question 2, which asks the following question:

- In what ways do adult AL learners measure their AL proficiency? Regardless, by what measures do adults assess their own AL success?

This chapter describes the ways that adult language learners define their own AL proficiency and how often they successfully reach their DOLs. It discusses the data which demonstrates participants’ self-defined measure of AL proficiency rather than measuring AL proficiency according to the nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. This chapter challenges the assumption that *native-like* proficiency is the only measure of ALA success. It argues that, as stated above, adult language learners can reach or exceed their varied DOLs.

The first two themes, which were discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 118), addressed Research Question 1. It argued that adult additional language (AL) learners do not always seek *native-like* proficiency as their desired outcome level (DOL). Rather, they have diverse desired outcome levels. Many of their DOLs relate to connection to the people and cultures associated with their AL. Chapter 5 challenged the assumption that adults seek *native-like* proficiency as their ultimate attainment goal.

The fourth and final theme, which will be discussed in Chapter 7 (p. 188), addresses Research Question 3. It presents evidence of attainable measures of success in ALA. It demonstrates that adults do not always fail at ALA. These four themes challenge the *native-like speaker myth*.

The next section, Section 6.2, will give a brief overview of the literature relevant to adult AL proficiency and ability to reach their DOLs. In Section 6.3, I will present interview questions asked to respond to RQ 2. Then, in Section 6.4, I will discuss the findings presented in Chapter 4 by detailing the individual life histories of participants regarding their individual measure of AL proficiency and success. The chapter concludes with considerations of the findings and how they can contribute to the field of linguistics.

6.2 Background

The research question addressed in this chapter seeks to challenge the assumption of *native-like* proficiency as the only measure of success. The literature relevant to this assumption can be found in detail in Section 2.2.3 (p. 39). A brief summary can be found in the following section.

ALA research tends to focus on what adult language learners cannot do: overcome “foreign accent” (Lenneberg, 1967 p. 176), “succeed” (Bley-Vroman, 1990, p. 8), “achieve the same level of mastery as those who started in childhood” (Hartshorne *et al*, 2018 p. 273), “attain nativelike competence” (Birdsong 2018, p. 2), or reach “nativelike attainment” (Bylund, Hyltenstam, & Abrahamsson, 2020 p. 26).

Although some more recent studies seem to equate “native-like attainment” with ALA success (Birdsong, 2018; Hartshorne, 2018), others acknowledge the variation of abilities in adult AL learners. Dąbrowska *et al* (2020) acknowledged the studies that found the “failure of many L2 learners to acquire native-like linguistic representations.” They argued that “not all studies found the outcome of adult L2 learning to be defective,” citing four studies (Dąbrowska and Street, 2006; Sasaki, 1997; Street, 2017; Dąbrowska, 2019) in addition to their current study that found “significant” overlap between L1 and L2 speakers in “functional” grammar. Thus, while so much of the research shows “that L2 learners, in contrast to children, often fail to acquire native-like competence in the second language” (Dąbrowska *et al*, 2020, p. 1), the learners themselves are meeting and exceeding their varied DOLs, which should be the measure of success. While some

studies have challenged the idea that “the native speaker a reasonable goal for adult L2 learners” (Han 2004), this thesis furthers this challenge by exploring participants’ individual measures of AL proficiency and their ability to reach their DOLs. Through the use of the life histories approach, this thesis seeks to allow participants to define their own AL proficiency in their own voice rather than measuring themselves by the *native speaker*.

The following sections will discuss the assumption of *native-like proficiency* as the only measure of ALA success. I will first present the interview questions to address RQ2. Then, I will discuss the diverse measures of AL proficiency as presented in Chapter 4. Next, I will discuss the third theme that emerged from the data and how it addresses the research question. This chapter will give voice to these twenty-six (26) participants and asks them to determine if they have successfully reached their own goals. I will then undertake to show how the data fits into and extends current ALA literature.

6.3 Interview Questions to Address RQ2

The theme discussed in this chapter emerged after analysis of the interview questions related to Research Question 2. A detailed explanation of the related data and the subsequent analysis can be found in Section 4.4.2 (p. 104). The following section will provide a discussion of the findings and the themes that emerged.

Participants were asked the following interview questions in order to address RQ 2:

- How well would you say you speak your additional language now?
- Do you believe you have reached your original goal for learning your additional language?
- If not, why or why not?
- If not, do you believe you can reach your original goal for learning your additional language?
- Do you have further goals for learning your additional language? Do you have anything you’d like to accomplish that you will need to improve [your additional language] (in any way: vocabulary, syntax, comprehension)?

The purpose for asking these questions is detailed in Section 3.5 (p. 85). Briefly, in order to challenge the assumption that *native-like* proficiency is the only measure of ALA success, I asked participants the above questions to describe their own AL proficiency and to determine if they had successfully reached their desired outcome levels (DOLs). The interview questions allowed participants to define their own AL proficiency and their own individual measure of AL success rather than measuring themselves by the *native speaker* as the field of linguistics so often does. Participants' self-described measures of AL proficiency were diverse. Additionally, the majority of participants reported either meeting or exceeding their DOLs. The following sections will describe participant responses to the interview questions and how they correspond to individual measures of adult AL proficiency and ability to reach DOLs.

6.4 Current AL Proficiency

For the purpose of this thesis, I asked participants to self-assess their current AL proficiency. The reason for self-assessment rather than an objective language assessment such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPIc) test was to allow participants to define their own AL proficiency as desired.

The concept of self-assessment is not a novel idea. Falchikov and Boud (1989) drew on studies from as early as the 1960s to determine the validity of self-assessment in multiple fields of study, including language studies. Their findings show that participants with a higher level of "expertise" in the field can assess themselves more accurately. Additional studies have found value in self-assessment (Panadero, *et al*, 2017; Furtoso and Ferreira, 2018; Boud *et al*, 2013). A study by Ma and Winke (2019, p. 81) and a further study by Winke, *et al* (2023) showed that many adult learners could "reliably and accurately self-assess their language ability." Their study compared participants' self-assessment to their OPIc scores and found that "most students' OPIc gains were reflected in their self-assessment gains; meanwhile, learners tended to underassess rather than overassess their skills" (Ma and Winke, 2019, p. 66). The authors suggest that "self-assessment is a valuable tool that instructors should embrace" (p. 80). Although the concept of self-assessment can be criticized for its lack of objectivity for all learners (Brantmeier *et al.*, 2012), this thesis allowed participants to have the opportunity for determining assessing their own AL proficiency, not choose a proficiency level as created by others. As Brantmeier *et al.* (2012, p. 152) stated "students stat[ed] that they really enjoyed being

able to rate themselves as it gave them a stronger sense of responsibility for their own learning.”

Additionally, allowing participants to declare their own level of AL proficiency gives nuance to individual stories. Larsen-Freeman (2018, p. 63) argued that “emphasis must be placed on the individual learner/person” rather than “operating under the assumption that group averages reveal something about the population on which they are based.” In the same article, Larsen-Freeman also “encouraged SLA researchers to no longer seek to generalize as much as to particularize” (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 64) to address the “individual variation” among adult language learners. For these reasons, I asked participants to assess their own individual AL proficiency.

6.4.1 Multiple Measures of Current Proficiency

Participants rated their own current proficiency in multiple ways. Some participants measured their own AL proficiency by external measures such as the *native speaker* or proficiency exams. Other participants measured their own proficiency using internal measures of proficiency such as using *can-do* statements and self-reflection. Their varied responses demonstrated the internal and personal nature of each participant’s AL proficiency along with individual DOLs and measures of success.

When I asked the interview question, I did not give any suggestion regarding how they should rate themselves so as not to unduly influence their individual AL proficiency assessment. The data as analysed using Nvivo are displayed below in Table 4.7 (p. 105). In summary, the vast majority of participants measured their AL proficiency by what they *can do*. While a few measured by a specific text score or a numbered scale, four participants did use a *native speaker* comparison. Furthermore, the corpus analysis revealed that participants used the word *native* 9 times in response to this interview question. Participants’ self-described measures of AL proficiency, including the use of the word *native*, will be discussed in the following section.

6.4.2 Current Proficiency as Measured by the Native Speaker

A few of the participants did measure themselves by the standard of the native speaker. The corpus data from participant responses are below in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Concordance of *native speaker*

“And because I started learning it a little younger, I can sound more like a native speaker almost in Spanish”
“I would say very, very high level of proficiency. Nowhere near native like but very, very high”
“Ok, I would say I speak German fluently, but not like a native speaker because I’m always amazed when I’m listening to a podcast. . .”
“Just because I don’t know some of these technical words in my native language”
“I try to be very humble with this because, first of all, I’m talking to a native speaker of English. . .”
[Researcher: What would you say a 10 would be?] “ Native speaker, sounding like you.”
“You know all these opportunities, I’m not getting them because I’m not a native speaker. I can’t put native [on government work applications]”
“Just tell them you are native , no one will know”

As shown in Table 6.1, four (4) participants used the *native speaker* in their description of their own current AL proficiency. Two (2) of the participants used the phrase *native speaker* to explain that their proficiency is not like that of a *native speaker*. Even though they both claim to have high AL proficiency, they are clear to indicate that they do not speak like a *native speaker*. Joseph (AL English) said that his current proficiency is “nowhere near native-like but very, very high.” Angela said that her AL German proficiency was that she “speak[s] German fluently, but not like a native speaker.” She added that her L1 German father-figure said she spoke “verdammt gut,” which means “damn good.”

Another participant used the *native speaker* to explain her current proficiency. Rose said that her L1 French friends encouraged her to check “native” on her French government job applications because her additional language proficiency was high enough they thought “no one will know.”

These participants who referenced the *native speaker* in their responses did not clarify what they meant by *native speaker* in defining their own AL proficiency. This speaks to the universality of the assumption of the homogenous *native speaker*. Many have their own idea of who counts as a *native speaker*, but no one singular native speaker exists by which they can measure their AL proficiency.

Many quantitative studies ask participants to measure their ideal self next to the native speaker (Bachman and Palmer, 1989; Papi, 2019). In the past, Peirce *et al* (1993) asked AL French participants to compare their own proficiency to a “francophone peer” on a scale of 1-3. In this study, “The top rating of ‘3’ reflects native-like rate of speech, rhythm, stress and intonation patterns, use of liaison, and avoidance of overly long pauses” (p. 29). However, Winke *et al*, (2023, p. 419) claim that “self-assessment in applied linguistics have improved drastically over the last few decades” because they more often “force a more critical process of self-evaluation through a larger depth and breadth of questioning, with learners asked to envision their proficiency in terms of standardized, positively worded L2-learning descriptors (e.g., Brantmeier *et al.*, 2012; Summers *et al.*, 2019), rather than in comparison to native-speaker norms (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 1989; Peirce *et al.*, 1993).” The self-assessment data presented in this thesis did not specify how participants should measure their own success to allow participants to determine their own measure of AL proficiency. Although a few of the participants did choose to measure their AL proficiency in comparison to a *native speaker*, the majority of participant responses related to what they can do with the language, not in comparison to an undefined native speaker.

6.4.3 Current Proficiency as Measured by Test Proficiency Scores

Although this thesis did not use language proficiency tests to assess participants’ AL proficiency, some participants had taken these tests previously and used those scores in describing their current AL proficiency. A few of the individual life histories of participants’ current proficiency are presented below. By allowing participants to share their stories in a qualitative method, they are given a voice in defining their own proficiency.

One participant, Joseph (AL Spanish / Brazilian Portuguese), specifically referenced his previous Oral Proficiency Interview (Oral Proficiency Interview, 2023) score. He said: “early on, before I did my graduate work in Spanish, and I was advanced mid [as assessed

on the AFTCL Oral Proficiency Interview], so I think I would be advanced high or higher.” Joseph had taken the OPI previously, but he believes his proficiency is higher now that he has studied further.

Other participants, Norman and Ruth (AL Swahili), referenced their rating of “Capable High,” which is a level of proficiency used in the Growing Participant Approach of ALA. They said they both reached this level of AL after three years. But, when asked how well they speak AL Swahili now, they said that they “speak fairly well, or we can communicate on just about anything. . . Now it's not so much our language that hinders us; it's like how we organize our thoughts, like we can, they can understand everything we say, but . . . right now it's learning how to think more like they do [and] order what we say.” Although Norman and Ruth report being able to communicate on “just about anything” they also note that they notice that their cultural barriers are what keep them from communicating more thoroughly, not necessarily grammatical or vocabulary knowledge.

Each of these participants used an objective measure of AL proficiency when describing their own AL proficiency. But they also added additional measures of their AL proficiency by discussing their further studies or their ability to communicate and understand their ALs. Although these participants were not given a language proficiency test to determine if their self-assessment corresponded to the language proficiency score, studies (Ma and Winke, 2019) have found that adults tend to accurately self-assess their AL proficiency.

6.4.4 Current Proficiency as Measured on a Numbered Scale

Another way participants measured their own proficiency was on a numbered scale. Some participants used a 5-point scale, some a 10-point scale, and others a 100% scale. Their life histories of their self-assessment of their AL proficiency are detailed below. Five (5) participants chose to use this numbered scale method to self-describe their current AL proficiency. Below are a few of their individual stories to highlight how participants describe their own AL proficiency.

Josephine (AL English) used the numbered scale to describe her improvement in her AL: “When I came [to the US], I . . . was not proficient. I was just able to communicate, but actual English I learned here with my friends. . . I think from 0 to 10, I would say, I'm maybe 6.”

Paul (AL English, Italian, French, Mandarin) responded to the question by differentiating between his multiple ALs: “I probably speak 8 in English. In Italian, I would say the same. In French. I would say a 7, probably. In Chinese, 4 or 5.” In responding to this question, Paul did compare himself to a *native speaker*. He said would “try to be very humble with this because, first of all, I'm talking to a native speaker of English.” When I asked him to clarify what a level 10 would be on his self-defined 10-point AL proficiency scale, he said that a 10 would be “sounding like you,” referring to me, the researcher and L1 speaker of English. Paul’s response converges with research that shows that proximity to L1 speakers influences self-assessment of proficiency. Peirce, *et al* (1993) in their study of the validity of self-assessment found that AL French participants who did not have an “authentic francophone peer standard by which to compare their own linguistic skills” did not assess their AL French proficiency in a way that corresponded to the objective language proficiency test. While Peirce, *et al* (1993) do not say the opposite could be true, in theory participants who do have “authentic [AL] peer standards by which to compare their own linguistic skills” are likely to self-assess their AL proficiency more accurately. Paul lives, works, and interacts in an environment of many “authentic” English speakers and has done the same with both his AL Italian and French. He also spends time chatting online with an “authentic [Mandarin] peer” which gives him a “standard by which to compare his own linguistic skills” For that reason, it would seem his self-assessment of AL English, French, Italian, and Mandarin should be objectively similar to any language proficiency exam he would take.

Anita (AL English) reported that she was not sure how to assess her AL proficiency: “I don't know maybe 6. I would say 5 or 6 or something I know I don't I don't think I am fluent, and I know I'm lazy of trying to pronounce not trying to pronounce things I I mean I could but I'm just lazy. I could do better.” Earlier in her interview, Anita explained the things she has gained by learning AL English including having a family and “finding a job [she] likes”, which is nuclear engineering. However, she also acknowledges that she could improve her pronunciation but that she has chosen not to. While I do not agree with her assessment that she is “lazy,” I do believe that her choice not to continue changing her pronunciation aligns with theories of andragogy. This theory popularized by Malcolm Knowles (1977) states, among other things, “Adults are oriented toward immediate application of learned knowledge” (Forrest & Peterson, 2006, p. 117). This claim means that adult learners must have a need for the information they are learning, or they will not

be motivated to learn. This theory of learning specifically uses the example of work as a motivation to learn: “Because most students learn in order to more effectively work, they are ready to learn about concepts that they can immediately apply in the workplace” (Forrest and Peterson, 2006, p. p. 120). However, even more relevant to Anita is that “conversely, [adult learners] will find little interest in ideas that are not relevant to them.” (Forrest and Peterson, 2006, p. p. 120). For Anita, she has already reached a level of AL proficiency that has afforded her a family and a job, so she may have simply lost interest in pursuing her AL further because she has already learned enough for immediate application.

Each of these participants used a numbered scale to measure their own proficiency, which is consistent with how students are often scored in school or how they rate things on a scale of 1-10. While I did not ask participants why they chose their method of AL ratings, it seems likely they chose this numbered scale system as it is a common rating system both in formal educational settings, in quantitative data collection, and in common popular feedback questions.

6.4.5 Current Proficiency as Measured by “Can Do” Statements

The majority of participants (16) used “can do” statements to measure their current AL proficiency (Table 4.7, p. 105) Rather than describing their AL proficiency by a test score or a numbered score, participants explained their AL proficiency by what they can do in their AL.

This method of measuring language proficiency by such guidelines is actually common in the field of language acquisition. In fact, the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) uses can-do statements to measure language proficiency. In collaboration with the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages and drawing on their previous “proficiency guidelines” and their “performance descriptors for language learners,” ACTFL created a framework for language learners to “reflect the continuum of growth in communication skills” (p. 1). ACTFL’s (2020) Can-Do statements were designed to be used as follows:

- Describe what learners can do consistently over time
- Help learners set goals as they progress along the proficiency continuum.

- Be a starting point for self-assessment, goal-setting, and the creation of rubrics for performance based grading (p. 4)

According to ACTFL (2020), by using the can-do statements, “learners set learning goals and regularly chart their own progress. Through reflection, they identify what it takes to advance their language and intercultural” (p. 8). Although I purposefully did not give participants a framework for measuring their own AL proficiency, sixteen (16) participants described their AL proficiency by describing what they can do with the language. Rather than listing an objective test score or even a numbered scale, participants responded to the interview question by stating what they can do in their AL. Participants described multiple measures as shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Participants' Can-Do Statements

<i>Numbers</i>	<i>What participants can do with their AL</i>	<i>Discussion</i>
7	Can converse/communicate	See 6.4.6.1 for discussion
5	Fluent	See 6.4.6.1 for discussion
4	Can understand/be understood	Ann (AL English): "As long as we can understand each other and communicate, I think it's fine."
		Anita (AL English): "Enough for people to understand "
		Carol (AL English): "I can have this conversation here with you"
		Norman/Ruth (AL Swahili): "We can communicate just on anything that we run up against."
2	Can preach	Joseph: "I preached in [AL] Portuguese; I lived in [AL] Portuguese for three years."
		John (AL Spanish) also preached in his AL Spanish without the use of a translator. "[AL] Spanish was a "crapshoot" and that it is "way less now."
2	Can get around	James (AL Mandarin): "[If necessary] I would be able to get around ."
		Janet (AL Spanish): "I can definitely get around well."
1	Can pass US Citizenship test	Amy (AL English): "So I just did my [US] citizenship last week. . . and I got worn in for my citizenship [including the English language interview]."
1	Can translate	Janet (AL Spanish): "I've translated a lot for them and that's always a boost in my confidence whenever I translate."
1	Can be mistaken for an L1 speaker	See 6.4.6.2

As demonstrated in Section 6.4.5 (p. 167), most participants did not measure their AL proficiency by their nearness to or distance from the native speaker. Instead, they related their AL proficiency to what they can do with their AL. The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (2020) published a list of “can-do” statements to assist language learners and their teachers in assessing AL proficiency. Their list of proficiency measurements includes the statement “I can communicate,” “I can interact,” and “I can converse.” Many of the participants described their own AL proficiency in a similar manner. The following section will discuss the most frequently used “can-do” statements. It will present individual stories of AL participants, in relation to what they *can do* in their AL.

