

What Motivates People to Learn Multiple Languages?

A Narrative Study of One Multilingual Speaker

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Introduction to the Problem and Review of Literature

In recent years, there has been an upsurge and interest in language learning. In a world where so many languages are spoken and the number of immigrants is rising, many people are presented with circumstances where the knowledge of a foreign language would be beneficial. Americans, in particular, are at a disadvantage when it comes to learning other languages. Grosjean (2010), in his book on bilingualism, states that most of the world's population is bilingual, but only 17% of the population in the United States speaks a second language (L2). He goes on to suggest that there is no discernible advantage in being monolingual and that bilingual people tend to excel in their career of choice. If that is the case, speakers of multiple languages would undoubtedly be counted among them.

Much of the current interest in language learning has focused on third language (L3) learning. For example, Cenoz (2013) implies that there are advantages in learning an L3 over learning an L2. Having learned an L2 will likely benefit individuals who are learning an L3 because they will have previous experience and learning strategies from which to draw. Furthermore, research shows that students are able to transfer linguistic knowledge from one language to another. Additionally, learning an L3 could impact how people identify themselves. Each new language learned might reflect a different sense of "self." If all of this is true for learning an L3, then why would it not be just as true, if not more so, for someone who learns multiple languages (i.e. languages beyond an L3)?

Why people choose to study multiple languages is a fascinating topic. One may perhaps choose to explore learners' motivations for studying various languages. Why do people choose a certain language first and another second? What strategies do they use to learn the languages? How do the languages they learn affect their identity? One of the best methods for addressing all of these questions is narrative research. This approach ties all of these aspects of multiple language learning together holistically in the experiences of a single individual.

Narrative inquiry uses first-hand stories as data. This is unique in the sense that the participants in the study "both live and tell stories about their living" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44) which serve as "a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). By conducting narrative inquiry and sharing the results, a researcher is able to convey the participants' personal stories, thus allowing the readers to better understand the participants' experiences, show empathy for the participants' situations, and relate these situations to their own lives.

Learning a Second Language vs. Learning Multiple Languages

It is interesting to note that most language acquisition studies today focus on bilingualism or L2 learning (e.g., Oxford, Pacheco Acuña, Solís Hernández, & Smith, 2015; Park, 2011); few look at learners of multiple languages. Furthermore, few studies of either L2 or multiple language learning have employed narrative inquiry. Oxford et al. (2015)

asked their participants to write stories about learning a non-native language, but each person was only bilingual. Park (2011) studied English language learners at a community college, all of whom were immigrants and learning English as their L2.

One notable exception is a study by Gabryś-Bargker and Otwinowska (2012), in which the researchers asked multilingual language users to produce retrospective narratives on their L2 and L3 learning experiences. All of the students in this study spoke Polish as their first language (L1), English as their L2, and were studying French as their L3. Although all the participants were in seemingly identical situations, one major factor in whether or not their experiences were favorable was the age at which they began learning the L3. The study consisted of two French courses—beginning and advanced—of 20 students each. The beginning students all began studying the L3 in their early twenties, while the advanced students began at the age of 10 or 11. As a result, the students in the beginning course expressed less enthusiasm for the language than the students in the advanced course.

Identity and Motivation

Much of the research explores how language learning relates to the learner's identity (e.g., Chik & Breidbach, 2011; Cummins, 2009; Harklau, 2000; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Li, 2014; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2001; Park, 2011; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Stroud & Wee, 2007). In these cases, the participants generally affirmed that their language identity was inseparably tied to their experiences in life using that language, whether at home, in a foreign country, or in the classroom. Unfortunately, nearly all of these studies look at L2 learning as opposed to learning multiple languages, and few are narrative in nature.

Perhaps the more intriguing topic is that of learner motivation to learn the language. Li (2014) conducted a narrative inquiry of six Hong Kong post-secondary students' English learning experiences. Although not explicitly stated, it is likely that these students were learning English as an L3, because Cantonese was the L1 and Chinese was widely used as an L2, especially in Chinese-medium schools—schools where all the materials are written in Chinese, but the instruction is in Cantonese. In Li's investigation, the participants' investment, or motivation, in the language was tied to their prior learning experiences, multiple identities, and hopes and desires for the future. One student believed that language is a means of communication that enables him to connect with other cultures. Several other students described their motivation in the language as the importance of performing well in school. Furthermore, because of the environment in which they had grown up, all of the students saw English as a means to climb the social ladder. For the students in Park's (2011) study, the situation was somewhat similar. These participants were all adult L2 English language learners at a community college in the United States. Because of their circumstances, they saw English as a means to gain membership in the community and become socially and professionally active.