6.4.6 Individual Stories of AL Proficiency

While the previous section quantified participant responses, the following sections will give more in depth details of each individual person’s measure of AL proficiency.

6.4.6.1 Communication, Comprehensibility, and Fluency. Participants overwhelmingly used *communication*, *comprehensibility*, and *fluency* to describe their current AL proficiency. Although these were separate codes, they all suggest that participants can understand and be understood in their AL. Importantly, the ability to converse or communicate in an AL was the DOL of more than half of the participants. (See Chapter 5, p. 118). As described in 4.4.2, fourteen (14) participants said their DOLs were to be “fluent” or to reach “fluency.” Not all participants who said they desired to reach fluency rate their current language proficiency as “fluent.” However, the main key is that they desire to use it to communicate with others in the AL. Therefore, participants’ self-determined level of AL proficiency seems to correspond to their original language proficiency goals. Many of those participants who sought to communicate with people in their AL successfully reached their DOL of learning enough of the AL to communicate with speakers of the AL. A few of the individual responses of participants who said they “can communicate/converse” as their current AL proficiency are detailed below.

With regards to their own ALA proficiency, some participants used *fluency* to describe their ability to speak their AL. Research shows that fluency and, relatedly, comprehensibility are both more about being understood by listeners rather than the speakers’ specific linguistic intuition (Derwing and Munro, 2013; Suzuki and Kormos, 2020). By this definition, participants who rate themselves as fluent perceive their AL

proficiency as able to communicate with speakers of their AL. Despite using the word “fluent” or “fluency” in their DOLs or current proficiency, participants desired the ability to communicate effectively as their primary goal. The DOL of fluency does not require speaking like a *native speaker*. Similarly, participants who rated themselves as “fluent” do not rate themselves as having *native-like* proficiency, but according to research such as Derwing and Munro (2013) and Suzuki and Kormos (2020), *native-like* proficiency is not required for comprehensibility. The following life histories serve as a spotlight on individual participant stories. The first spotlight is Angela, whose quote headlined this chapter, who measures her AL proficiencies differently for each AL. The second is Anita, whose DOL was simply to get a good grade, and, despite not considering herself *fluent*, lives and works in her AL.

Angela (AL German, Spanish) also measured her proficiency by fluency but also by what she is not, which according to her is a *native speaker*: “I speak German fluently, but not like a native speaker.” She described her proficiency in very specific terms as well:

“Getting around with my level of German. . .that's all I really want . . . I don't need to be fabulous. [An L1 German speaker] said your German is *verdammt gut*, which is ‘damn good.’ . . . If that's gonna be your proficiency level, it's a pretty good one. . . I'm at the *verdammt gut* level. What is it (Spanish faculty) always says to me? ‘You speak *bastante*,’ and I'm like yeah that’s my level in Spanish.”

Although these measures of AL proficiency will not ever be used as an objective measure of language proficiency, they have a clear meaning in that Angela is well-understood by her peers who speak her AL.

In a similar way to Angela, Anita (AL English) measured her AL proficiency by what she is not, which according to her is fluent. She stated, “I don't think I am fluent, and I know I'm lazy not trying to pronounce things I mean I could, but I'm just lazy. I could do better.” Anita was one of the participants whose DOL was to get a good grade. Since her adolescence when she set her DOL of earning a good grade, she has reached an AL English proficiency level in which she can live, work, and communicate in a primarily English-speaking space. As Derwing and Munro (2009) argue, “Comprehensibility is more important in successful L2 communication than nativelikeness or accentedness” (in Suzuki and Kormos, 2020, p. 144). Furthermore, in their longitudinal study of L1

Mandarin / AL English speakers, many participants did not continue to improve their “comprehensibility, fluency or accent” even after living immersed in AL English for 7 years. They claim that the participants whose L1 Mandarin may have non-linguistic reasons for increasing these components of the language:

“The Mandarin speakers overall showed greater ties to their L1 community, more reluctance to initiate conversations as a result of lower self-confidence in their English abilities, and fewer opportunities to interact in English” (Derwing and Munro, 2013, p. 179).

Anita’s self-assessed current proficiency level of “not fluent” is hers to claim; however, the important key is that Anita believes she could improve her pronunciation if she chooses to. Unlike L1A when participants do not choose to learn, in ALA, participants can choose to pursue further language proficiency if desired. See 6.5.6 (p. 178) and Table 4.9 (p. 108) more details regarding further ALA goals.

Another important note is that the ACTFL (2020) Can-Do statements do not use the word “fluent” to describe AL speaking proficiency. In fact, none of the statements relate to accent, fluidity, or pronunciation. Derwing and Munro (2013, p. 167) define fluency as “listeners’ perceptions of the flow of the speaker’s language output, for example, whether there are frequent pauses, false starts, or other dysfluencies.” Suzuki and Kormos, (2020, p. 146) define it as “fluency is the interlocutor’s inference of the efficiency of linguistic processing system underlying the given speech.” However, through the use of a life histories approach, participants were not given a list of levels of proficiencies to choose from in self-defining their own proficiency. Therefore, when determining their own AL proficiency, participants were able to give more context to their responses.

6.4.6.2 Can be mistaken for an L1. One participant did, however, say her current AL proficiency is that she “can be mistaken for a *native speaker*.” One participant, Rose (AL French and Spanish), said she measured their proficiency by how other French speakers perceived her AL French. Rose said: “when I, I had a French speaker who asked me one time, so where are you from, and I said, Louisiana and he said, No, I meant not where are you living now where you from in France?” Her response describes a level of AL proficiency in which a native speaker thinks she is a *native speaker* from elsewhere. Rose is one participant who described a reference to speaking like a *native speaker* but

without saying it as directly. She measured her AL proficiency based on listener judgment, which is a common way to determine one's AL proficiency level.

These self-described measures of AL proficiency converge with research that shows that adult AL learners may have DOLs and AL proficiency that is not to speak like a native speaker. King (2017, p. 34) claims that although some adult language learners have “the aim. . . of reaching near native proficiency. Meanwhile, the reality is that people of all ages. . . are managing to communicate across cultures and languages because they want to and need to.” The discussion in Chapter 5 demonstrate that some participants do seek to speak like a *native speaker*. The discussion in this current chapter demonstrate that some participants do measure their own AL proficiency by the *native speaker*. However, this discussion also demonstrates that most participants do not seek native-like proficiency and are still able to communicate with others and can do many other tasks with their AL.

In the next section, I will discuss Theme 3 and how the findings respond to Research Question 3 and challenge the assumption that *native-like* proficiency is the only measure of AL success.

6.5 Discussion of Theme 3

The data elicited from participants in this thesis revealed diverse measures of individual AL proficiency. The data revealed that participants most frequently measure their AL proficiency by what they can do with the language rather than by measuring their proficiency by their nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. Through discussion of participants' individual measures of proficiency, it was noted that many participants current AL proficiency correlated to the DOLs discussed in Chapter 5. In analyzing the participants' interview data regarding RQ2, a third theme emerged. This theme is as follows:

- Adults can succeed at reaching or exceeding their additional language goals.

Previously in this chapter, the data from participants demonstrated the diversity within self-described AL proficiency levels. In this upcoming section, I will discuss the participants' life histories, which displays their self-described AL proficiency levels and their determination of if they were able to reach their DOLs.

To respond to the question about whether or not their current proficiency level matched their desired outcome level, I asked participants if they had reached their original goals. Essentially, nineteen (19) of the twenty-six (26) participants said they either reached or exceeded their desired outcome level. Although there were some who did not reach their DOLs, the majority of participants did. Those who did not reach or exceed their DOLs clarified their answers in multiple ways. Their individual voices add nuance to the field of linguistics, which is often not an opportunity adult AL learners are afforded. The following sections will first describe the participant responses in which they did not quite reach or will never reach their DOLs. The sections after that will show how participants describe reaching or exceeding their DOLs. Their responses are also nuanced as they share their individual life histories in relation to their ALA experience.

6.5.1 Current Proficiency and DOLs.

As was discussed thoroughly in Chapter 5, adult AL learners have diverse DOLs and do not always seek to speak like a *native speaker*. Participants were asked if they had met their original language goals or their desired outcome levels (DOLs). Their responses are available in Table 4.8 (p. 107). A few of the participants' stories of reaching, exceeding, never reaching, or not quite reaching their goals are highlighted below.

6.5.2 Never Will.

Four (4) participants responded to the interview question by saying they “never” will reach their original goals or that they were either “ongoing” or impossible.

For example, Kenneth (AL English) responded that he is always learning, even in his “native Arabic” saying, “I think, for language there is no fixed level, so there's always better and better . . . so, even in my native Arabic I'm learning still a lot of things.” What Kenneth acknowledged here is that languages are always fluid, and there is always more to learn even in one's primary or first language. His recognition of continued learning even in his primary language is consistent with Hartshorne *et al*'s (2018) finding that “it takes both native and nonnative speakers longer to reach their ultimate level of attainment than has been previously assumed,” though Kenneth and Hartshorne's definition of ultimate level of attainment may differ. Hartshorne *et al* (2018) does recognize that little “is known about how long non-native speakers continue to improve on the target language” and suggests that it “may continue for a couple of decades” (p. 269).

However, Paul (AL English/French/Italian/Mandarin), responded that he has “always been very exigent with myself, and my goals are always near-native or native.” As one of the only participants to answer that his goal is to be “near-native or native,” he is also one of the few who will never reach their original goal. Paul had hoped to rid himself of his accent when speaking English: “With English, I think to my dismay (because I don't think I'm improving anymore) I have not been able to erase [my accent] completely. So that's a bit sad, but I don't think that that I'll be able to go beyond that.”

Paul does have different goals with French and Italian though, which he has met, because he says “I have checked for a fact that when I go [to France or Italy] and I spend a couple of weeks, I just regain it like this [snaps fingers]. So I think, . . .since. . . my future plans, do not include moving to a French or an Italian-speaking country, I would say I've reached my goals of being able to understand all the media that I need, and to have a conversation with somebody [in French or Italian] if the need arrives.” What is important here is that Paul has different goals for different languages and different purposes. He lives in the United States, functioning well in his additional language English, and has not reached his goal of erasing his accent, yet he is satisfied with his French and Italian despite his accent. While the primary argument of this thesis is that adult language learners do not always seek to reach *native-like* proficiency, some adults do strive for this level of AL proficiency.

6.5.3 “Not Quite” Reached DOLs.

Some participants say they have increased their AL proficiency, but they have “not quite” reached their DOLs. For example, Shirley (AL Spanish) responded both “yes and no. I think I would love to always be better but that's just who I am as an individual or striving and challenging myself to be better, but I also have come a lot further than probably a lot of people who come from my background so I am very proud of what I've learned and what I've accomplished and the amount of diversity that I have been exposed to.” Shirley recognized that she set very high goals for herself, specifically to simply “always be better,” but she also acknowledged that she takes pride in the language learning accomplishments she has made.

Similarly, Thom (AL Japanese) reported that he has “not quite” met his DOLs. He explained that he had wanted to learn more of the “hiragana” writing in Japanese. He said “I wish I actually spent time studying” but that if given the opportunity he could

“definitely” reach his DOLs. It is important to note that Thom was clear that he did not reach his DOLs because he did not try, not because he tried and failed. He did not reach his DOLs not because of his AoA, the critical period, or brain plasticity. Instead, he simply learned the amount of AL Japanese to do what he wanted to do while there, which was to connect with people (Section 4.4.1, p. 96).

These participants who either never will or have not quite reached their DOLs acknowledge their reasons for not reaching their own goals. By asking participants first to identify their goals and then to determine if they had reached those goals, this thesis gives nuance to the individual experiences of adult AL learners. Much of the past and current literature in the field of linguistics does not ask participants about their goals or if they have reached them. This method of studying ALA then groups all adult language learners into the false dichotomy of failure or success rather than exploring the varieties of goals and abilities of adult language learners.

6.5.4 Reached DOLs.

The majority of participants reported either reaching or exceeding their DOLs. Although they were asked to look back to their initial ALA starting point to remember their initial goals, participants answered the question confidently as they described successfully reaching or exceeding their DOLs. Much of the research in the field of linguistics focuses on what adult language learners cannot do in their AL. As reported in previous sections, many studies have focused on adults seeming inability to speak like a *native speaker*, making the assumption that this was the DOL of adult language learners. However, contrary to the field of research, when asked specifically if participants had reached their DOLs, most of them described either reaching or exceeding their DOLs. A few of their individual stories are detailed below.

One participant who reached their DOL, Arthur (AL Spanish/Portuguese), clarified that his goals were not related to the *native speaker*: “I’ve never said like goals like I want to be a native speaker [of AL Portuguese]. It never occurred to me to set a goal to be a native, like a near native or highly proficient. It was always like I want to be able to ask my in laws like what they thought about me and [his spouse] getting married or be able to just hang out with them and let them know that I care about them and want to be a part of a family. Same thing with the Guatemala community and that’s it [for AL Spanish]. It’s. Those are my goals.”

Another participant who reached their DOL, Angela (AL German/Spanish), responded “definitely” when responding to whether she reached her DOLs. She clarified that she is “closer on the [AL] German [in comparison to AL Spanish].” She continues saying, “I’m pretty confident with my German.” She describes her proficiency as “I speak German fluently, but not like a native speaker.” Angela explained that she has not yet reached her DOLs in AL Spanish but that it is “good” because she has “places to go” regarding improving her AL Spanish in the future.

Others responded saying they did reach their DOLs but that the goals have either changed over the years or that they see opportunity to continue learning. For example, Alice (AL English) said her goals have shifted a bit from what she expected: “I think I reached my goal in English, even though it’s different, than what I thought originally it would look like after living here for years.” She says that she imagined that she “would not have an accent” but “that changed” and now she is proud of her accent. She says that even though her goals have changed she “can you know read, write, and communicate and if I don’t, something doesn’t make a sense to me, I can ask, and it can be explained to me, and I get it like right away.” She discusses how despite her changing goals she still has reached a level of AL ability that she is satisfied.

Another participant, Ann (AL English), says that she has reached her original goals, but that she knows there are always more goals to reach for: “So I think the goals have been met, but like we talked about it’s a journey and you always set next goals. I think it’s sufficient to be able to work. How to live life here . . . when you do some of these comparisons it’s like, Wow, you know, you really came a long way to meet those goals.” For Ann, she has had many accomplishments and reached many goals in her AL but desires to always have further goals for her AL.

Each of these participants described not only that they reached their DOLs but how. In studies where participants are not asked if they have reached their DOLs, they do not have a chance to determine their own success in reaching said goals. In studies where participants responses are generalized, they also do not have the opportunity to give nuance to their individual life histories with regards to ALA.

6.5.5 Exceeded DOLs.

Many participants, when asked if they had reached their DOLs, responded that not only had they successfully reached them, but they exceeded their DOLs. A few of their individual stories are spotlighted below.

One participant, John (AL Spanish), responded as follows:

I would think I might have exceeded it. I think I would have capped it earlier but just over time and I think it exceeds it because you kind of see a point where you're going to reach the once you kind of cross the threshold into fluency, your growth of vocabulary and all it just comes super quick because now all you're doing is starting to add on, like the small pieces. It's not these massive chunks you're trying to gain.

Similarly, Norman (AL Swahili) said he also learned more AL proficiency than anticipated: "I think that I probably learned more than I ever thought I would. But still not as much as I would have hoped."

These participants not only reached their goals, but they also exceeded what they had hoped to do in their AL. They were able to successfully reach or exceed their DOLs.

6.5.6 Further Proficiency Goals.

Many participants reported having reached or exceeded their DOLs, and many reported having or not having further proficiency goals. To determine if participants have any further proficiency goals, past their current proficiency, I asked them if they had an additional proficiency goal. Many participants, whether they have reached their DOLs or not, do have future proficiency goals in their ALs, including different future proficiency goals for different ALs. Their responses are reported in Table 4.9 (p. 108) and in more detail below in Table 6.3 (p. 179).

Table 6.3 Further Proficiency Goals	
Josephine (AL English)	"Making my writing better"
Joseph (AL Spanish)	"Constantly wanting to improve there just so I can be the best I can be at my job future-wise"
Joseph (AL Brazilian Portuguese)	"Fulbright grant to Brasil and maybe also somewhere like Ecuador"
Angela (AL German / AL Spanish)	"I would like to feel better about my Spanish speaking abilities"
Teresa (AL Spanish)	Maybe would like to pursue medical translation
Ruth (AL Swahili)	"Understand more native communication. . . I have some cultural holes"
Natalie (AL Italian)	"Improve spoken Italian"
Natalie (AL Spanish)	"Always want to improve my writing"
Paul (AL English, French, Italian, Mandarin)	"I am very aware that at this point of my life, and not being able to move to China for, like I don't know 5 years, it will be very, very hard to reach fluency, and near-native command, but I will try as much as I can"
Elizabeth (AL English)	Academic writing, speaking

Shirley (AL Spanish)	"Continually want to improve and get better"
Rose (AL French)	"Writing though not necessary"
Rose (AL Spanish)	Ability to tutor, learn vocabulary in more domains
Alice (AL English)	Write better
Alice (AL Russian)	Learn the keyboard better
Alice (AL French)	"[Visiting] the Congo is like the big goal."
Arthur (AL Portuguese)	"I don't want to sound like an idiot. . .so I would like to get my academic ease a little bit higher there too"
Arthur (AL Spanish)	"Get much more comfortable again"
Elaine (AL Spanish)	"Build confidence in my listening and comprehension"

The chart above gives nuance to participants individual life histories of their ALA experience. Many have reached a point in their life wherein they have reached their DOLs but as they grow they identify further goals they have in the language.