Although the rationale behind the initial catalyst to learn a language and the reasons for continuing to study a language may be different, the idea of motivation in a language is a fascinating subject. In the instance of the participants in Li's (2014) study, they were likely required to study English by the school system. For the students in Park's (2011) study, the impetus was probably due to their newfound lives in an English-speaking country. While these reasons are fairly simple to deduce, it does not explain the situation of other students who study languages without living in these circumstances.

Narrative Inquiry

As stated previously, few studies in L2 and multiple language learning employ narrative inquiry. Li (2014) undoubtedly uses this approach as she recounts the experiences of the six students based on interviews she conducted with them. Others employed the use of written narratives (Gabryś-Barker & Otwinowska, 2012; Oxford et al., 2015; Park, 2011). In the case of Oxford et al. (2015), the study looked at the written stories of six individuals associated with a university in Costa Rica, all of whom had previously learned an L2. Although the data collection used narrative research, the analysis used grounded theory. In the end, the researchers concluded that:

We need more studies involving learner histories, which let learners speak in their own voices. These stories not only reveal what animates learners but also disclose the reasons why learning languages becomes so engaging in intellectual, emotional, and sociocultural ways. (p. 108)

Nothing can compare to the personal story of a language learner in aiding to understand their experiences with a language. Although some studies have used narrative inquiry, the combination of learning multiple languages and narrative research is rare. How can we hope to understand the reasons behind people's desire to learn a language if we do not allow them to tell their story? If the focus of a study is on multiple language learner experiences, then a narrative inquiry allows them to tell their stories and allows the researcher and reader to make meaning of those experiences: "Narrative inquiry helps us to see more carefully and completely ... [the] details, complexities, contexts, and stories of human experiences of learning..." (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 1).

Although studies have discussed the rationale behind the acquisition of an L2, those reasons, in many cases, are accompanied by a lack of true desire to learn the language. On the other hand, it seems reasonable to assume that someone would learn multiple languages because there is an earnest desire. Whatever the justifications may be, there is a clear need for research to illustrate them. Therefore, narrative research on one individual who has chosen to learn multiple languages would be very meaningful to the educational community by tying together the various aspects related to learning multiple languages in the experience of a single individual.

The Present Study

The purpose of this narrative study is to tell the story of one individual who chose to study multiple languages. Furthermore, it strives to understand and describe her background with languages, the reasons she chose to learn these languages, the strategies she has employed in learning and maintaining each language, and her beliefs about how being multilingual has affected her identity.

Research Questions

- What stories does this individual have to tell as a learner of multiple languages?
- What experiences led her to study each language?
- Were there turning points or epiphanies?
- How has knowing one language helped her to learn others?
- How does being a learner of multiple languages affect her identity?

Methodology

Participant

I became interested in this topic as a substitute teacher getting to know the students in a SPAN 321 course at Brigham Young University (BYU). I noted that some students had learned other languages before taking this course. I wondered at the experiences that may have led them to study Spanish after having learned other languages. Therefore, I decided to use narrative inquiry to try to understand why someone would choose to study multiple languages. I selected one individual to participate in this study: Ruth Maria Baptista, an adjunct professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at BYU.

Sources of Information

Initially, I conducted an hour and a half, in-person interview with Ruth. This interview was semi-structured with guiding questions. Thus it made allowances for spontaneous, follow-up queries that allowed her to elaborate on her descriptions.

Once I gathered, analyzed, and organized the data, I conducted a half-hour, in-person follow-up interview. This allowed for clarifications of the information gained in the first interview, as well as a few questions that arose as I studied the transcript. Furthermore, it served as an opportunity for member checking, in which I allowed Ruth to look over the data analysis to confirm whether or not I had accurately portrayed her story. In order to accomplish this, I sent a copy of my preliminary data analysis to Ruth.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I first transcribed the initial and follow-up interviews, along with some of my comments about what Ruth said. Second, I read through the interviews various times, identified major ideas, and coded the passages with notes in the margins. Many of these codes became categories, which I kept track of, and later organized, in a Word document. After looking through the categories in the Word document, I grouped them into four different themes and organized the themes and categories—now subcategories—in a logical order. Using the Weft QDA software, I highlighted different passages from the interview transcripts and assigned them to their proper subcategories. By doing this, I was able to view the subcategories individually and see all of the related data. Within each subcategory, and based on the data, I wrote my preliminary analysis in memo format. These notes have guided my findings, which are separated by theme and then subcategory.

Validity and Reliability

In order to increase validity and reliability in this study, I attempted to use various methods suggested in the literature on qualitative research. As stated previously, I performed a member check with Ruth to ensure that the analysis of the information provided appeared accurate to her. Furthermore, information on some of my biases and my audit trail—a record of the steps taken throughout this research—have been included in this study.

Findings

Some people, if they're not close to something, they cannot see the value of it. Others, they don't have to be close in order to see the value for [sic] it I think I'm the second.... (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

Ruth Maria Baptista made this comment as she reflected on learning languages during one of our interviews. As some-

one who speaks seven languages, she feels that anyone, given the right opportunity, has the ability to speak multiple languages. In her nearly four decades of life, she has found value in learning languages and continues to express her love for them.

I first met Ruth when we sat down for our first interview. Although we are both involved in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at BYU, we had never crossed paths. That may be partly due to the fact that I am an M.A. student in Spanish Pedagogy and Ruth is an adjunct professor teaching Portuguese conversation courses. At any rate, thanks to an e-mail solicitation sent to the faculty members of the department, she graciously agreed to participate in this research. I believe this is because she is passionate about language learning.

Ruth is from Portugal and spends much of her time translating and interpreting for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), as well as other organizations such as the Foundation for Better Life and UNESCO in Africa. It is clear that her knowledge of various languages qualifies her for this work. Aside from her native Portuguese, she speaks French, English, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, and Turkish. She also aspires to learn Farsi, Russian, Korean, and Japanese.

In getting to know Ruth and reviewing our conversations, I was able to better understand her fervor for language learning. This examination provides an in-depth analysis of her background with languages, why she learns languages, how she learns and maintains these languages, and how they affect her identity. I also have a love of languages, but after speaking with Ruth, I found myself wanting to acquire the same level of enthusiasm she has. It is my hope that others will find meaning in language learning through Ruth's experiences.

Background with Languages

MANDATORY/FAMILY INFLUENCE. As in many countries, learning an L2 was mandatory in the Portuguese school system where Ruth grew up. Students could choose between French, English, and German, "French was my second language, when I was nine, my parents chose, but then they sent me to boarding school and I think the English sections were full and I was put into the French sections" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). Although her parents chose French as her second language, her siblings were not sent to boarding school and were therefore able to study English.

Not only did Ruth's parents influence which language she would learn as a second language, but they may also have been a latent influence in her decision to continue learning languages, "My parents don't speak either English or French, but they do speak some of the second languages for [sic] Angola, as well as some of the dialects" (personal communication, August 6, 2016). Perhaps language learning seemed natural to Ruth because her parents already knew more than one language. Furthermore, she became an influence for her own family. Her younger sister Nadia showed an attraction to languages as well. When I asked Ruth if she thought she had had any influence on her sister's interest, she said, "Oh yah. Yah. She changed degrees a few times 'cause she said, 'I wanna be like my sister.' No, absolutely, she says that straightforward. I was like, 'Oh man, that's a lot of responsibility'" (personal communication, August 6). So it seems that family influence can play a powerful role in learning languages, even on a multigenerational basis. I have no doubt that Ruth could be an inspiration to nieces and nephews as well.

NATIVE TEACHERS. In her language studies, Ruth felt that she had a "privileged education." For nearly all of the languages she speaks, she was able to study with native teachers:

I learned English from English. I learned French with French.... My English teacher, she was either English or from the United States.... And, also, the German we learned with Germans. And so I had a privileged education when it came to that. Not everybody did. (personal communication, July 26, 2016)

She goes on to say that some students had Portuguese-speaking language teachers. When she studied Spanish at the university in London, her teacher was from Madrid. Furthermore, her Arabic and Turkish teachers at BYU were also native speakers of those languages. In Ruth's opinion, learning language from a native can bring insights that might not otherwise be gleaned. I discuss later how Ruth stresses the importance of conversing with native speakers.

MULTICULTURAL UPBRINGING. One thing that motivated Ruth to learn other languages was her multicultural upbringing. Aside from the fact that growing up in Europe afforded exposure to other languages because of the close proximity of the countries, she was raised in an area where many tourists from various nations would visit

I know for a fact what got me interested in languages is I grew up in a very multicultural area.... Northern Europeans go on vacations in Spain and Portugal... so having Spanish, German, and English every summer.... Everybody sends their kids to colonies regardless of which country you are [sic]. (personal communication, July 26, 2016)

As a child, she spent summers at beach colonies with children from other countries. The closest description she could come up with to describe these "colonies" to me was that they are basically the equivalent of "day care," but in this case, the children went to the beach. At these colonies, she quickly discovered that the languages were different, but, as she says, children have a tendency to interact regardless. It seems to me that we would do well as adults to learn from children when it comes to language interaction.