6.5.7 No further proficiency goals

Not only do many participants feel satisfied with their current proficiency, but many of them do not have further proficiency goals. Fifteen (15) participants responded they have no further proficiency goals. Their responses are as follows in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 No Further Goals

Nancy (AL English)	"I feel pretty comfortable."
Angela (AL German / Spanish)	"I really don't need to be fabulous."
James (AL Mandarin)	"It's unrealistic to think I would unless I'm over there"
Carol (AL English)	"I don't think so."
John (AL Spanish)	"I don't think I need anything more."
Anita (AL English)	"I hit a plateau."
Ann (AL English)	"I think it's sufficient to be able to work, to live life here"
Norman (AL Swahili)	"It's not so much learning more Swahili. It's more along the cultural side of thing, cultural lifestyle"
Kenneth (AL English)	"It's not the language itself. . . the issue is the writing style"
Paul (AL English)	"Not for English, no, and if I did it wouldn't be a professional or a practical reason. It would be more like a hobby, or like leisure time."
Paul (AL French/	"My future plans do not include moving to a French or an Italian-speaking country, so I would say I've

Italian)	reached my goals of being able to understand all the media that I need and to have a conversation with somebody if the need arrives.”
Joan (AL English)	"I don't have a specific goal for learning more, but every single day I learn"
Amy (AL English)	"I don't think so, not for [AL] English specifically" but she may want to learn [AL] American Sign Language.
Linda (AL Japanese)	Maybe to get a Fulbright, but maybe not
Thom (AL Japanese)	Has “goals, but probably not plans”

Because adult language learners must choose to begin learning an AL, unlike children who do not choose, arguably adults also can choose when to stop learning an AL once they have reached a proficiency level at which they are able to do the things they wish to do with the language and/or have gained what they wished to gain by learning an AL. The choice to learn and when to stop learning concurs with the learning theory of andragogy which states that adult learners must know the reason for learning and must see immediate application for what they are learning (Forrest and Peterson, 2006).

Additionally, at some point, some learners reached a point where they believe they have plateaued with regards to the grammar and vocabulary but that they need additional learning in the cultural parts of the language that are not as easy to learn. For example, Ruth and Norman report that although they can “communicate on just about anything” the parts of the language they need to improve in are more cultural than grammatical.

Many participants had additional DOLs after they had reached their initial DOLs. Others were satisfied with their current level of proficiency and have no intent to learn more. The goal of this individual life histories approach is to elicit responses from participants that represent their ALA experience in detail.

6.6 Addressing RQ2

The purpose of the interview questions to elicit information was to address Research Question 2, which says the following:

- In what ways do adult AL learners assess their AL proficiency? Regardless, by what measures, do adults assess their own AL success?

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that adult AL learners assess their AL proficiency in multiple ways including can-do statements and personal achievements. Often times, their own proficiency correlates to whether they had reached their AL goals. Most importantly, the discussion presented here shows that many adult AL learners do not consider native-like proficiency to be the only measure of AL success. An important aspect of this present study is that while many studies show how often adult AL learners fail, they themselves fail to give voice to individuals to allow them to share their own unique ALA experiences. By allowing participants to define their own proficiency and

their own ability to reach DOLs, this thesis challenges the assumptions of *native-like* proficiency as the only measure of AL success.

6.7 Challenging the assumption of *native-like* proficiency as the only measure of success

As shown in Section 2.2.3 (p. 39) and in Section 6.2 (p. 159), the field of linguistics assumes that *native-like* proficiency is the only measure of AL success. This assumption is based on two additional assumptions. The past and current literature assumes the existence of a homogenous *native speaker* (Section 2.2.1, p. 18) and that all adult language learners desire to speak like a *native speaker* (Chapter 5, p. 118). This leads to the assumption that adult language learners can only be successful at ALA if they reach *native-like* proficiency. The discussion in this chapter challenges this assumption by asking participants to define their own level of AL proficiency and their own ability to successfully reach their desired outcome levels.

The data elicited from participants in this thesis shows that adult language learners actually have varied measures of AL proficiency, few of which are referential to the native speaker. The findings also indicate that participants can successfully reach or exceed their DOLs.

Most participants measured their AL proficiency by the ability to communicate in the AL and other professional and personal achievements. As demonstrated by the findings in this chapter, adult language learners measure their own success unrelated to the *native speaker* and instead to what they can do and with the language. Additional measures of defining ALA success will be discussed in Chapter 7.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from participant data concerning the assumption that the only measure of AL success is *native-like* proficiency. It is important to note that a few participants did measure their AL proficiency as nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. The claim of this thesis is that not all adult language learners measure their AL proficiency and, specifically success, by the *native speaker* yardstick. The data elicited from participants in this thesis suggest that participants' diverse measures of AL proficiency are not always compared to the native speaker as tends to happen in research in the field of linguistics. The findings presented in this chapter suggest that adult

language learners can successfully reach or exceed their desired outcome levels in their AL. This challenges the notion that the only way to success in ALA is to reach *native-like* proficiency.

The use of individual interviews allowed participants to share their life histories of their ALA experiences, which produced ample data. Upon primary analysis using Nvivo, a CAQDAS, consistent themes emerged that suggested that adults can reach or exceed their desired outcome levels, despite not self-determining their AL proficiency as *native-like*. A secondary analysis of the data using corpus analysis in Sketch Engine confirmed that participants had varied methods of measuring their current AL proficiency, with only a few using the native speaker in their AL language self-assessment. Collectively, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that adult language learners have diverse AL proficiency and are able to reach or exceed their desired outcome levels.

One theme that emerged from analysis of the data was presented in this chapter. These findings demonstrate that adult language learners do not always measure their AL proficiency by their nearness to or distance from the native speaker. These findings also suggest that adult language learners can reach their own AL proficiency goals, which are not always *native-like* proficiency.

The final portions of this chapter demonstrate how the findings respond to the research question and challenge the assumption that the only measure of ALA success is native-like proficiency. The data from participant interviews overwhelmingly demonstrates that adults can succeed at reaching or exceeding their DOLs. Although “there is a large literature showing that adult L2 learners, in contrast to children, often fail to acquire native-like competence in the second language” (Dąbrowska *et al.*, 2020, p. 1), the findings of this thesis suggest that adults do not fail to reach their own DOLs. Further discussion of ALA success will be detailed in Chapter 7.

These findings converge with previous studies regarding the value of self-assessment. Ma and Winke (2019) and Winke *et al* (2023) claim that many adult language learners could assess their own AL proficiency and that their self-assessment often correlated to their objective OPIc language proficiency scores. Additional studies have developed similar studies to support this claim (Panadero, *et al*, 2017; Furtoso & Ferreira, 2018; Boud *et al*, 2013). This thesis did not use an objective language proficiency test to confirm accuracy

of participants' self-assessment because it was not relevant to this study. Participants in this study were given the "responsibility for their own learning" (Brantmeier *et al.*, 2012, p. 15), which contributed to the aim of this thesis.

This thesis extends current research by using a qualitative method in a field that often uses quantitative methods (Coppeters, 1987; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Hartshorne *et al.*, 2018). This thesis uses a life histories approach in order to "treat language learners as 'people', or as 'agents', . . .to treat them as individuals, albeit within a social conception of individuality" (Benson, 2019, p. 65). By allowing them to define their own proficiency and success in reaching their DOLs, participants were given agency in their own ALA experience. Although adult ALA motivations are commonly discussed in the field of linguistics, no studies to my knowledge have asked participants if they have successfully reached their goals that motivated them to begin ALA initially.

This chapter underscores the need to allow participants to tell their own life histories. It underscores the need to approach adult AL proficiency from a more individualized approach. A more individualized approach allows adults to define their own proficiency by what they can do in the language and can define their own success by reaching their DOLs. Because adult language learners must consciously choose to begin learning an AL, they should also have agency in defining their own success, unrelated to the nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*.

Chapter 5 discussed the first theme that emerged and responded to Research Question 2. Chapter 7 will discuss the fourth theme that emerged and will respond to Research Question 3. Together, these themes challenge the *native-like speaker myth* and the false dichotomy of failure and success in ALA through the use of the *native speaker* as the standard measure of failure or success.

CHAPTER 7:

“Beyond what I expected”: Attainable Measures of Success

“I far exceeded my expectations how much I could learn in a year.”

- James, AL Mandarin

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the fourth and final theme that emerged upon analyzing the individual life histories of participants who learned an additional language after the age of 12. The theme discussed here is as follows:

- Adults do not always fail at ALA; instead, they have varied measures of AL success, which are not always measured by nearness to *native-like* proficiency.

This chapter will address the attainable measures of success as defined by the adult language learners who were interviewed for this thesis. It will discuss the various measures by which adult AL learners define their own AL proficiency and its relation to reaching their DOLs and their personal measure of AL success.

To briefly recap the discussion thus far, upon analysis of the data, four themes emerged. The first two themes were discussed in Chapter 5 (p. 118) and regarded the desired outcome levels of adult language learners. The third theme, which was discussed in Chapter 6 (p. 158), revolved around individual adult language learner’s ability to assess their own AL proficiency and to reach their DOLs. These themes in combination with the fourth theme discussed in this chapter challenge the *native-like speaker myth*.

The theme discussed in this chapter will challenge the assumption of an objective measure of ALA success. This chapter will address Research Question 3, which is as follows:

- If additional language acquisition success is achieved by reaching their DOL, can adults language learners be successful in ALA?

This chapter looks at the methods adult language learners use to define their own ALA success. It discusses the findings that suggests that when adult AL success is measured by reaching individual DOLs that many adults language learners can be successful. It presents evidence of attainable measures of success in ALA, demonstrating that adults do

not always fail at ALA, challenging the assumption that adults always fail at ALA (Bley-Vroman, 2009; Hartshorne *et al*, 2018).

This chapter will include a brief summary of the literature relevant to the assumption of an objective measure of ALA success (Section 7.2). In Sections 7.3, I present the interview questions that were designed to respond to the RQ3. In Section 7.4, I will discuss the findings that suggests that adults measure their ALA success in various ways. In Section 7.5, I will discuss theme 4, which suggests that adults can successfully reach their own ALA goals. I will present a discussion of the role of future proficiency goals in relation to ALA success. In Sections 7.6 and 7.7, I report how the findings address Research Question 3 and challenge the assumption of an objective measure of ALA success.

7.2 Background

The research question addressed in this chapter sought to challenge the assumption of the existence of an objective measure of ALA success. The literature surrounding this assumption is fully detailed in Section 2.2.4 (p. 43). In brief, it claims that adult language learners almost always “lack success” (Bley-Vroman, 1990; Hartshorne *et al*, 2018).

This research has contributed significantly to what is known about how people acquire languages and how well they do so. However, many studies make the assumption that success can only be measured by nearness to or distance from the *native speaker* (eg. Coppieters, 1987; Birdsong, 1992; Ioup *et al*, 1996; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Saito, 2015). However, the idea of success and failure in ALA is a false dichotomy. Adult language learners have varied measures of success in relation to their desired outcome levels, not necessarily related to their nearness to or distance from the *native speaker* and not necessarily measured objectively.

These studies tend to create standards to be met and objectives by which language learners are measured. Some studies even state that adults “lack success” (Bley-Vroman, 1990), that they are “incapable of learning a new language” (Hartshorne, 2018, p. 273), that “nativelike level [of ALA] is impossible” (Birdsong, 2018, p. 4). But, in much of the most influential literature in the field of linguistics, participants were not asked if they considered themselves successful (Johnson and Newport, 1989; Clahsen and Felser, 2006; Birdsong, 2018; Flege, 2018; Bylund *et al.*, 2021).

In contrast, participants in this thesis were asked their definition of ALA success and then asked if they considered themselves successful. Their responses demonstrated that, to them, ALA success is more nuanced than the false dichotomy of success and failure suggested in past and current ALA literature.

This current chapter asked participants to define their own measure of success. They were asked if they would consider themselves a success if it were defined as reaching their DOLs. I will discuss the findings and demonstrate how they fit into and extend current ALA literature. Then, I will discuss how the data elicited from participants addresses the research question.

7.3 Interview Questions to Address RQ3

The theme discussed in this chapter emerged after analysis of the interview responses related to Research Question 3. A detailed explanation of the related data and the subsequent analysis can be found in Section 4.4.3 (p. 111). The following section will provide a discussion of the findings and the themes that emerged.

Participants were asked the following interview questions in order to address Research Question 3:

- How do you measure your success or lack of success in speaking your additional language? Have you reached the point of success in speaking your additional language?
- If the measure of AL speaking success were “to reach the goal that you set when you originally began learning,” would you consider yourself a success?

Although the following interview questions were discussed in Chapter 6 (p. 158), the following questions also address the research question and contribute to the development of the theme of ALA success.

- Do you believe you have reached your original goal for learning your additional language? If not, why not?
- If not, do you believe you can reach your original goal for learning your additional language?

The purpose of asking these interview questions is detailed in Section 3.5.3 (p. 90).

7.4 Self-Identified Measures of Success

In order to challenge the assumption of an objective measure of ALA success, I asked participants to define their own success and to determine if they had reached their ALA goals. I asked participants if reaching their DOLs would be considered successful at ALA. The interview questions allowed participants to describe their own individual measures of success rather than measuring it by an objective standard. Participants' responses detailed a varied measure of ALA success. The data from participant interviews suggested that adult language learners can be successful when allowed to define their own success, specifically in regard to reaching their desired outcome levels. The data elicited from participants and the subsequent data analyses can be found in Section 4.4.3 (p. 111). The following sections will discuss this theme and how the data addresses the research question.

To determine participants' individual measure of ALA success, I asked participants how they measure their success or lack of success in their AL. Their responses (Table 4.12, p. 112) include eight (8) different, and individualized, measures of success.

The majority of participants had specific measure of success based on what they were able to do with the language, not whether they had reached the level of an "the asymptotic performance of native speakers" (Hartshorne *et al*, 2018, p. 273). Furthermore, when their responses were put into a corpus (Table 4.13, p. 113), the most frequently spoken words include verbs that indicate desire to communicate such as "understand," "communicate," "say," "speak," and "conversation." None of the top 50 mostly-frequently used words in this response are *native* or *native-like*. Participant responses indicate that they measure success in multiple ways, which is not an option when participant success is measured using quantitative methods.

The interview data regarding adult ALA learners' measure of success and ability to succeed in ALA is contrary to some studies, which claim that "foreign language learning is often a difficult and ultimately unsuccessful task" (Bley-Vroman, 1990 p. 4) and that "not only is success in adult foreign language learning not guaranteed, complete success is extremely rare, or perhaps even non-existent" (p. 6). The findings of this thesis converge, however, with a study conducted by Dąbrowska *et al* (2020), which suggests that adult language learners can be successful. The study Dąbrowska *et al* (2020) found

that “adult L2 learners are very successful in acquiring some aspects of the target language: for example, “functional” grammar is clearly an area of strength. . . ignoring aspects of grammar which are acquired relatively quickly by adult learners gives us a very biased view of L2 attainment.” Contrary to earlier claims that adult ALA learners cannot succeed, the findings of this thesis along with other studies such as Dąbrowska *et al* (2020) suggest that in fact they can.

One reason that participants are often not asked for their definition of success is that many studies use quantitative methods, which do not give opportunity for individual life histories. For example, many studies solicit speech samples from participants in which they either read or answer questions (Flege, 1984; Derwing and Munro, 2013; Saito, 2015; Magne, *et al*, 2019). Participants are not in communication with others in a structured or naturalistic context. This method of data collection is valid, but it “gives a rather limited picture of one’s communicative skills” (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 63). Even more so, using this objective method determines a measure of AL success based on the *native speaker*. Some research on language proficiency tests has advocated for “more social views of language testing” (Roever and McNamara, 2006), wherein participants are asked to speak in a more naturalistic setting to see what participants can do with the language when in communication rather than in an objective, unrealistic testing setting.

The data elicited in this thesis allows participants to define their own success, adding nuance to the current research. Larsen-Freeman (2018) advocates for this “person-centered” frame of reference, suggesting “focusing on the individual learners in context.” Instead of grouping all adult language learners together to form the “universal learner,” this thesis focuses on the individual stories of language acquisition, which is often left out of quantitative studies. The following sections will detail the ways in which participants described their own ALA success.

7.4.1 Communication as Success

The primary measure of success indicated by participants is simply the ability to communicate. Sixteen (16) participants mentioned the ability to communicate with others in their AL is how they measure their ALA success.

Table 7.1 Communication as Success

How do you measure your success or lack of success in using your additional language(s)?	
Participant	Quote
Alice (AL English)	"I feel like I can you know read, write, and <u>communicate</u> , and if something doesn't make sense to me, I can ask, and it can be explained to me and I get it like right away."
Amy (AL English)	"The whole idea is to <u>communicate</u> . It's like <u>if I get my message across</u> , I think it communicated right."
Angela (AL German / Spanish)	"I mean it's really it's <u>all about communication</u> ."
Anita (AL English)	"If people who I talked <u>to understand me and understand what I'm trying to say</u> ."
Ann (AL English)	"As long as we can <u>understand</u> each other and <u>communicate</u> , I think it's fine. . . So I think it's been all successful you know even if there were, you know, hiccups or obstacles on the way. You power through."
Arthur (AL Spanish / Portuguese)	"My success is like <u>did I sound stupid? no? then, that's good</u> ."
Carol (AL English)	"I just can <u>communicate</u> ."
Elaine (AL Spanish)	"At a basic level, I'm always able to <u>communicate</u> what I need to communicate. I think in any language the ability to <u>communicate</u> what you need to say is paramount, so I feel like I'm highly successful in that way."

Elizabeth (AL English)	"I can <u>communicate</u> in a way that people can <u>understand</u> what I'm saying."
James (AL Mandarin)	"Success was <u>the ability to kind of bridge that language gap</u> with a lot of friends I had made who their English was very, very weak and so we just had a connection"
Joseph (AL Spanish / Portuguese)	"It really is just about can I <u>converse with the other person on the topics I want to converse on</u> . And I don't need to speak perfectly, and I don't need to sound like a native and I don't need to have perfect grammar or all the words, or anything. . . Just being able to <u>communicate</u> ."
Norman (AL Swahili)	"For me it's in my relationships. How they're going and <u>how I'm understood in my relationship or not understood.</u> "
Paul (AL English, French, Italian, Mandarin)	"I felt I had reached a satisfactory point when I was able to be <u>conversational with a native speaker</u> that did not necessarily know my language. So, for example, when somebody random in Virginia, I can have a conversation with them, and that person is not a language teacher or an academic or whatever. Then I thought, Okay, I got it."
Rose (AL French)	"I could achieve what I was after just simply by being able to <u>communicate</u> thoroughly in the language."
Shirley (AL Spanish)	"The ability to have a <u>conversation</u> and for people to understand."
Teresa (AL Spanish)	"I measure my success by how I feel about how <u>conversation</u> goes."

Although the desire to connect with others in communication is thoroughly addressed in Chapter 5 (p. 118), Table 7.1 demonstrates that upon reaching the ability to communicate in their AL participants consider themselves successful. As discussed in Section 5.8.1 (p. 139), participants' desired outcome levels are often to communicate with speakers of their AL. However, adult language learners not only desire to communicate but also measure success by their ability to communicate in their AL as shown in Table 7.1. Although participants did not specify the topics or complexity of their communication ability, they do make clear that their success is measured by ability to communicate not by speaking like a *native speaker*.

Some studies, however, do not consider ability to communicate in an AL to be a measure of success. In their 1994 study, Ioup *et al.* (1994) show that on a rare occasion adults can “apparently acquire” native-like proficiency in an AL. However, in their study, they compare one “successful” adult learner (Julie) to an “unsuccessful” adult language learner (“Wes” from Schmidt, 1983). They state that, “other than in his ultimate attainment, Wes resembles Julie. He is *socially outgoing* and *obtains abundant comprehensible input* and *error feedback*. He employs the learning strategies of the good language learner. These characteristics he shares with Julie; yet Julie was successful, Wes was not. (p. 91, emphasis mine). In fact, as Ioup *et al* (1994) explain,

Wes . . . normally ignored grammatical corrections from native speakers. His primary concern was the content of the message, and he employed a number of communication strategies to help him when his inadequate syntax led to misunderstandings. . . But the fact remains, he did not consciously note grammatical distinctions and manipulate them; therefore, he did not acquire them. (p. 92)

While the authors have some suggestions on why he did not acquire these parts of grammar, the issue remains that Wes may have reached his DOL of communicating a specific message, which he may have considered successful ALA. While this study was foundational for the theories of the critical or sensitive period of ALA and what adults are capable of doing in ALA, it also did not ask Wes if he considered himself successful. The tests he underwent showed he did not perform as well as a *native speaker*, but in automatically equating *native-like proficiency* with success, Wes was unable to decide for

himself if he was successful at ALA. If his goal was simply to be “socially outgoing” and he reached that DOL, then he could potentially be considered a success rather than “not.”

The following section will report the individualized measures of success as stated in participants’ voices.

7.4.2 Mistaken for a Native Speaker

Two (2) participants reported that being mistaken for a *native speaker* of their AL was one way they measured their AL success. James (AL Mandarin) explains a situation in which he was living in China and needed to make a request via phone in Mandarin. When the person came to fulfill the request, they assumed James had a Chinese roommate who had made the phone call due to his Mandarin speaking abilities. James considered himself successful when he realised an L1 Mandarin speaker, saying “it was really satisfying” that they didn’t know they were AL Mandarin speakers.

Despite the fact that being mistaken for a *native speaker* is often a nearly impossible ALA achievement, some still do not consider this to be successful. Ioup *et al* (1994, p. 81) state this directly:

Having a good ear or being able to pass as a native speaker is not enough to qualify one as a native speaker. Nor does it give information on the characteristics of the learner's internal knowledge of the language. More important is an evaluation of the L2 learner's underlying linguistic competence. Very proficient learners may appear to be nativelike because they have no need to use constructions that manifest subtle points of the grammar unknown to.

However, this thesis argues that if an adult language learner reaches or exceeds their DOLs, whether it be to speak like a *native speaker* or not, they should be considered successful in ALA.

Dąbrowska *et al* (2020, p. 10) claims that adult language learners can be “very successful” in ALA. But they add that “another important point to bear in mind is that the fact that a high proportion of L2 learners achieved scores within the native speaker range does not necessarily entail that they processed the sentences in the same way as native speakers.” However, this demonstrates that when the measure of success is not to speak like a *native speaker*, adult language learners can, in fact, be successful.

7.4.3 Earning a Career as Success.

Two participants described their own ALA success in terms of reaching their career goals. Kenneth (AL French/English) and Anita (AL English) both consider having a career in which they must use their AL to be a success. Kenneth, who is a university professor, explains:

When the students understand actually what I'm saying that's a success. When there's an issue in my pronunciation that prevents them from understanding, actually that's a failure. So, typically I don't have issues with that so they understand what I'm saying typically.

He goes on to explain that he is “about to be tenured at the university,” which could not happen if he did not have reached a successful level of AL English proficiency. Anita (AL English) also refers to getting a job as a nuclear engineer, thanks to her successful AL English proficiency.

7.4.4 Other Measures of Success

Participants had multiple other individualized measures of AL success. These additional measures of success are detailed below in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2 Other Measures of Success

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Measure of Success</i>	<i>Quote</i>
James (AL Mandarin)	Dreaming in his AL	“That’s a big deal”
John (AL Spanish)	Fulfilling a religious calling	“We fulfilled the call that the Lord called us to do. It was to plant a Spanish speaking church. . . So I guess as far as success, it’s come full circle.”
Thom (AL Japanese)	Understanding a phone call	“My success was the ability to understand a random phone call. . . I feel super successful that I was able to piece it together. I felt like I was successful.”
Elizabeth (AL English)	Academic achievements	“The biggest success for me . . .I could do a whole presentation in English, and now working and studying in a doctorate program, having GPA 4.0, for you know, in my doctor program. I'm proud of that a lot.”
Angela (AL German/Spanish)	Compliments from others	“My German father over there said ‘your German is <i>verdammt gut</i> ’ which is damn good. . . (L1 Spanish speakers) always says to me ‘you speak <i>bastante</i> ,’ and I'm like yeah that’s my level in Spanish.”

As discussed previously, much of the ALA literature equates ALA success to speaking like a *native speaker*. However, the above discussion demonstrates that adult AL learners, in fact, have different measures of success unrelated to the *native speaker*.

This false dichotomy of success and failure in ALA assumes an objective measure of success and failure as well. The more detailed findings from the interviews and discussion presented above challenge this assumption by showing that adult language learners define success in multiple ways, not always in relation to the *native speaker*. Their varied definitions of AL success add nuance to the discussion of adult ALA. In the following section, the findings of this thesis add additional nuance to the field of ALA by asking participants to define their success as related to their DOLs.

7.5 Discussion of Theme 4

The data elicited from participants and the subsequent analysis revealed that participants have diverse measures of AL success and frequently consider themselves successful at ALA. The fourth theme that emerged is as follows:

- Adults do not always fail at ALA; instead, they have varied measures of AL success, which are not always measured by nearness to *native-like* proficiency.

This fourth and final theme suggests that adults define ALA success for themselves in many different ways. When measuring ALA success as reaching their DOLs, adult AL learners can be successful at ALA. The field of linguistics has spent years explaining that adults cannot learn an AL as children do, cannot ever lose their foreign accent, and are incapable of learning an AL. However, many studies do not ask participants how they define ALA success, if they have reached their DOLs, and if they consider themselves successful. When given the chance to determine their own success, participants answered with a wide variety of responses, adding nuance to the discussion of ALA success.

7.5.1 Success as Measured by Reaching DOLs

Almost every participant, twenty-five (25) participants of twenty-six (26), said they would consider themselves a success if they measured success by reaching their own desired outcome levels (Table 4.14, p. 114). One (1) participant said they would “never” consider themselves a success. Another participant, Alice, responded twice: yes for ALA Russian, no for ALA English. For this reason, the number of responses was higher than the number

of participants. When given the opportunity to define success as reaching their ALA goals, the vast majority of participants would consider themselves successful. The discussion of the participant responses is below.

When the interview data was put into a corpus, the most frequently-used words used in response to that question show that participants used the word “yes” eighteen (18) times, the word “definitely” five (5) times, and the word “satisfied” three times (3). The full chart of most-frequently used words can be found in Table 4.15 (p. 115). These words indicate that participants positively identify themselves as successful in ALA when the measurement is to have reached the goals they had originally set when they began.

The word “never,” however, was used seven (7) times. However, in none of these instances did participants indicate they would “never” be successful in their ALA. Their responses are detailed below:

Table 7.3 Use of *Never* in Relation to Success

Participant	Use of never
Teresa (AL Spanish)	“Yeah, I think so because I never had, I don't think I ever had the goal or expectation to be completely balanced in my bilingualism and, yeah, I don't think I am, but I feel very comfortable, so yeah.”
Rose (AL French, Spanish)	“If you don't go backwards, and you don't get outside feedback you can fall into a trap of never achieving the goal because you know where all of your qualities or lack of qualities are, right?”
Amy (AL English)	“Yes, yeah, absolutely. . . Having to go through the whole doctoral process, that also, I think, brought it up to a much to a whole nother level because I had never really done you know like APA citations, or anything like that. When I did my Masters in Europe . . we didn't have a dissertation to write. . . I was never able to, you know, was never I've never had to do that.”

These uses of the word *never* in response to the interview question, while present, do not refer to their ability to reach their DOLs or to be successful.

7.5.2 Current Proficiency, DOLs, and Success

Many participants acknowledged that, whether they reached their DOL or not, they would consider themselves successful at ALA. When given the chance to define their own measure of success and AL proficiency, their responses show a much more nuanced perspective of the abilities of adults to learn an AL.

7.5.2.1 Reached DOLs and Are Successful. Twenty-three (23) participants both reached or exceeded their DOLs (Chapter 6, p. 158) and consider themselves successful at ALA. By allowing them to define their own DOLs and their own success, most participants claim their own success at ALA. Research focused on AL motivation shows that those who have integrative motivation to learn an AL “promotes successful second language acquisition” (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003, p. 201). Additional studies on motivation have shown the same (Gardner, 2000; Gardner & Lambert, 1959). While this thesis is not focused primarily on ALA motivations, the findings of this thesis show that participants can be successful no matter their motivation. For example, five (5) participants report having no specific initial AL goal, but those same participants consider themselves successful at ALA. This shows that participants with motivations of any kind, or of no kind, can be successful in the AL.

As mentioned in previous sections, many studies in the field of linguistics assume that speaking like a *native speaker* equates to success in ALA (Ioup *et al*, 1996). Other studies do not ask participants their DOLs or if they consider themselves successful in ALA (Hartshorne, 2018). Instead of using quantitative methods which make broad generalization, this thesis uses the life histories approach to individualize participants’ stories subjective to their own definition of ALA success. A few of their stories are detailed below.

7.5.2.2 Success without reaching DOLs. Some participants responded that they did not reach their DOLs and yet consider themselves successful. Others considered themselves successful unrelated to reaching their DOLs. Their responses are given below in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4 Success without Reaching DOLs

Response	Number of Participants
Successful though did not reach DOL	6
Successful, unrelated to DOL	2
“Successful but not satisfied”	2

By defining their own measure of AL success, many participants indicated that they considered themselves successful, but they are not fully satisfied. For example, Alice, responded that she is both “yes” [successful] and “no” [not successful] in responding to the interview question. Alice has multiple additional languages, so her responses are different depending on the language. For Russian, Alice says, “Yeah, because like I wanted to learn Russian to read books in Russian like in the original [language]. That was the thing that motivated me into it. So, I can read in Russian; still, I'm not reading as fast as I read in Polish or English. but I can read.” Alice answered differently with regards to her AL English proficiency, which will be discussed further in Section 7.5.2.3 (p. 203).

Another participant, Paul, despite not reaching his goal of reaching *near-native* or *native* proficiency in English, Paul does consider himself successful though not satisfied: “I would consider myself a success; I'm not satisfied with myself, but I would consider a success. It's a reasonable success in English, reasonable success in Italian and in French, and in Mandarin it's an ongoing process.” Paul set high language proficiency goals and worked diligently toward them. Although he did not reach his DOL, he considers himself a success, which is an important distinction to make. In addition to being able to read literature and understand the Italian opera without the libretto, he has gained better insight into why people act the way they do: “I have come to understand attitudes methods or systems of thought that it didn't understand culturally before because I didn't understand it linguistically. I think I've gained some insight that I wouldn't enjoy without language.” He has successfully been able to interact with people who speak one of his additional languages, learning more about them, understanding their culture better, despite not reaching his goal of “near native” or “native” proficiency.

7.5.2.3 Unattainable measures of success. For some participants, they would not consider themselves a success if the measure was to reach their DOLs because their expectation was unattainable. For example, one participant had hoped “to be French,” which is not an attainable measure of language acquisition. However, she went on to clarify: “I would consider my success myself as a success at this point. I think that you have to reevaluate what success means to you in different periods of time and think that the language that I have attained. . . is just a success.”

Other participants, Kenneth and Natalie, claim they will never reach their DOLs because their goals are ongoing. Natalie’s response is classified as “other” because it was neither “yes” nor “no.” She said that once she reached her original goal, “well, then I would go on to the next [goal]. . . There's always more. It's another mountain; there's another peak.”. Kenneth says he has not reached his DOLs and that there will always be more to learn. He points out that even in his L1 Arabic he is still learning and, therefore, will continue to learn his ALs as well.

Another participant, Alice, says that for her AL English, she would not consider herself a success if success were measured by reaching her DOL. The reason is that her DOL was “not to have an accent.” Alice spoke openly about her personal growth toward accepting her accent in English and considering herself successful in her ALA.:

With English, when I first started, I wanted to be fluent and for a while like my accent really bothered me, and I wanted to get rid of it. But, then eventually I said, it is what it is; I don’t really care. I think it's different in Europe than it is in the West because in Europe everybody speaks in a different language, and everybody speaks with a different accent. But, I felt like in the US I was often judged as not as smart as other people because I had an accent. But, that's part of why I wanted to get rid of it, but then you kind of grow and say, “Hey, how many foreign languages do you speak?” And, well, my accent is who I am, and it doesn't bother me; I don't really ultimately obsess of it anymore.”

Therefore, although Alice did not reach her original goal of speaking accent-less English, rather than being “saddled with an accent” (Hartshorne *et al* 2018, p. 263), she adjusted her perspective to accept her accent as a part of her identity as a multi-lingual person rather than being embarrassed by it. Despite not reaching her DOL to rid herself of her

“accent,” she does consider herself successful in her ALA. Alice makes an important point that “in Europe because everyone speaks English with an accent, nobody cares [if you speak with an accent].” While Alice specifies Europe, this is true in countries across the globe where those who live there interact with multiple languages from an early age.

Accent, as defined by Derwing and Munro (2013, p. 167), is “the perceived degree of difference from the local language variety.” It is important to note that each person who mentions an initial self-consciousness about their accent are speaking about their accent in AL English and live in the United States where English is the primary, though not official, language. Although the United States does not have one “local language variety,” it does have a specific enough accent that “difference” is readily identified.

Alice (AL English) is not the only participant to mention her accent, however. Table 7.5 below details additional participants’ perspective on their own accent.

Table 7.5 Participant Perspective on Accents

Participant	Quote
Ann (AL English)	“As long as we can understand each other and communicate, I think it's fine. . . I really wanted to have American <u>accent</u> on all these things. . . . but that went away . . . I will always have that accent. I don't want to lose it.”
Anita (AL English)	“[People] have to kind of [get used] to my <u>accent</u> ”
Elizabeth (AL English)	“After staying here 10 years, I was hoping that the <u>accent</u> [wouldn't] be that strong. But I'm content with what level I have you know.”
Paul (AL English, French, Italian, Mandarin)	“With English. . . I don't think I'm improving anymore. My <u>accent</u> . . . I have not been able to erase it completely. So, I don't think that I'll be able to go beyond that.”
Kenneth (AL French, English)	“When the students understand what I'm saying that's a success. When there's an issue in my pronunciation that prevents them from understanding, actually that's a failure.”

Even after living in an immersion situation for years as these participants have, studies show accentedness does not necessarily reduce significantly after the first few years (Saito, 2015). Longer LOR increases AL comprehensibility in some aspects such as intonation, word choice, and grammar. But despite three or more years LOR, accentedness and comprehensibility in adult AL learners are “substantially different from the native English speaker baseline” (Saito, 2015, p. 14). However, even with an accent, adult AL learners can understand and be understood by listeners because “an

improvement in comprehensibility does not necessarily require that strength of accent be diminished” (Derwing and Munro, 2013, p. 177).

However, Alice's belief regarding why people judge her due to her accent is consistent with research that suggests that people who are exposed to multiple “foreign accents” are more likely to understand “foreign accented speech” (Baese-Berk *et al.* 2013, p. 178). Furthermore, as Alice noted, Europeans speak many different languages, meaning everyone has an accent, but in the US where she lives, people are surrounded by speakers without “foreign accents” and make assumptions about people who speak with a “foreign accent.” However, some studies indicate that some choose to maintain identity within a language and cultural group by retaining accent. Gatbonton *et al.* (2005, p. 504) “suggests that L2 learning entails choices, in this case, perhaps between the reward of being efficient in the L2 (indicating the need for language ability best suited for communicative success) and the cost of not marking the right identity (implying a risk of being labelled disloyal).” Their study indicates that adult language learners may learn enough of their AL to communicate effectively in their AL, but they do not attempt to speak like a *native speaker* so as to remain a part of their language community. Although some adults certainly do attempt to lose any indicator of their L1, many purposefully maintain indicators of their L1 so as to maintain that part of their identity.

Although these participants had initially hoped to speak their AL English without an accent, they also address the assumptions made both by the public and by research. Singleton *et al* (2021) argues that AL language proficiency includes multiple parts of language, not just accent. They criticize the assumption that “any small subset of language skills. . . is representative of the bigger picture.” They mention the frequency in which ALA literature uses accent as a marker for “nativelikeness,” explaining the following:

The presence of a nativelike accent [is] popularly taken as the criterion for ‘nativelikeness’. Accent is thus often covertly assumed to represent language proficiency in general. It seems to be tempting to some (and not just lay-people) to imagine that nativelike pronunciation is the ultimate marker of performing like a native speaker, but we have to recognize that, while the various aspects of language proficiency do tend to develop broadly in parallel, pronunciation is arguably distinct from other language skills. (p. 10)

As Alice stated, and Singleton *et al* (2021) concurs, those who assume that having a “foreign accent” indicates lack of language proficiency are incorrect because pronunciation is only one of many aspects of language proficiency.

Although Bley-Vroman (1990) may say Alice is “proud of [her] foreignness,” (p. 8), Alice is proud of her ability to communicate with people in multiple languages, recognizing that her accent is part of her identity. Although Alice, Ann, Elizabeth, and Paul all stated they had hoped to reduce their accent in AL English, there are some benefits to maintaining an accent because those who rid themselves of their accent are not as closely identified with their ethnic group (Gatbonton 2005, p. 497). What these participants who discuss their accent, their desire to lose their accent, have in common is that they consider themselves successful. Despite different L1s and LORs, they have reached or exceeded their DOLs and consider themselves successful, even with maintaining an accent.

7.5.2.4 Ongoing Goals. As shown above, participants most frequently responded that they considered themselves a success already. However, a number of participants indicated that they had ongoing goals. This means that even if they consider themselves to be successful at ALA they still have future aspirations for additional ALA. Some participants were specific in their ongoing goals, such as to continuing to learn their AL to continue using it for their religious pursuits. Others answered more generally saying their DOLs were to always be learning, which is something that will always continue no matter their level of proficiency. Table 4.9 (p. 108) displays participants’ ongoing or further goals for ALA.

One ongoing goal specifically was to continue learning for religious or faith-based purposes. The use of AL for the purpose of religious-related reasons and how this motivation influences proficiency is not a highly studied phenomenon. However, Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) conducted a qualitative research study of people who learned an AL for religious reasons. These participants not only learned an AL but immersed themselves in a culture in places very different from what they were accustomed to including “simple living conditions in a poverty-stricken country far away from extended family” (p. 183). The participants’ language proficiency was not assessed formally for this study. But a number of them are Bible translators, which requires them “to be at the top of the proficiency scale” (p. 183). These participants did not have a set

period of time for learning their AL because their religious motivation dedicated them to “a life-long commitment” to language learning. One of their participants has now been learning their AL for over 50 years and now “at over 70 [years of age], she continued to . . . work at improving her language skills” (p. 184). Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013) note that despite living immersed in the AL, intentionally learning the AL for decades, and having an “end product” of a translated portion of the Bible that indicates a high level of proficiency, their participants continued to learn the language. Arguably, these participants were successful in that they produced Bible translations to share their religious beliefs with the communities they lived in, but they did not consider themselves satisfied.

Similar to the participants in Lepp-Kaethler and Dörnyei (2013), the participants in this study who have ongoing language goals due to ongoing religious-based intentions recognize how well they function in the AL but also know how much more they intend to learn.

7.5.2.5 Additional Ongoing Goals. A number of participants indicated they have ongoing goals in their ALA unrelated to religious purposes. These goals are detailed in Section 6.5.6 (p. 178). Relevant to this chapter, however, is the point that if a person expresses that they have further ALA goals, they are not unsuccessful but see the next “mountain” to climb in their language process. According to theories of andragogy and early ALA scholarship, adults must see the reason they are learning something and must find immediate use for their new knowledge. For adults who are learning a new language, their contexts may change in a way that creates need for new AL knowledge. Many of these participants desire to improve their ability to speak, read, write, sing in their AL, but they still consider themselves successful at ALA when success is defined by reaching their DOLs.

In examining participants' current proficiency and ALA success, it is evident that even participants who rate their current proficiency as “okay” say they exceeded their DOLs and consider themselves successful. Paul, who rates his current proficiency as 4 or 5 on a scale of 10 and who has not reached his DOL still considers himself successful in his AL Mandarin.

In consideration of the diversity of DOLs, the high number (20) of participants who said they either reached or exceeded their goals, and the majority (25) who said that if reaching their goals would make them successful, they'd consider themselves successful, it seems that most, if not all, adult language learners *can* and *do* become successful in learning an additional language. If the rigid measurement of additional language success is that speakers sound "near-native" or "nativelike," then no adults can expect to ever be successful language learners. However, if the measurements of success were individualized by the person's own personal goals, then many more adult language learners would be successful.

In a similar vein, when given the opportunity to describe their own success, while some said unequivocally *yes*, others said *yes* with detail. Their nuanced descriptions of their measure of ALA success are described in Section 7.4 (p. 191).

7.6 Addressing RQ3

The purpose of the interview questions to elicit information from participants was to address research question 3, which states the following:

- If additional language acquisition success is achieved by reaching their DOL, can adults language learners be successful in ALA?

To respond to this research question concerning how adults define their own ALA success, the findings reported in this chapter suggest that adult language learners have varied measures of ALA success. When given the chance to determine their own ALA success, most participants considered themselves successful which is contradictory to much of the ALA research. Additionally, upon reaching their DOLs, almost all participants considered themselves successful. Many of the participants reported considering themselves successful but also have additional or ongoing ALA goals. Upon analysis of the data, the final theme emerged, which is as follows:

- Adults do not always fail at ALA; instead, they have varied measures of AL success, which are not always measured by nearness to native-like proficiency.

By demonstrating that participants have multiple measures of ALA success, this thesis challenges the assumption of an objective measure of ALA success.

7.7 Challenging the Assumption of an Objective Measure of Additional Language Acquisition Success

As shown in Section 2.2.4 (p. 43) and Section 7.2 (p. 189), the field of linguistics tends to assume the existence of an objective measure of ALA success. The literature tends to focus on the false dichotomy of success or failure in ALA whereas adult language learners themselves have much more nuanced measurements of ALA success. The data discussed in this chapter challenges the notion that ALA success can be measured objectively. Because adult language learners must consciously choose to begin AL, they have diverse motivations (Ch. 5). Diverse motivations lead to diverse desired outcome levels (See Ch. 6). These diversities lead to diverse measures of ALA success, many of which are attainable by adult language learners. Participants indicated a wide range of AL proficiency (Section 6.4, p. 161) and yet nearly every participant would consider themselves successful if ALA success were measured by reaching their desired outcome levels. Although objective measurements of AL proficiency have value, assuming an objective measure of ALA success paints all adult language learners with a broad brush rather than allowing for the nuance and individuality present in each person's life history.

The data from this thesis, presented below, confirms that adult language learners of diverse backgrounds, diverse L1s, diverse ALs, and diverse goals can be successful.

- 84.6% of participants (n = 11) with multiple ALs consider themselves successful.
- 88% of participants (n = 14) who have completed some or all doctoral level education consider themselves successful.
- 90.9% of participants (n = 10) with AL English consider themselves successful.
- 92.3% of participants (n = 24) who would define success as reaching their DOLs consider themselves successful.
- 93.3% of participants (n = 14) with L1 English consider themselves successful.
- 96% of participants (n = 25) with DOLs other than to speak like a *native speaker* consider themselves successful. Note: the participant whose DOL was to speak like a *native speaker* or *near native* still considers himself successful despite not reaching his DOL.

- 100% of participants (n = 10) who have completed high school through graduate level education consider themselves successful.

By quantifying the qualitative data, the evidence is clear that adult language learners can be successful in ALA. The interview question in which participants were asked if they considered themselves successful primarily elicited yes or no responses. For this reason, representing the data quantitatively demonstrated that the majority of participants consider themselves successful. Due to the small sample size, the actual number of participants is given alongside the percentage of participants who consider themselves successful in their ALA.

Although this concept of an objective measure of success and failure is common in many other spaces, specifically sports such as track and field, it does not necessarily apply to ALA. Davies (2003) uses a track and field metaphor to describe how language proficiency is measured saying:

“An analogy for [norm referencing and criterion referencing] can be found in athletic jumping, in the long jump where the level to reach (and supersede) is set by the last leading contestant: this resembles norm referencing; and the high jump, where a level of **success** is set (and when appropriate, changed) on the basis of what height should be reached in order to show mastery: this resembles criterion referencing” (p. 172).

Similarly, Hartshorne *et al* (2018, p. 264) also uses a track metaphor in describing how adults learn an AL:

“People who began learning [an AL] at a certain age [who] reached nativelike proficiency merely indicates that they learned fast enough, not that they learned as fast as a native speaker, just as the fact that two runners both finished a race indicates only that they both started early enough and ran fast enough, not that they ran at the exact same speed.”

However, these objective measures of success and failure cannot apply to ALA. Hartshorne *et al* (2018) claims that “adult learners rarely, if ever, achieve the same level of mastery as those who started in childhood. In order to study that phenomenon, the relevant yardstick is the asymptotic performance of native speakers.” But the data from

this thesis challenges the assumption that all adult language learners should be measured by the same “yardstick” of the *native speaker*. Although using these sorts of norm and criterion referencing works for track and field, it should not be used for language learners as the level of success is different for each individual. Davies (2003, p. 173) does question “Should the norm be, as is often claimed, the native speaker or should it be some yardstick of language proficiency?” The data from this thesis suggests that the norm of the *native speaker* should not be the “yardstick” of measuring success but rather a self-defined determination of ALA success or failure.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the fourth and final theme that emerged from participant data and the subsequent analysis. This theme challenges the assumption of an objective measure of ALA success. The claim of this chapter is that ALA should not be measured as an objective binary success or failure, but that adults should be given the agency to determine their own success. Instead of using the *native speaker* as a measure for ALA success, participants define their own ALA success by diverse measures such as by what they can do with the language. Most of the participants in this thesis consider themselves a success when they reach their DOLs.

The final portion of the chapter demonstrates how the findings respond to the research question and challenge the assumption of an objective measurement of ALA success. The data from participant interviews overwhelmingly demonstrates that adults do not always fail. In fact, they frequently succeed at ALA.

These findings converge with previous research on individual ALA motivations (Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Cocca & Cocca, 2019; Al-Hoorie & Hiver, 2020), individual goals (Gatenby, 1948; Burt, 2022a; Burt, 2022b), and the use of self-assessment (Ma and Winke, 2019; Winke *et al*, 2023). This thesis extends the field of research, however, because it connects these individualized motivations, goals, and self-described AL proficiency to ALA success. No studies, to my knowledge, seek to connect these variables. A comprehensive table demonstrating these connections is found in Appendix 13 (p. 280).

These findings give individuals the opportunity to describe their life histories concerning ALA. This method was suggested by Larsen-Freeman (2018) who suggested using an

“ecological perspective, whereby the relations among factor are what is key to elucidating the complexity [of ALA].” Larsen-Freeman (2018) advocates for this “person-centered” frame of reference, suggesting “focusing on the individual learners in context.” Instead of grouping all adult language learners together to form the “universal learner,” human-centered approach allows each individual to add nuance to a very complicated ALA process. The life histories method allows broader research on ALA by studying the “combination” of “how [cognitive involvement and social interaction] relate” to the ALA process (Larsen-Freeman, 2018, p. 58).

This chapter concludes the discussion of the themes of this thesis. Chapter 5 (p. 118) presented evidence that adult language learners do not always seek *native-like proficiency* as their desired outcomes level. Chapter 6 (p. 158) presented evidence that adult language learners have diverse measures of AL proficiency and can successfully reach their DOLs. This chapter presented evidence that adult language learners have diverse measures of AL success. And, this chapter challenged the notion that adults always fail at ALA. In the next chapter, I will look at the implications of these findings in the theoretical, academic, and practical realms. I will address the limitations of this study, and I will present potential for future research.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to challenge the *native-like speaker myth*, using a life histories approach to give voice to individuals who learned an AL after 12 years of age. In challenging the four assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth* with the individual life histories of each participant's ALA, this thesis demonstrated that adult language learners can be successful at ALA when success is measured by their ability to reach their initial proficiency levels, not by measuring their success as only in comparison to *native speakers*.

The twenty-six (26) participants who agreed to share their life history through a virtual interview expressed multiple motivations to learn, which led to diverse desired outcome levels (DOLs). Participants detailed diverse measures of AL proficiency and ALA success, suggesting that more adult language learners can be successful at ALA than previously presented in literature. Participants described their initial reasons for learning an AL and what they had hoped to gain from learning an AL. They shared about the connections they made with the people and the cultures in which their AL is the primary language. They shared their personal successes and their ability to reach their ALA goals. Each person had a different and diverse story to share. The significance of their stories is that when asked to share their individual life histories, adult language learners add nuance to an often broadly generalized field of linguistics.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the contribution of this thesis to the current field of additional language acquisition. This discussion will include the contribution of an additional methodology to be used to examine ALA. I will describe the strengths and limitations of the qualitative life histories method as found in this thesis.

I will then briefly discuss the findings of this thesis, the themes that emerged, and how they address the research questions. Finally, I will describe the future implications of this thesis and potential future research opportunities.

8.2 The contribution of this thesis to the current field of ALA

8.2.1 ALA studies

As discussed in Chapter 1, the idea for this thesis began with personal observations of different AL students with different motivations and different measures of AL success. The thesis idea developed further upon the publication of Hartshorne *et al* (2018), in which 2/3 of a million participants participated in a language quiz that went viral online. This study contributed the notion of a critical period for learning an AL to the field of literature. However, the use of quantitative methods in their study, while effective for its purpose, relied on assumptions about its participants and their ultimate attainment goals.

Further research into the field of additional language acquisition led to the idea of challenging the assumptions present in past and current ALA research. Bley-Vroman's (1990) Fundamental Hypothesis states that adult language learners "always fail."

However, the vast majority of the world speaks more than one language in their daily life, and the notion that each of these speakers must conform to a uniform definition of a *native speaker* in order to be considered a success seems a bit reductive.

8.2.2 ALA methodology

This thesis has established the use of life histories as a viable method of investigating adult language acquisition. Early in the process of determining the most appropriate methodology to challenge the false dichotomy of success and failure in ALA, Larsen-Freeman (2018) published an article advocating for this "person-centered" frame of reference, suggesting "focusing on the individual learners in context." Instead of grouping all adult language learners together to form the "universal learner," I decided to focus on the individual stories of additional language acquisition, proficiency, and success, which is often left out of quantitative studies.

In this thesis, the life histories of these twenty-six participants demonstrate the wide variability within the experiences of adult language learners. Their individual stories demonstrate that the diversity of motivations and DOLs lead to diverse measures of AL proficiency and success. Their narratives give insight into their experiences of learning their AL. Their stories include details regarding their early recognitions of the broader world around them, the ways that ALA has changed the course of their lives, and the access they gained to the people and the culture of their AL.

By using the qualitative method, life histories approach, this thesis seeks to model additional ways to study adult additional language acquisition. The value of this approach is that it gives voice to adult AL learners whose experiences tend to be generalized in quantitative studies. Their ALA life histories, however, illuminate the subtleties present in each person's ALA experience.

One of the major advantages of using the life histories method is that individual participants can give voice to their own experiences rather than have their experiences grouped together with others. As researcher, I was given the opportunity to elicit additional details about their ALA experiences that would have been lost in a quantitative study. Because current and past studies in the field of linguistics have focused so heavily on the *native speaker* and has used this mythical ALA target as the measure of success or failure, many adult language learners have not been given the chance to determine their own measure of proficiency and success in ALA. In contrast, in this thesis, participants were given the chance to detail what they wanted to be heard in their ALA experience while also having the chance to withhold any information they did not desire to share. This thesis, in using the life histories approach, has affirmed the diversity within each individual language learner and has opened the door for further study. Potential for further study will be discussed in Section 8.6 (p. 222).

8.3 Limitations of this study

As with any study, this thesis did have limitations. Qualitative methods are sometimes criticized for their lack of objectivity, reliability, and validity. Those who favor quantitative methods tend to find them more objective, with numbers representing data rather than words. However, this study used data triangulation to quantify the data, adding rigor to the analysis by using both a qualitative data analysis and then a corpus analysis.

Participants all were required to have sufficient English reading, listening, and speaking proficiency to understand and respond to the interview questions. It is speculated that the data may be even more diverse if speaking to people whose AL is English but are not yet ready to understand and answer interview questions in English. Because all participants had to have a high enough level of English proficiency to participate in the study, people who are still early in the language acquisition process may be excluded. If the interview were offered in people's preferred language, more people would qualify to complete the

interview and they may give more complex answers if they are speaking in their most comfortable language.

Participants all identified as voluntary minorities in their AL language and culture. Studies show that people who are involuntary minorities or who are migrants in a place where their AL is primary have different DOLs than those who are minoritized intentionally. All participants were either born in the United States, traveled to the US voluntarily, and/or traveled overseas voluntarily. This excludes people who are immersed in the language for sociopolitical reasons such as refugees and migrants.

All participants were either part of my social or professional group or were invited to participate by someone in my social/professional group. Due to my profession being a professor at a university, many of the participants have had access to various levels of higher education.

All participants had access to high-speed internet, email, and Zoom to participate, which excluded people who may be in a lower socioeconomic status.

The initial plan for data collection was to conduct focus groups so participants could use discussion as a method of remembrance of their ALA process. However, prior to completing the ethical review, the Covid19 pandemic arrived, and I decided to pivot my data collection to individual, virtual interviews via Zoom. Although Zoom does allow for multiple participants to join a meeting, which could have worked as a de facto virtual focus group, the uncertainty and chaos of that time period made the scheduling too difficult. For that reason, I scheduled individual interviews with participants as every person's schedule during the periods of shutdown was different from usual. I believe that this method still elicited a rich and thorough data set. However, in-person interviews and in-person focus groups may elicit more complex data for future studies.

Despite these limitations, the data elicited from participants was rich with details and diversity. Future studies can include participants from additional educational backgrounds, ages of acquisition, lengths of residences, and socioeconomic statuses to identify further nuances in the field of adult ALA DOLs, proficiency, and measures of success.

8.4 Review of the Findings

This section will give a brief overview of the findings of this thesis. The themes that emerged after data collection and analysis challenged the assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth* and addressed the research questions which will be demonstrated below. Detailed information of these findings can be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

8.4.1 Lack of a homogenous native speaker

The literature review found in Chapter 2 gives a thorough discussion of this first assumption. In brief, the assumption of a homogenous *native speaker* has been part of the discussion in the field of ALA for decades (Davies, 2003, Hartshorne *et al*, 2018). For that reason, this assumption was not challenged as thoroughly as the following ones due to the vast research previously conducted. However, it was necessary to include in this thesis as it is an assumption both in the ALA literature and is the foundation on which the other three assumptions rest. Despite not probing this assumption further, the findings in this thesis concur with the notion that a homogenous *native speaker* does not exist. Dąbrowska (2015, 2018, 2019) has demonstrated that even *native speakers* do not converge on the grammar in their L1. *Native speakers* have variations in their language whether it be regional, dialectal, or simply differed understanding of the language. Therefore, the focus on what AL learners cannot do is misplaced and should instead be what they can do.

8.4.2 Connection to people and culture as ultimate attainment goal

The literature review found in Chapter 2 gives a thorough discussion of this second assumption. In brief, the assumption of *native-like proficiency* as the ultimate attainment goal has been prevalent throughout much of the ALA literature. To challenge this assumption, Research Question 1 asked if people who learned an AL were seeking *native-like proficiency* and what their desired outcome levels were when they began ALA. Many participants reported seeking AL language proficiency that was not related to the nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. Rather, most participants sought AL proficiency that allowed them to connect to the people and culture of the AL.

8.4.3 Success by reaching DOLs

The literature review found in Chapter 2 gives a thorough discussion of this third assumption. To summarize briefly, this assumption suggests that the only measure of ALA success is to reach *native-like proficiency*. All other proficiency levels are

considered a failure. To challenge this assumption, Research Question 2 asked how adult language learners assessed their own AL proficiency and if they had reached their DOLs. Participants were asked to define their own AL proficiency. They indicated multiple methods of measuring their own AL proficiency with the majority of participants measuring by what they *can do* with the language rather than measuring their proficiency by their nearness to or distance from the *native speaker*. Participants overwhelmingly reported successfully reaching or even exceeding their DOLs, suggesting that they can use the language to do what they had originally intended.

8.4.4 Varied measures of ALA success

The literature review found in Chapter 2 gives a thorough discussion of this fourth assumption. In brief, this assumption creates a false dichotomy of success and failure in AL proficiency. However, because linguists have concluded that *native-like* proficiency is almost universally unattainable, the assumption that ALA success can be objectively measured by this standard is flawed. By assuming the existence of a *native speaker*, assuming *native-like* proficiency is the ultimate attainment goal of adult language learners. Furthermore, by making the assumption that reaching *native-like* proficiency is the only measure of success, the field of linguistics has also assumed the existence of one objective method of measuring ALA success.

To challenge this assumption, Research Question 3 asked if ALA success could be measured by reaching DOLs. Participants were asked how they measured their own ALA success. They were then asked if the measure of success were that they reached their DOLs would they consider themselves successful at ALA. Each individual participant had a different DOL, but they overwhelmingly said they would consider themselves successful if measured by reaching their individual DOL. These findings suggest that a variable measure of ALA success is more attainable than an objective measure of success, which is based only on the nearness to or distance from the mythical *native speaker*.

8.4.5 Summary

The life histories of individual participants revealed a much more nuanced picture of ALA including diverse DOLs, measures of proficiency, and measures of AL success. Participants demonstrated the many diverse experiences of individual adult language learners. Their diverse motivations and goals have led them to diverse measures of ALA success. The findings of this study converge with my own personal, individual experience

learning an AL after the age of 12. My positionality in relation to this study is detailed below.

8.5 Positionality statement

My relationship to this present research is that I am an adult language learner much like the participants in this thesis. I began learning an AL in high school as was required, but I have continued communicating, studying, and teaching my AL. My personal belief is that I have succeeded in ALA because I have far exceeded my initial ALA goals. Throughout my education and career, I have read many studies that claim that unless one reaches *native-like proficiency* in their AL they are a failure. I did not believe this to be an accurate assessment of adult ALA. As a teacher of adult ALA, I desire for my students to be motivated to reach their initial ALA goals and to consider themselves a success rather than to believe the prevalent view in ALA literature that all adults fail to learn an AL. My connection to the participants is that they are all part of my personal network whether it be professional or social. Some participants serve on a team of which I am a leader. But, they were advised that all participation is completely voluntary. Wooffitt and Widdicombe (2006, pg. 56) state that “the interviewer’s participation is significantly implicated in what the respondents end up saying, and how they say it.” For this reason, I bracketed my own words and input out of the interview data. However, when necessary for context and clarity, I inserted my own words into the interview data. Beyond my own experience, the findings of this this have many implications and potential for future studies. These will be discussed below.

8.6 Implications and Future Study

This thesis sought to add to the field of linguistics by using a novel methodological approach to adult additional language acquisition. The findings using the life histories approach demonstrate that it can elicit new perspectives on ALA. These implications and potential for future studies are discussed in the following sections.

8.6.1 Methodological and Theoretical Implications

The use of a qualitative methodological with a life histories approach elicited rich data from individual participants. The use of quantitative methods has contributed significant amounts of data to the field of ALA. Quantitative methods, however, tend to use larger data sets and find generalizable data whereas the use of qualitative methods lends more nuanced data to the field. By using a qualitative method, this thesis was able to offer a

more complex picture of the reasons adults learn an AL. It also focused on what adult language learners can do with their AL rather than what they cannot do.

For future studies in ALA, qualitative methods should be considered as a valuable method to contribute more in-depth details about the millions of individuals who are learning and using additional or multiple languages every day. By using a qualitative approach, participants can have a voice in describing their own personal experience. A qualitative approach can demonstrate that adult language learners can be successful by tying their measures of success to their initial goals rather than to using the *native speaker* as a yardstick for success.

In future research, researchers should address the assumptions of the *native-like speaker myth*. Many language learners have many different DOLs and, therefore, are not seeking to go the same distance in the ALA process. Some people only need to learn a little bit of the AL to reach their DOLs. Some adult language learners do seek to speak like a *native speaker*. Some participants in this study did describe their initial goals as related to the *native speaker*. However, despite recognizing they had not met their goals, they did realise that their language allows them to do what they want to do in their AL despite not reaching that goal of *native-like proficiency*. By addressing these assumptions, the field of linguistics may avoid making such assumptions, changing the perspective of research from what adult language learners cannot do to focusing on what they can do in their AL.

Given the global population who speaks more than one language each day, qualitative data is rich with information. By using a life histories approach, linguists can gain insight into the complexities that belie the additional language acquisition process. Upon gathering stories of those who have learned an AL after the age of 12, the data analysis can include the traditional qualitative data analysis process but also could potentially be analysed using corpus analysis, similar to the method of this thesis. The qualitative data could potentially be quantified, creating reliable, replicable, and valid analysis of the adult ALA process. As noted previously in this thesis, the future of adult ALA is in the qualitative data. Larsen-Freeman (2018, p. 60) “expect[s]” a new “person-centered” approach to ALA, which will “herald a new phase in SLA research.” This focus on the “individual” and the “unique developmental trajectory” can “offer significant insights into the SLA process.” In order to move forward in the knowledge of ALA research, it is

recommended to focus more closely on the individual learner experience rather than the broader generalized experience.

These findings also underscore the necessity for more research that allows participants to define what it means to succeed and fail at ALA. Others in the field are recognizing this need. The 2021 International Conference on Foreign and Second Language Acquisition hosted by the University of Silesia decided to focus on “The Narratives of Success and Failure” in the “second/foreign language context.” Their conference focused on “the role of qualitative methods in SLA research, and especially the role of (personal) narratives as a tool not only of expression of subjective perceptions and experiences but also of interesting in-depth analysis of the issues relating to FL success and failure in a diversity of educational and non-educational contexts (Gabryś-Barker, 2021, p. 82).

Additionally, the findings presented in this thesis converge with the notion of subjectivity in success and failure in ALA. This thesis extends the field of research, however, as this conference is focused on the narratives of teachers of foreign and second languages, but this thesis focuses on the narratives of the learners themselves. The implications of this thesis are that adult language learners are empowered to learn because they can reach their DOLs and use the language in the way they desire without being told they are likely to fail. This thesis recognizes the importance of the individual qualitative studies as well, specifically with regards to analysis of success and failure, and challenges further studies to do the same.

8.6.2 Future Directions in Measures of Success in ALA

In addition to the aforementioned future directions in qualitative studies, this thesis lays groundwork for future studies with regards to individual measures of ALA success. The qualitative method used in this thesis allowed individuals to identify their own individual measures of ALA success. However, qualitative studies usually have a small sample size. In the future, research can be done using a quantitative method to examine the phenomena of ALA on a bigger scale. For example, the most common measures of success as identified in qualitative studies could be formed into a quantitative survey in which a large sample size of participants can choose from the most common measures of success. Although participants would be given a list of responses to choose from rather than defining their own success, the addition of many more voices to the diverse measures of

success could lead to better understanding of adult language learners, their motivations, and their personalized measures of success.

8.6.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this thesis also have pedagogical implications. As one participant, Ann, stated regarding the methods used to learn an AL: “I think whatever methods we had in place were as effective as they could have been at that time.” Many who teach additional languages to others may focus specifically on the so-called *right* methods. However, as this participant suggests, the method does not matter as much as the motivations to learn and an attainable measure of success does.

Ideally, due to the discussion in this thesis and other literature, language students can dismiss the idea of speaking like a *native speaker*. Instead, adult AL learners can focus specifically on what they want to say rather than how they say it.

As suggested in this thesis, each adult language learner has individualized motivations to learn and individual desired outcome levels. Recognizing this diversity and allowing those learners to define their own needs for learning the AL can allow people to learn their AL more successfully. Furthermore, by allowing learners to define their own success can create a scenario in which people can succeed in ALA. Rather than measuring their success by the yardstick of the *native speaker*, people can define their success by having reached their language goals and/or by what they can do with the language.

Additionally, if people knew they would not “always fail” when they were beginning ALA, perhaps they would enjoy their studies more and could potentially reach further desired outcome levels. Studies have found that when participants enjoy learning an AL they are much more willing to communicate. Khajavy *et al* (2018, p. 605) found “that a positive classroom environment is related to fostering [willingness to communicate] and enjoyment, while it reduces anxiety among students. Moreover, enjoyment was found as an important factor in increasing [willingness to communicate] at both student and classroom level, while anxiety reduced [willingness to communicate] only at the student level.” Similarly, Barber (2023) found that language anxiety led to poor outcomes in the “foreign language” classroom. Much of this anxiety had to do with the pervasive view that adults cannot learn foreign language. Rather, in future pedagogy, those teaching

additional languages can focus on the connections to speakers of the AL and to the culture of the AL.

However, this thesis and much research shows that adults can make significant progress toward reaching or even exceeding their language goals. If participants are continually told they will definitely fail and will never succeed at ALA, then they certainly will experience foreign language anxiety and will have less desirable outcomes. Barber (2023, p. 670) says that “efforts at lowering anxiety and encouraging growth mindsets ought to mutually strengthen one another and improve student outcomes” (Barber, 2023, p. 670). Part of these efforts must be changing the narrative that adult language learners will “always fail” and instead developing the narrative that adults can and do succeed to do what they want to do with their AL. Ultimately, if adults learning an AL believe they will fail, they will not enjoy the ALA process and may not reach their own measure of success.

8.6.4 Implications Regarding the Native Speaker

Despite the significant amount of research required for a thesis of this length, multiple avenues for potential further research emerged. The topic of the *native speaker* not as a language proficiency measure but as a social and cultural measure remained adjacent to this thesis, but it did not fit into the scope of this study. However, some of the broader implications of this thesis are the social implications of having a *non-native* accent in English including discriminations such as native speakerism and accentism (Ramjattan, 2019).

The notion of the *native speaker*, as noted in Chapter 1, has been used to create in-groups and outgroups, and to commit linguistic discrimination. The following sections will discuss the various avenues related to the *native speaker* that were outside the scope of this thesis but would be valuable for future study.

8.6.4.1 Accentism and the Native Speaker. The concept of accentism or of distinguishing someone by their accent is not a new concept. The word “shibboleth” is used first in the Biblical book of Judges to determine who is and is not part of the tribe based on pronunciation. The concept of “shibboleth” has been used worldwide as a method of identifying who is in an in-group such as using phrasing that is understood only to those in the group. But, more nefariously, the use of a “shibboleth” can be used to determine who is not part of the in-group such as identifying those on the opposing

side of a war (US Army, 1942) or those of a homosexual orientation (Shilts, 1993). In the context of this thesis, accent can be a “shibboleth” which identifies someone by their accent as either *native* or *non-native* rather than simply identifying a person’s place of origin. A more commonly used phrase in linguistic literature is *accentism*.

As noted in the introduction, a study by Flege (1984) found American *native* English speakers can distinguish between a *native* English speaker or a French-accented English speaker in as few as 30 milliseconds. Although the distinction between accents is not necessarily problematic, the judgments made based on these distinctions is. Flege’s (1984) study is certainly not the first nor the last that proves that native speakers make language judgments about others based on their accent. A Canadian judge recently rejected an expert medical witness who spoke Nigerian English. The judge claimed that the expert was unable “‘to articulate his thoughts in an understandable fashion’ because of ‘his garbled enunciation; his failure to use appropriate endings for plurals and past tenses; his failure to use the appropriate definite and indefinite articles; his repeated emphasis of the wrong syllables; dropping his Hs; mispronouncing his vowels.’” (Guichon, 2019). In this case, a judge determined someone who comes from a country with English as an official language lacked credibility. This judgment based only on accent literally hindered the justice system.

The story of this judge is one anecdote, but a scholarly study confirmed this situation is not uncommon. This study found that “people perceive statements as less truthful when spoken by non-native speakers” (Lev-Ari and Keysar, 2010, p. 1095). Similarly, the Accentism Project, developed by professors of sociolinguistics, has the “aim of uncovering and challenging such discrimination in everyday life” (Accentism, 2023). The project allows individuals to share their any individual stories of “accentism” or linguistic discrimination due to accent describe personal stories from people who were judged based on their accent, whether it be a regional dialect or the accent of a multilingual person. Finally, this issue converged with this thesis when one participant who is from Europe and speaks multiple languages said the following:

“In Europe everybody speaks in a different language, and everybody speaks with a different accent. But, I felt like in the US I was often judged as not as smart as other people because I had an accent. . .that's part of why I wanted to get rid of it.

But, then you kind of grow and say, ‘Hey, how many foreign languages do you speak?’ And, well, my accent is who I am.”

The implications of the themes discussed in this thesis are such that people do not need to speak like a *native speaker* to do what they want to do in their AL. In fact, as indicated by this thesis, people often seek to make connections with others who speak the AL or can better enjoy the culture of an AL, despite having proficiency unlike a *native speaker*.

In the United States, *native* English speakers have the privilege to choose to learn a new language in addition to English. Those who choose to learn an AL are celebrated for pursuing bilingualism and are considered an asset and are desirable in the workplace. On the contrary, those whose first language is not English are expected to learn English and are considered to be at a deficit. They then face linguistic discrimination for not speaking like a *native speaker*. For example, students taking “English as a second language” classes in high school or college are treated like they are trying to catch up with L1 English speakers. But, learning taking Spanish/French or another language as an AL is an asset, desirable and even privileged, something to put on a resume to get a higher paying job.

The themes discussed in this thesis and the challenges to the *native-like speaker myth* sought to expose the incorrect assumptions about adult ALA. The implications of this thesis demonstrate that adults can consider themselves successful at ALA if they are able to reach their own AL goals. It is hoped that people will accept different varieties of English, whether it is used as an L1 or AL, and that various accents can be considered valuable for language diversity.

8.6.4.2 Jobs, Research, and the Native Speaker. Social situations are not the only spaces in which those who are not *native speakers* are excluded and othered due to their language. A further issue is that even when a person is eligible to apply for a job, they may be perceived negatively if they speak with a “regional” or “non-standard” accent. A study by Rakić *et al.* (2011, p. 877) “found that speakers were rated lower in competence and hirability if they spoke with a regional accent . . . [and] that in the context of a job interview, regional accent presence alone was enough to trigger negative impressions of those speakers. Non-standard accent speakers speaking their native language were possibly seen as deliberately diverging from the standard accent that is appropriate in a job context” (Rakić *et al.*, 2011, p. 877). This exclusion is based on the

assumption of the homogenous *native speaker* and demonstrates the misconceptions of what speakers of additional languages can do in their AL. This thesis demonstrated that many people who learn an AL as an adult can reach their DOLs, which includes succeeding in jobs that require AL proficiency. In fact, one participant in this thesis notes that sometimes people have to “get used to” her accent but also has earned a master’s degree in her AL and is a chemical engineer in her AL. Other participants indicate they have accents in their AL but also have reached high levels of academic and professional achievement including earning PhDs and publishing in scholarly journals in their AL. The implication of these findings is that judging an otherwise qualified candidate by their accent is linguistic discrimination as this speaking like a *native speaker* is very rarely, if ever, necessary to meet the job requirements.

Not only are people who are not considered *native speakers* excluded from jobs, they are also excluded from the literature which intends to study language acquisition. Dividing people into *native* or *non-native* speakers as eligibility for participation is a false dichotomy that leaves out many participants who could add tremendous value to studies. Cheng *et al* (2021, p. 6-7) concurs with this problem: “When researchers use NATIVE SPEAKER in their work, and when participants are excluded from research because they do not fit researcher expectations of a NATIVE SPEAKER, they perpetuate deficit perspectives towards multilingualism and non-hegemonic modes of language acquisition.” Additionally, by using the *native speaker* as a requirement to participate in linguistic studies, researchers are not eliciting a comprehensive data set as it does not examine the many complexities of adult language learners who do not “conform to these assumptions” (Cheng, 2021, p. 197). The implications of this thesis are that it reveals the richness of data found by interviewing participants with no *native speaker* requirements. Each participant had an individual life history of their ALA experience, and each participant added important nuance and context to what we know about ALA.

8.6.4.3 English as a Native Language / Official Language / Lingua Franca. A related issue for future study is English as a language, whether it be as a *native language*, an *official language*, or as a *lingua franca*. It was hypothesized that participants whose AL was English would have different perceptions of proficiency and success than participants whose L1 is English. As noted in the introduction, the language of the conqueror becomes the language of the conquered. This was demonstrated in the colonization of North America when Native Americans were forced to learn and use

English (Little, 2023) and of Commonwealth countries, which despite their geographic distance from England utilize English as an *official language* or as a *lingua franca*. However, as noted in (Section 2.2.1.1, p. 18) only those from specific countries are considered to be *native speakers*. Often, those who are *native speakers* of the language of power are part of the in-group. Those who are not *native speakers* from specific countries often face many hurdles to participate in the world of English-speakers. A number of the participants in this thesis learned English because it “opens more doors. . . to research” (Kenneth, AL French/English) or because it was necessary to accomplish their professional goals. The implications of this thesis are that participants whose AL is English do, in fact, have different perceptions of their proficiency, specifically their accent, than those whose L1 is English. Although this was hypothesized prior to the study, exploring this idea in depth was outside the scope of this thesis.

8.6.4.4 Language proficiency testing and the Native Speaker. The final issue for further research is the use of language proficiency tests. As noted in Chapter 7, language proficiency tests tend measure AL proficiency with objective measures, often resulting in a false dichotomy of success or failure. An additional issue with using language proficiency tests is the exclusivity of who is required to take them and who is not.

An article in African news site, African Arguments, raises the question as to why people who are from countries where English is the official language are not considered *native speakers* and are, therefore, must take the IELTS or TOEFL prior to receiving a visa to travel to the US or the UK (Akinyemi, 2022). Furthermore, a 2005 study by Mcnamara claims that language proficiency tests are used as a “shibboleth” or as a way of determining who is part of the in-group and who to exclude: “Since the Shibboleth test of biblical times, language tests have been used as instruments of social policy. While there is an ongoing tradition of using language tests for purposes of identification of insiders and outsiders in situations of inflamed intergroup conflict, language proficiency tests are not normally thought of in this light” (p. 351). However, such language tests can be used to determine who belongs to an in-group and who does not, making judgments based only on participants’ language proficiency.

This thesis claims that individuals can describe their own AL proficiency and define their own ALA success. This claim is founded on the idea that adults must choose to learn an

AL and, therefore, must have motivations that contribute to varied measures of ALA success. This claim, however, could be criticized as there are some instances in which objective language assessment may be necessary.

For example, when applying to attend a higher education institution, the university desires to know that the student can succeed in the language of the institution. Or, when a person is applying for a job or a visa, those in the approval process likely would want assurance the applicant can function well in the language of the job or in the country. While in these instances a proficiency exam may be necessary, the AL proficiency exam should measure the AL ability of the applicant according to what they need to do in the language, not according to how they compare to the *native speaker*.

It is important to note that some research does show that people at specific AL proficiencies do not self-evaluate as well (Lim, 2007; Winke *et al*, 2021). Additionally, there are some learners who enjoy taking standardized language proficiency exams to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The implications of this thesis, however, is that the use of such objective measures of AL proficiency should not be conflated with a measure of success or failure compared to the *native speaker*. Furthermore, due to the ambiguity of the *native speaker* in the context of each individual's language history, language proficiency exams as required for a visa should be a requirement for people from all countries, not just the ones perceived to have lower English proficiency. The official language policy of each country is not indicative of how many people speak that language and at what proficiency level. As McNamara (2005, p. 369) says, "while the potential for conflict can never be removed, it can as it were be disarmed, and the language weapon can figure now in symbolic boundary-marking play." The research presented in this thesis could potentially be used to advocate for the loosening of regulations for those looking to immigrate to the US or UK to become exempt from the IELTS test.

8.7 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to challenge the common assumptions made in the literature of the field of linguistics. The method of challenging these assumptions was by asking adult AL learners to detail their own life histories of their ALA process. However, while it does not solve any problems, it does offer a possibility of new methods of researching ALA, which can give the field new insight into this complex, individualized process.

The field of linguistics, including the field of ALA, is in a constant flux. As the world changes and as research develops, so too does the knowledge of ALA. Research has demonstrated this development as linguists have revised and redevelop their theories. For example, Bley-Vroman's Fundamental Difference Hypothesis published in 1989 was revised in 2009 to de-emphasize the role of Chomsky's Universal Grammar. Additionally, he removed the binary idea of "success" and "failure" in language acquisition. Hartshorne *et al* (2018) used the phrase *native speaker*, but in a reanalysis of the data Li and Hartshorne (2022) does not use "native" other than in describing previous studies but, instead, uses the word "monolingual" and "bilingual" to describe the participants. This transition in terminology improves specificity in participants as the term "monolingual" has a much clearer definition. Even the term for describing children in need of English-specific education has changed from "Limited English Proficiency" to "English Language Learner" to "English Learner" to "emergent" or "transitional bilingual" or an ESL student (Najarro, 2023). Ultimately, it is not just the terminology that evolved but the notions of language, identity, and proficiency that change over time. As research develops, we must change our perspectives as well.

As Larsen-Freeman (2018, p. 59) said regarding ALA, "Rather than seeking to understand complexity through reductionism, . . . the world today requires a more holistic, ecological, and relational systems account as a complement. This means that while some SLA researchers will continue to identify new variables, others will not simply focus on one component of a complex developing system but rather will look at the changing relationships among many of them." This thesis is not intended to be a solution to any issues presented here but is intended to lend a different perspective to the field of ALA, adding nuance to the concept of success and failure in adult ALA.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Institutional Review Board Approval from University of Lynchburg



University of Lynchburg Institutional Review
Board for Human Subjects Research
Research Approval Letter

Date: May 19, 2020
To: Alissa Keith
From: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

IRB Approval No.: LHS1920105
Project Title: The Native-Like Speaker Myth: Challenging native-like proficiency as the only measure of language acquisition success
Final Determination: Approved
Approval Date: May 19, 2020

Thank you for your recent submission to the University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. Your request for review of your research project listed above has been completed. The proposal and related study comply with the standards set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 CFR Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects, and all applicable federal, state, and institutional policies. If a member of the research team is affiliated with and/or if there is an affiliated research site from which participants are recruited and/or data are gathered, then your study may necessitate review from another entity. It is the responsibility of the PI to inquire at other site(s) and with other IRBs regarding reviewability and, if necessary, secure approval from other site(s)/IRB(s) prior to the collection of data.

Please remember that if any modifications are necessary, these changes need to be approved by this Board. The IRB website includes detailed instructions and forms for this process. Investigators must report any adverse events involving subjects to the IRB Director as soon as possible but no later than three working days after the discovery of the occurrence. **Please submit a closure form within 30 days of completion of data collection (when no additional interaction will occur with human subjects).** While the Lynchburg IRB will make an effort to send reminder correspondence regarding completion of a closure form, it is ultimately the responsibility of the PI and research team, not the Lynchburg IRB, to ensure that this deadline is met. Please feel free to contact the Director at irb-hs@lynchburg.edu if you have any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alissa Keith".

*The University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board website is located at
<https://www.lynchburg.edu/academics/institutional-review-board/>

University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board (IRB) – IRB-HS@lynchburg.edu

Appendix 2

Institutional Review Board Modification Approval from University of Lynchburg



University of Lynchburg

University of Lynchburg Institutional Review
Board for Human Subjects Research
Modification Approval Letter

Date: July 31, 2020
To: Alissa Keith
From: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Review Reference No.: LHS2021004
Original IRB Approval No.: LHS1920105

Project Title: The Native-Like Speaker Myth: Challenging native-like proficiency as the only measure of language acquisition success

Final Determination: Approved (modification approval)
Modification Approval: July 31, 2020
Original Approval Date: May 19, 2020

Thank you for your recent submission of a modification form and supporting documents to the University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. Your request for review of modifications to the research project listed above has been completed. The proposal and related study continue to comply with the standards set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 CFR Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects, and all applicable federal, state, and institutional policies.

Please remember that if any additional modifications are necessary, these changes need to be approved by this committee. The IRB website includes detailed instructions and forms for this process. Investigators must report any adverse events involving subjects to the IRB Director as soon as possible but no later than three working days after the discovery of the occurrence. **Please submit a closure form within 30 days of completion of data collection (when no additional interaction will occur with human subjects).** While the Lynchburg IRB will make an effort to send reminder correspondence regarding completion of a closure form, it is ultimately the responsibility of the PI and research team, not the Lynchburg IRB, to ensure that this deadline is met. Please feel free to contact the Director at irb-hs@lynchburg.edu if you have any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alissa Keith".

*The University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board website is located at
<https://www.lynchburg.edu/academics/institutional-review-board/>

University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board (IRB) – IRB-HS@lynchburg.edu

*Minor modification was necessary upon after modifying for the Liberty University and University of Birmingham (UK) reviews

Appendix 3

Institutional Review Board Approval from Liberty University

Date: 9-5-2020

IRB #: IRB-FY19-20-410

Title: The Native-Like Speaker Myth: Challenging native-like proficiency as the only measure of language acquisition success

Creation Date: 5-28-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Alissa Keith

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

Key Study Contacts

Member	Alissa Keith	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	arlim@liberty.edu
Member	Alissa Keith	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	arlim@liberty.edu
Member	Alissa Keith	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	arlim@liberty.edu

Appendix 4

Ethical Review Approval From University of Birmingham (UK)

9/2/2021

Application for Ethical Review ERN_21-0076

 Reply all |  Delete Junk | ...



Application for Ethical Review ERN_21-0076



Samantha Waldron (Research Support Services)

Today, 8:29 AM

Suganthi John (Arts and Law); Alissa Keith (PhD Engl Lang +App Ling 6y DL) ✕

 Reply all | 

Inbox



Action Items



Dear Dr Suganthi,

Re: "The Native-Like Speaker Myth: Challenging native-like proficiency as the only measure of language acquisition success"
Application for Ethical Review ERN_21-0076

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.



On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx>) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx>) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards

Ms Sam Waldron

Research Ethics Officer

Research Support Group

C Block Dome (room 137)

Aston Webb Building

University of Birmingham

Edgbaston B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 8101 (if you leave a voicemail message and number I will get back to you)

Appendix 5

Request for and Approval to Interview Faculty at Liberty University

From: Keith, Alissa (Interdisciplinary Studies) <arlim@liberty.edu>
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 11:28 AM
To: Conner, Jamaica (Interdisciplinary Studies) <hjconner@liberty.edu>
Subject: Request for permission for IRB

28 May 2020

Dear Jamaica,

As a PhD student in College of Arts and Law at the University of Birmingham (UK), I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in English language and linguistics. The title of my research project is "The Native-Like Speaker Myth: Challenging native-like proficiency as the only measure of language acquisition success." The purpose of my research is to explore participants' English language proficiency in relation to their language function goals, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

I am writing to request your permission to contact faculty members of your college to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. The data will be used to challenge assumptions of second language acquisition success and create a new attainable measure of success. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please reply to this email.

Sincerely,

Alissa Keith
Instructional Mentor, Interdisciplinary Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Instructor of Spanish

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971



Conner, Jamaica (Interdisciplinary Studies) <hjconner@liberty.edu>
Para Keith, Alissa (Interdisciplinary Studies)

viernes, 29 de mayo de 2020, 3:11 p.m.

Hi, Alissa,

This research opportunity sounds so interesting! I give my blessing for this project as soon as you have the approval of Liberty University's IRB to begin.

I hope that you have excellent success with your interviews and look forward to reading your findings. 😊

God bless you,
Jamaica Conner '98
Online Department Chair, Interdisciplinary Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Assistant Professor of English

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Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

Appendix 6

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certifications

[Required for University of Lynchburg and Liberty University IRB approval]



Completion Date 21-Feb-2020
Expiration Date 20-Feb-2024
Record ID 35523456

This is to certify that:

Alissa Keith

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

CITI Conflicts of Interest (Curriculum Group)
Conflicts of Interest (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Lynchburg



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wd181f9a7-8c62-4a3a-bd43-88d52860f6eb-35523456



Completion Date 09-Mar-2020
Expiration Date 09-Mar-2023
Record ID 35523469

This is to certify that:

Alissa Keith

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Liberty University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w82d9fb7b-435c-41a4-96ec-1eace7e0661c-35523469



Completion Date 09-Mar-2020
Expiration Date 09-Mar-2023
Record ID 35523453

This is to certify that:

Alissa Keith

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Lynchburg



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w12b75cad-624c-4513-ace5-acd4e740eb2f-35523453



Completion Date 10-Mar-2020
Expiration Date 10-Mar-2023
Record ID 35523455

This is to certify that:

Alissa Keith

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research (Curriculum Group)
Humanities Responsible Conduct of Research (Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Lynchburg



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w2fa09c31-a988-4845-8120-f4e690af4c72-35523455

Appendix 7
Pilot Round Participant Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient]:

As a PhD student in the College of Arts and Law at the University of Birmingham (UK), I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in English language and linguistics. The purpose of my research is to explore second (or additional) language proficiency in relation to your language function goals, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and must have learned a language in addition to English no earlier than age 12 in any setting. Participants of all language abilities are included. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a recorded one-on-one interview conducted via video conference from a location of your choice. Responses will be recorded on audio or video depending on your preference. The interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Your name and any other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but your information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click [here](#) to read the participant consent document and then fill in your contact information to indicate your consent. Once you've completed the consent form, I will contact you to set up a time for the interview. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Alissa Keith

Instructor of English

434-942-4937

Keith_ar@lynchburg.edu

Appendix 8

Round 2 Recruitment Email

Hello!

As a PhD student in the College of Arts and Law at the University of Birmingham (UK), I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in English language and linguistics. The purpose of my research is to explore second (or additional) language proficiency in relation to your language function goals, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and must have learned an additional language after the age of 12 in any setting. Participants of all language abilities are included. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a recorded one-on-one interview conducted via video conference from a location of your choice. Responses will be recorded on audio or video depending on your preference. The interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. Your name and any other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but your information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click [here](#) to read the participant consent document and then fill in your contact information to indicate your consent. Once you've completed the consent form, I will contact you to set up a time for the interview. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Alissa Keith

Instructor of English

434-942-4937

Keith_ar@lynchburg.edu

Appendix 9

Informed Consent Agreement

[Hosted by Qualtrics]

Please read this consent agreement (or listen carefully if it is being read to you) before you decide to participate in the research study. Please keep a copy for your records.

Project Title: The Native-Like Speaker Myth: Challenging native-like proficiency as the only measure of language acquisition success

Principal Investigator: Alissa Keith, PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham (UK)

Invitation: You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and must have learned a language in addition to English additional no earlier than age 12. Participants of all language abilities are included. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to challenge the underlying assumptions that native-like proficiency is the only measure of second language acquisition success. Current literature considers native-like proficiency to be the only measure of second language acquisition success; however, this assumption is problematic in that it assumes a homogenous native speaker, a singular L2 ultimate attainment goal, native-like proficiency as the only measure of success, and the existence of an objective measure of L2 success or lack thereof.

Participation: As a participant in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a recorded one-on-one interview conducted via video conference from a location of your choice.
- Fill out a post-interview survey asking your feedback on the questions and interview process.

The session will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. You can choose whether you prefer audio or video recording.

Time Required: Your participation is expected to take approximately 30-45 minutes .

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and/or answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty. You also have the right to withdraw from the research

study at any time without penalty. If you want to withdraw from the study, please tell the researcher or contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included below. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Potential Risks: The potential risks associated with this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Although the interviews focus on second language acquisition experience, participants may remember previous experiences that may be uncomfortable for them. In order to mitigate those risks, participants will be reminded they can skip any question they prefer not to answer and can withdraw from the study at any point.

Potential Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a broader opportunity for success in learning an additional language, which implicates similar results for other languages, and, thus, creating higher motivation to begin learning an L2.

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality: Your individual privacy will be maintained throughout this study. In order to preserve the confidentiality of your responses, I will keep records of this study private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

Interviews will be conducted virtually using headphones in a private space where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After 10 years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for 10 years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Whom to Contact with Questions: If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact Alissa Keith at keith_ar@lynchburg.edu.

[University of Lynchburg Participants]: The University of Lynchburg Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. This IRB currently does not stamp approval on the informed consent/assent documents; however, an approval number is assigned to approved studies – the approval number for this study is LHS2021004. You may contact the IRB Director, Dr. Alisha Walker Marciano, through the Office of the Associate Provost at the University of Lynchburg at 434.544.8367 or irb-hs@lynchburg.edu with any questions or concerns related to this research study.

[Liberty University Participants]: The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research has approved this project. The approval number is IRB-FY19-20-410.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Agreement: I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation in this research study answered. By typing your name, the date, and clicking “yes,” you consent to participating in this study.

Name:

Date:

I consent to participating in this study.

Yes

No

Appendix 10

Interview Questions

1. Demographic Questions:
 - a. What is your name?
 - b. What is your current age?
 - c. What is your country of origin?
 - d. What is/are your first language(s)?
 - e. What additional language(s) have you studied/do you speak?
 - i. What additional language is your additional language?
Second, third, fourth, etc?
 - f. What is your highest education level?
 - g. Which, if any, parts of your education were conducted in your L1 and which were conducted in your additional language?
2. Initial questions:
 - h. [At what age] When did you begin learning your additional language? (Age of onset)
 - i. If applicable, how old [at what age] were you when you were first immersed in your additional language? (Age of arrival)
 - j. How long did you spend in that immersion experience? (Length of Residence)
 - ii. If not continuous, describe how much time total you have spent in an immersion experience.
3. Environment of learning your additional language
 - k. In what environments did you learn your additional language? Describe the process.
 - iii. For example, did you learn your additional language in a classroom but speak L1 at home?
 - l. Upon beginning to learn your additional language, approximately how many hours per day were you exposed to your additional language? (Krashen: stimuli v. poverty of stimuli)
 - m. Where and how do you believe you learned the most effectively?
 - n. What methods did you use to learn your additional language?
 - iv. For example, flashcards, memorization, watching tv, etc.
4. *Motivations for living in the [your immersion experience]

- o. Describe your motivation to move to/ spend time in [your immersion experience].
 - v. Was the move voluntary v. involuntary? (Ogbu and Simons 1998)
 - vi. Initially, did you plan to stay for a short time? Indefinitely? Forever? Describe why that was your plan.
 - vii. Currently, has your plan changed? Describe why or why not.
 - viii. Was the motivation to “improve [your] economic, political, and social status, and so on?” (Ogbu and Simons 1998, pg 162)

2. Motivation to learn your additional language

- b. Why did you start learning your additional language?
- c. What did you believe you would gain by learning your additional language? What do you believe you have gained by learning your additional language?
- d. When you began learning your additional language, what were your proficiency goals (i.e. what did you want to do with the language) (desired outcome level)?
- e. *(2 “can you repeat/reword that?”) How do you believe your attitude toward the language and its speakers affects your learning? Has your attitude changed since learning your additional language?
- f. *Do you feel any loss of cultural identity when you speak your additional language? Or gain of a new identity? Or both? (Good, Masewicz, and Vogel 2010).

3. Perception of proficiency

- g. How well would you say you speak your additional language now?
 - i. Are there some parts of your additional language that you believe you do better at? (Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, Reading, writing, listening, speaking, etc?)
- h. Do you believe you have reached your original goal for learning your additional language?
 - ii. If not, why or why not?

- iii. If not, do you believe you can reach your original goal for learning your additional language?
 - i. Do you have further goals for learning your additional language? Do you have anything you'd like to accomplish that you will need to improve [your additional language] (in any way: vocabulary, syntax, comprehension)?
 - 4. Measure of success
 - j. How do you measure your success or lack of success in speaking your additional language?
 - iv. Have you reached the point of success in speaking your additional language?
 - k. If the measure of [your additional language]-speaking success were "to reach the goal that you set when you originally began learning," would you then consider yourself a success?
- 2. Anything else you want to share?

Appendix 11

Post-Interview Survey for Pilot Round

[Hosted by Qualtrics]

This interview was a pilot study for a larger research project on adult English language acquisition and the assumptions made about language goals. You were asked to participate due to your experience in learning an additional language as an adult and/or because of your work with people who are studying English as an additional language. For this reason, I am asking for your feedback on the interview itself including the questions, method of recruitment, and comfort with the questions along with your feedback on how participants who have learned English as an additional language may react to the questions. I am asking for your constructive feedback in order to better validate the methodology used for my larger research project.

5. Name
6. Today's date
7. Date of interview
8. What is your first language?
9. What is your additional language?
10. If applicable, what languages do you consider yourself proficient in?
11. Educational background
12. Background in *teaching* English as an additional language
13. Your comfort of the interview recruitment
14. Your comfort with the method of recruitment
15. Your comfort with the method of interview/recording
16. How comfortable were you with the following:
 - a. Demographic questions (i.e. country of origin, age, additional languages, educational setting)
 - b. Initial questions (i.e. age of immersion and immersion experience)
 - c. Learning Environment questions (i.e. types of learning, language exposure, methods, hours of learning)
 - d. Motivation Questions 1 (i.e. reasons for living in an immersion setting, voluntary v. involuntary, initial plans v. current plans)

- e. Motivation Questions 2 (i.e. reasons for learning the additional language, initial proficiency goals, attitude toward the language and its speakers, loss or gain of cultural identity)
- f. Perception of proficiency (i.e. proficiency self-assessment and language goals)
- g. Measure of success (i.e. definition of success and self-assessment of success)

17. If you have worked with adult English language learners, would they be comfortable answering these questions? Why or why not?

18. Are there any questions that I didn't ask that you believe would benefit this study?

19. Any other feedback you have?

Appendix 12

Participant Biographies: Alphabetical Order by Pseudonym

The following section gives basic demographic data about the participants and then a brief description of individual participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to maintain confidentiality.

Alice, 49, is originally from Poland, and her L1 is Polish. Her additional languages are English, Russian, French, “and a little bit of German.” She got her first master’s degree in Poland and then a bachelor’s degree in the United States. She began learning Russian around age 11-12 years old, English around age 15, and French around age 19. A fun fact about Alice is that she uses “really bad Russian movies” to learn Russian because the “plot is really pathetic” and they “repeat things multiple times,” making it easy to follow and a great learning tool.

Amy, 60, is originally from France and Switzerland. She clarified, saying “my mom is French. My dad is Swiss. We lived in France, but I was born in Switzerland.” Her L1s are French and German, saying that they “learned both growing up” due to their location. Her additional languages are English and Russian. She began learning English around age 11 and Russian in high school. Her early education was conducted in French, and her college was conducted in German, but also in French and English. A fun fact about Amy is that the area where she “grew up has a dialect [of French] that’s more Germanic that’s called Alsatian and so that’s what my parents spoke to us when we were really little.”

Angela, 54, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is English. She has studied Latin, French, Spanish, and German. She has a PhD in German language and literature and a master’s in Spanish. Her PhD was conducted in German, and her master’s was conducted in Spanish in Madrid. Angela took French as a required class in high school and needed it to complete graduate school. And, Latin she knows only to say mass. A fun fact about Angela is that she learned Spanish at the age of 40 after getting a PhD in German.

Ann, 45, is originally from Poland, and her L1 is Polish. Her additional languages are English, Russian, and German. She has a PhD in Higher Education. Her elementary and secondary educations were conducted in Polish, and her undergraduate and graduate degrees were all conducted in English in the United States. She first began learning Russian and English when she was around 11-12 years old. A fun fact about Ann is that she was a professional track and field athlete.

Anita, 47, is originally from Thailand, and her L1 is Thai. But, the first language she learned was a dialect of Chinese called Hainanese, which was spoken at home with her grandparents and parents. Her AL is English. Her education was all in Thai through undergrad, and her master's degree was conducted in English in the United States. A fun fact about Anita is that she came to the United States to get an education but that it was "really kind of [an] adventure" for her.

Arthur, 38, is from the United States, and his L1 is English. His additional languages are Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, and French. He has an undergraduate degree in Spanish, a master's degree in Spanish, and a PhD in Spanish. He had no early exposure to any additional languages. A fun fact about Arthur is that while learning his L3 Portuguese he found a book in Portuguese at a local bookstore and read it aloud to his then girlfriend now wife.

Carol, 49, is originally from Taiwan, and her L1 is Mandarin. Her AL is English. Her education through her bachelor's degree was conducted in Mandarin, and she earned two (2) master's degrees, which were conducted in English, in the United States. A fun fact about Carol is that her initial goal of learning English was just to get a good grade, and now she has not one but two higher education degrees from English institutions.

Elaine, 38, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is English. Her AL is Spanish, and she has also studied Italian and Latin "a little bit." She has her PhD, and all her education was conducted in English aside from her language courses. A fun fact about Elaine is that her initial interest in learning her AL Spanish was on a missions trip when a group of young children wanted to learn English from her. She said she was "very interested from that point on."

Elizabeth, 40, is originally from Tunisia, and her L1 is Arabic. Elizabeth clarified that at home they speak the Tunisian dialect, and "it's different from Arabic Arabic. So, if I meet with someone . . . that speaks in Arabic, they may not understand what I am saying. So, that's a local language." She also clarified that the Tunisian dialect of Arabic that she speaks is not the official language. Her additional language is French, which she began learning at the age of 7 because "in [Tunisia] we speak both languages in the same way." She began learning English around age 17 or 18. She added later in the interview, "Oh, I forgot to mention I'm learning Korean right now," which began more recently. Her elementary education was in both Arabic and French, her secondary education mostly in French, and her university was only in French. Elizabeth has two master's degrees: one from Tunisia (conducted in French) and one from the United States (conducted in

English). She has been working on her doctoral program in the United States, which has also been conducted in the United States. A fun fact about Elizabeth is that she learned English through watching the American TV show *Friends* and is now learning Korean by watching Korean dramas.

James, 30, is from the United States, and his L1 is English. His AL is Mandarin, and his L3 is Spanish. He has an undergraduate degree with some graduate credits. Most of his education was conducted in English; however, he spent two semesters in China learning Mandarin. A fun fact about James is that he traveled for weeks at a time to China to visit friends starting as young as age 13.

Janet, 31, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is English. Her AL is Spanish, and she “studied Chinese for a little bit very superficially.” She has a master’s degree, and most of her education was in English though she took quite a few Spanish classes that were conducted completely in Spanish. A fun fact about Janet is that she teaches Spanish to high school students now.

Joan, 39, is originally from Brasil, and her L1 is Portuguese. Her AL is English, and she “can speak a little bit of Spanish and can understand Spanish.” Her undergraduate degree was conducted in her L1 Portuguese, and her master’s degree was conducted in her AL English. Joan was exposed to English when she was starting around 10-12 years old, but she did not really begin studying purposefully until she was 18 years old. A fun fact about Joan is that she planned to come to the United States as an au pair for a year or two, but now she has lived in the U.S. for 16 years.

John, 46, is originally from the United States, and his L1 is English. His additional language is Spanish. Although John is married to an L1 Spanish speaker and thinks he took Spanish 1 and 2 in high school, he only began learning Spanish the year before moving to a primary Spanish speaking country for an indefinite period of time. A fun fact about John is that in the church he planted he used a translator while he preached, but after about 3 years the translator moved away, and John took over teaching completely in his AL Spanish.

Joseph, 33, is originally from the United States, and his L1 is English. He disclosed prior to the interview that he has significant background knowledge in linguistics, language acquisition, and language instruction having just completed his PhD in the subject. After I assured him his knowledge of the subject would not skew the results, he consented to participate. He has undergraduate degrees in both linguistics and Spanish and Portuguese language and culture. Growing up in Colorado with a high

Chicano/Latino population, Joseph was surrounded by Spanish speakers, but he did not begin to learn formally until 10th grade. During high school, he traveled to Paraguay, and during that trip he heard Brazilian Portuguese, and determined right then to learn that language as well. Joseph learned Spanish in a mostly formal classroom setting whereas his Portuguese education has been “fully immersive.” A fun fact about Joseph is that to improve his Spanish he read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and to improve his Portuguese he read the Bible.

Josephine, 26, is originally from India, and her L1 is Hindi. Her AL is English. Her elementary and secondary education took place in India, but the education was technically conducted in English. Josephine says that the teachers would often explain things in Hindi. Despite beginning to learn English during elementary school, Josephine says she did not begin speaking English until closer to high school. A fun fact about Josephine is that in order to practice her AL English she spoke to her father even though he did not speak English, just so she could have the speaking practice.

Kenneth, 48, is originally from Syria, and his L1 is Arabic. His additional languages are French, English, and “a little bit of Italian.” He has a PhD, and most of his university education was conducted in French. A fun fact about Kenneth is that he learned English in France, and at the beginning of learning English he spoke with a French accent.

Linda, 42, is originally from Canada, and her L1 is English. Her AL is French, and her L3 is Japanese. She clarified that she “did not learn Japanese, [but] learned a little bit of Japanese.” She has a PhD in education, and all her education was conducted in English. She had early exposure to French since Canada is a bilingual country, but she had no early exposure to Japanese. A fun fact about Linda is that she is the only participant from Canada.

Nancy, 27, is originally from India, and her L1 is Hindi. Her AL is “only English,” as she said. Her education from elementary school through her bachelor’s degree was in India but was conducted in English. She has a master’s degree and recently finished her doctorate, both of which conducted in English and in the United States. A fun fact about Nancy is that she initially wanted to be an English literature teacher.

Natalie, 69, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is English. When asked what additional languages she has studied or speaks, she replied “all of them.” But, she specified that she speaks Spanish and English mostly and is increasing her Italian. She also has studied French, Chinese, and Japanese. She had a doctorate, and most of her

education was conducted in English apart from her Spanish language classes. A fun fact about Natalie is that she began learning Spanish because her older brother would call her *hermana*, which she thought was something bad, so she was determined to learn Spanish so she would know what he was saying.

Paul, 40, is originally from Spain. His L1 is Spanish or Castilian. The languages he can speak and “control” are English, Italian, and French “in that order of proficiency.” He also added that he is a first-level intermediate Mandarin learner. He has a PhD, and all his formal instruction was conducted in Spanish. He said that he technically began learning English in school very early but that “the instructors. . . were just . . . knowledgeable enough to teach children or that’s what they thought.” Thus, Paul said he did not really begin learning English until high school when he taught himself. For Italian and French, he began learning later in life and traveled to each country to study the languages. A fun fact about Paul is that during the pandemic he used a language website called italki to converse with Mandarin speakers and improve his Mandarin proficiency.

Rose, 44, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is English. When asked what additional languages she has studied, she clarified “I studied? Not that I speak fluently but I’ve studied?” which told me she is aware of differences in proficiency between a language she has “studied” v. a language she can “speak fluently.” Her answer was, “I speak fluently English, French, Spanish and German. However, I’ve also studied Farsi, Arabic, Russian, and a little bit of Chinese.” Rose has nearly completed a PhD in French / Francophone studies and is all but dissertation. A fun fact about Rose is that part of her desire to learn her AL French was because “I fell in love with Alexander Dumas and Victor Hugo and all of these people and I was totally in love with what my image was a France, which was of course incorrect.” Her early exposure to her AL (French) was more so exposure to World War 2, which as she says, “my youth was very much interwoven with WW2. . . [so] learning German and French was super important.”

Ruth, 36, and Norman, 36, are a married couple who are originally from the United States and whose AL is Swahili. After learning Swahili in a large city in Tanzania, they moved to a more remote village and began learning L3 Kisi. They consented to interview together because many of their circumstances are the same, but I wanted to interview both of them because while their circumstances are the same, their language learning experiences differ. A fun fact about Ruth and Norman is that they learned Swahili using a method called the “Growing Participator” approach wherein they began learning using toys and

children's books and then by the end they were considered "Capable High" or basically could get around on their own.

Shirley, 34, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is Spanish. Her AL is Spanish, and she "can understand some French." She has a master's degree, and her education was primarily in English other than 4 months during her bachelor's degree wherein she studied in Central America. A fun fact about Shirley is that she decided last minute to study abroad in Costa Rica, immersing herself into business classes conducted in Spanish for an entire semester.

Teresa, 50, is originally from the United States, and her L1 is English. Her AL is Spanish, and she has "had some reading French classes in grad school and a tiny bit of Portuguese." She has a PhD in applied linguistics. All of her elementary and secondary education was conducted in English apart from her one Spanish class per year from 7th-12th grades. Her bachelor's, master's, and PhD were all conducted in both Spanish and English. A fun fact about Teresa is that Spanish was the only language option in her "tiny little rural high school," but it has now become her profession and passion.

Thomas, 42, is originally from the United States, and his L1 is English. His AL is Japanese, though as he says, "I don't think it's great." He studied Spanish as a requirement in school and a little bit of Swahili, but we focused just on Japanese for the interview. He has a Juris Doctorate, which was conducted in his L1 English. He had no exposure to his AL Japanese prior to moving to Japan for a year and says he began learning the language "probably on the flight to Japan." A fun fact about Thomas is that he and his wife still use Japanese phrases that do not have an English equivalent in their daily life.

Appendix 13
Current Proficiency + DOL + Reached DOL + Success Chart: Complete

Name	Current proficiency	DOL	Reached DOL?	Success?
Alice (AL English/ Russian/ French)	Fluent	Fluent	Yes	Yes / No
Amy (AL English)	Can pass US Citizenship exam, Can write/pass dissertation in AL	No initial goal Graduation	Yes, exceeded	Yes
Angela (AL Spanish)	"Definitely a higher level"	Good grade, job	No	Yes
Angela (AL German)	Fluent, "Not like a native speaker"	No initial goal Good grade	Yes	Yes
Anita (AL English)	Numbered scale: 5-6 Enough for people to understand	Good grade	Yes	Yes
Ann (AL English)	Can understand/communicate	No initial goal	Yes	Yes
Arthur (AL Spanish)	Can communicate in daily, academic, church settings	Good grade Build "community"	Yes	Yes
Arthur (AL Brazilian Portuguese)	Can communicate in daily settings, including pop culture and "shooting the breeze"	"To let [family who speaks Portuguese] know I care about them and want to be part of the family"	Yes	Yes
Carol (AL English)	Numbered scale: 90 Can converse	Fluent Connect to Culture Engage with people Good Grade	Yes, exceed	Yes
Elaine (AL Spanish)	Can understand/	Fluent	Yes	Yes

	communicate	"To be a teacher"		
Elizabeth (AL English)	Can understand, can write, "Not like someone who their first language is English"	Fluent "To speak it well, so I can communicate in a way that people can understand"	Yes	Yes
James (AL Mandarin)	Can read/speak/ Get around	"take the HSK [proficiency exam]" "to get around" "hold conversation"	Yes, exceeded	Yes
Janet (AL Spanish)	Can converse, translate	No initial goal Fluent / Proficient Good Grade "If I can hold a conversation, that was probably the goal of 8th grade me"	Yes	Yes
Joan (AL English)	Fluent	Fluent	Yes, exceeded	Yes
John (AL Spanish)	I'm okay, [Did you reach your goal to be fluent?] Yeah.	Fluent	Yes, exceeded	Yes
Joseph (AL Spanish)	OPI test score: Advanced-High or Higher	No initial goal Good grade Fluent "To converse with people at a high level"	Yes, Ongoing goal. "The goal is to continue to improve"	Yes
Joseph (AL Brazilian Portuguese)	Can preach, live in Portuguese	To communicate	Yes	Yes
Josephine (AL English)	Numbered scale: 6/10	"to communicate with someone"	Yes	Yes

Kenneth (AL English)	"It's ok. Not very good, but ok."	No initial goal	Other. "There is no fixed level; there is always better and better."	No. "Because my original goal was not to have an accent"
Linda (AL Japanese)	"Complete novice"	Fluent	Not quite.	Yes
Nancy (AL English)	Numbered scale: 70-80%	Fluent	Not yet.	Yes
Natalie (AL Spanish/Italian)	Can communicate, "Pretty strong in all areas"	"To be able to communicate"	Never, always ongoing	Other. "There's always more. It's another mountain. There's another peak."
Norman (AL Swahili)	Can communicate	Ongoing goals "Getting to know people"	Yes, exceed	Yes
Paul (AL English/Italian)	Numbered scale: 8/10	Travel Expand horizons "My goals are always near native or native."	Yes, "With English, I don't think I'm improving anymore, so I think I'm done with English."	Yes
Paul (AL French)	Numbered scale: 7/10	Native, near-native	Yes	Yes
Paul (AL Mandarin)	Numbered scale: 4 or 5/10	Native or near-native	No, desires to reach fluency	Yes
Rose (AL French/Spanish/German/Farsi)	Confused for <i>native speaker</i> in French	"I wanted to be French" Didn't have those "stringent requirements" for Spanish or German	Yes	Yes

Ruth (AL Swahili)	Can communicate	"Capable high" [proficiency level based on the Growing Participator approach to ALA]	Not quite	Yes
Shirley (AL Spanish)	Can communicate	Fluent	Yes and no. "I would love to always be better, but I also have come a lot further than probably a lot of people who come from my background."	Yes
Teresa (AL Spanish)	Can speak well	Fluent "To be able to speak well" "To have a conversation" "To be able to teach [AL] Spanish"	Yes	Yes
Thom (AL Japanese)	"I don't use it much at all. . . very, very elementary."	"Ability to get by" "Read menus at the restaurants that were really good but didn't have English on their menus."	Not quite	Yes

Appendix 14
Comprehensive List of Codes

abroad	connection to another culture	Higher than now
abstract or pragmatics	Conscious choice to begin	No initial goal
accent	Converse or communicate	Not terrible
acceptance in the culture	culture	proficient
admission to school	culture barriers	Work or Career
adventure	curious to learn	Different domains
Age-related factors	currently fluent	informal study
appreciation for difficulty of L2A	desired outcome level	Y o N Success if goal is reached
broader perspective on L2A	ability to travel abroad	Y or N Success
attitude change	DOL Communicate	Motivation for immersion
Beauty of language	DOL Culture	Motivation to learn
brain confused	DOL Fluent or fluid	Attitude affects learning
bridge gaps	DOL Good grade	Attitude change
access to people or culture	DOL Native speaker	Desired proficiency level

broken	DOL no goal	Loss, gain of identity
Challenges	Engage with people	What did you believe you'd gain
classroom	Fluid or fluent	Cognitive benefits
confident	Good grade or graduation	Communication
Early contact with L2	Interest in culture	Cool
Effective methods	Interview Questions	Culture
any available method	Additional info	Education
flashcards	Demographic Questions	Enjoyment
foundation	Country of Origin	Escape
friendship as method	Current age	Evangelism
watching tv or movies	Highest level of education	Independence
exceeded expectation	L1	Interest in the language
exceeded original goal	L2	Jobs
expand horizons	L3	Open doors
Extracurricular study	Language of education	People

failure	Name	Travel
fear, scared to speak	Environment of learning your additional language	What have you gained
figure it out	Hours of exposure	makes me happy
forced to speak	Language learning environment	metaphors
Funny quotes	Learning effectiveness	ministry
good opportunity	Methods of learning	multiple ALs
Good teacher	Initial Questions	Native speaker or native like
Higher ed in AL	Age of Arrival	Negative attitude about L2 speakers
hobby	Age of Onset	nerds
Immersion diff than school	Length of Residence	no attitude
Impossible to reach goal	Measure of success	no loss of identity
ineffective methods	Personal measure of success	no opportunity for further goals
Why did you start	comprehension	numbered measure of success
Connect to people	General improvement	ongoing goals
Culture	No	only language option

Enjoyment	Professional goals	perce
Global influence of English	PronunciationAccent	Perception of others
Good challenge	to get comfortable	Perfect
Good teacher	Vocabulary	positive attitude twd L2
Horizons	Writing	Reached original goals
Immersion	Reached original goal	really began qt
Job	Exceed	Really enjoyed it qt
Required	Never	really interested in L2
To be cool	no	Really love the language
Travel	Ongoing	remove barriers
Perception of proficiency	other	Required to learn
Current speaking ability	Yes	total immersion
can do	just clicked	Transferral of skills
complete novice	Knack for it	translation
Fluent	L2A as a good challenge	Trend to come to the US

native speaker comparison	L2A means to end	understand, not speak AL
numbered scale	language exchanging	used for job
Okay	Long term immersion	Would or have gained
test score	loss of identity	Broader perspective on culture
Further goals	love the people	Career
Academic ease	lucky to learn	Cognitive benefits
Room for improvement	that guy	gain insight
rounds out identity	Communication	gain tolerance
segmented identity	evangelism	gained new vocab with no equivalent
semi-immersion	Friendship or love interest or spouse	Higher ed degree
Short-term travel	Gain an identity	teacher directed gain
simultaneous learning and immersion	gain family	to be cool
socialization with L2	gain independence	
sociopolitical issues	studied	
something different		

specific level of proficiency		
Current proficiency		
Comfortable		
Compliments from others		
Did not reach DOL		
Get around		
Gets jokes		
dreamed in L2		
listener comprehension		
Measure of success		
Personal measure of proficiency		
Success		