NATURAL ABILITY/TALENT. In her interactions with foreign children, Ruth discovered at an early age that she had a natural ability with languages. Linguistically, she was able to reach out to other children faster than they were able to reach out to her. This talent did not begin in the colonies, however, but rather while reading Portuguese subtitles on television programs and listening to the native languages (particularly English), "A lot of people struggle, but I was able to do that from an early age" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). As she grew older, she realized that she was good at learning languages, so she might as well learn them. She decided to study Spanish while in London because she found that it was a "hub for internationals everywhere": "At that point my brain was like, 'OK, I'm good at this. So we [sic] gonna just do as much as possible.'... And uh, it wasn't hard" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). The ease of learning Spanish was certainly connected to her natural ability for languages. However, it should be noted that Portuguese and Spanish have many similarities which aid in learning one language for those who know the other.

Why Learn a Language?

CHILDHOOD INTEREST. As a young child, Ruth's interest in language learning was piqued by watching cartoons in another language with Portuguese subtitles, "I remember paying attention to Japanese cartoons and thinking, 'Oh, those are Japanese, right? But they're speaking English.'... So I wanted to learn the language without having to read it" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). That was when she first realized that there were other languages and she became curious about them, "It was understanding there was [sic] other languages around me" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). She described her initial interest in language as a "curiosity."

DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS. In the beginning, Ruth wanted to be able to understand the children from other countries. She saw the differences between the way the Portuguese acted and the way the German or the English acted and she wanted to understand it, "The body language is different in some nations" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). She noticed, depending on the country, that body language is distinct and that a person's sense of time can be very different. She found that she wanted to communicate with people from other countries so that she could understand them.

The curiosity of language in Ruth's childhood soon grew beyond understanding language and actions; it became a desire to understand the deeper meanings of the language and the connotations behind what was being said, as well as understand why people do the things they do, "I think if I understand individuals, I can also understand them, not just understand what they say, but understand the meaning, which, there's a difference between what we say and what we mean" (personal communication, August 6, 2016). This aroused her interest when she began to discover that people from different countries act in different ways.

Ruth expressed particular enthusiasm for understanding why Vladimir Putin speaks and acts the way he does, "So when it comes to ... Putin, I want to understand that man. It's almost like I feel like, 'Ok, let's have a conversation, Mr. President. And I want to understand you and what the heck's going on in that brain'" (personal communication, August 6, 2016). This is one of the reasons she feels a desire to learn Russian, which also extends to other languages (e.g. Korean). In order to pick through cultural biases, which she believes every culture has, she uses language.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE. In my conversations with Ruth, the most recurring topic seemed to be the idea of understanding cultures. As a young adult and growing up, she became more interested in learning about cultures in other countries. She used language as a means to help her understand cultures and why people do what they do. In one instance, she recalled sitting down to a meal with her family and watching the news at the same time:

I remember that Saddam Hussein was accused of killing an entire Kurdish village by using what the world knows now to be anthrax. That was the first time in my life I'd ever heard of anthrax, and I think half of the world. And I was shocked! And I was like, "How?" I was distraught. I really was. My dad was like, "You have to calm down." I couldn't understand why a person would use an entire village, all of the human beings on [sic] that place, 500 people who lived there, and just kill them to see how effective anthrax was. And I was distraught by that. And I was like, "Are you kidding me?" And so I was like, "I'm gonna learn Arabic. I don't understand, but I'm gonna learn it 'cause I want to understand why a person would do this. (personal communication, July 26, 2016)

Much like her desire to learn Russian and Korean, she felt the need to understand this man and his culture in order to come to grips with his actions. From there, she began studying the Middle East and visiting Muslim mosques to try to gain some perspective. When she moved to England to study at the university, she studied the Arabic language.

Ruth affirmed that it is impossible to understand a culture without speaking the language. For example, she does not speak German, and therefore she feels that she does not understand Germans, "I don't understand their culture. I don't know how you eat so many sausages and drink so much beer" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). She also mentioned that she has no interest in learning the German culture, and by extension, she has no interest in learning about their language.

However, Ruth's ambition to learn Turkish is directly related to a craving to understand the culture. When Turkey asked to be part of the European Union, she asked herself, "How is that gonna work? There's [sic] so many ethnicities in Turkey ... what does that mean for the European Union with all of us? I should learn Turkish so I can understand the people, so I could be friendly" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). Not only did she seek to understand their culture, but she wanted to be able to welcome them and interact with them in meaningful ways.

CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS. Beneath the subcategory of understanding culture, Ruth brought up related topics that I found interesting. One area was that of the assumptions that we make about cultures. One point that Ruth made in driving home the idea that one should use language to understand the culture is a myth that has circulated amongst the students

in the Portuguese department at BYU that every Portuguese person has a donkey. She finds this to be a ridiculous notion and points out that:

if that person would [sic] really took the time or taken [sic] the time to understand the Portuguese culture and immerse himself into it using the language, for example, he would probably understand people's conversations and ideas and he would understand that that's not true. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

That seems like good advice, and Ruth practices what she preaches:

I feel part of a culture when I understand the language, when I can communicate with a similar accent, when I am not just a user of the language, but I'm actually somehow part of their culture by understanding it. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

So not only does Ruth discuss some problems inherent to language learning and culture, but she offers recommendations on how to combat those problems. This counsel is more meaningful because she implements it herself.

Her desire to understand culture does not relate only to actions, but also to specific words that are used within cultures. Ruth gave an example of the word "Latino" in the United States:

In Spain, in Europe, you are Spanish. In United States [sic], you are Latina. Why? Why that specific word means [sic] what it means, encompasses billions of individuals, and why is it that United States [sic] as a nation is the only country who says that? (personal communication, July 26, 2016)

She explained that in Europe, people are simply described as being from their country of origin (e.g. Portuguese, Spanish, French, German, etc.). They are not lumped into a category with people from other countries. I must admit that I can see how it might be difficult to describe everyone based on their country of origin if you live in a large country such as the United States where there are many immigrants. I imagine that's why we group people with a similar language. However, I have also wondered at the oddity of the word "Latino" or even "Hispanic." Because of her longing to understand the culture of certain people, Ruth seeks to learn their language in order to comprehend. It seems to me that we would do well in the United States to strive to learn more about the immigrants who come here instead of assuming that they all belong in one category.

ACCENT. Accent is also a topic that belongs under the subcategory of understanding culture. It is not necessarily an imperative aspect in learning about a culture, but Ruth believes that it places one in a position to gain an insider's perspective of the culture. At one point in her own experience as a language learner, she was mistaken for a native speaker of Italian:

I met some Italians from Rome. And then they were talking to me, and they stopped and they're like, "Did you grow up in Naples?" And I was so happy. I was like, "No, but I'm so excited!"... when a native thinks that I am a native... I think that opens a window for the native speakers to communicate with me in a way that they would communicate with an Italian. They won't make it prejudice [sic]. They will forget that I'm not Italian.... So they will interact with me as if I was [sic] another Italian. At that point, I am able to consume an aspect of the culture that a person who just uses the language does not. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

Although she was flattered and did tell the natives that she was not a native herself, she found that this allowed her to have conversations with the natives that would not have otherwise been possible. In this way, they treated her as a "homie," as she puts it, or comrade.

Ruth had a similar experience while working as a French translator for the LDS Church. A native French speaker asked her if she was from Paris. She gave a similar response. Again, while she does not believe that a near-native accent is necessary for accessing a culture, she does see the value of it:

At that point, there's an interaction between two individuals that only two natives can have. And at that point, I access a part of the French heritage, the French culture that only French, or those who grew up in France will. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

Unfortunately, we had no conversations about how a language learner can achieve near-native accents in languages. I would imagine that Ruth's strategy of repeating the words she hears may have helped her. However, I think this is a topic for another qualitative study.

CHARM OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES. In one instance, Ruth's decision to learn a language was unlike the rest. She chose to learn Italian merely for the charm and beauty it exuded, "The idea of Italy is romantic ... it was a beautiful language and I wanted to learn it" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). This was quite an unusual response, given that she stressed the desire to learn about culture through languages. In fact, when asked which language she would want to learn in the future, she mentioned two "practical" languages (Russian and Korean) and a language for pleasure (Japanese): "It's a mellow language.... I guess for pleasure, kind of like Italian, it'd be Japanese. " She finds the sound of Japanese soothing and described it as a "feng shui language" (personal communication, July 26, 2016).

KNOWING ONE LANGUAGE HELPS LEARN OTHERS. Cenoz (2013) discusses the influence of bilingualism in learning an L3. She describes in depth the advantages bilinguals have over monolinguals when they are attempting to acquire another language. In a very relatable example, Cenoz describes learning three languages as learning to walk, learning to drive a car, and learning to drive a bus. In this example, learning to drive a car (L2) is not the same as learning to walk (L1), therefore the skill of walking is not very helpful in learning to drive a car. However, learning to drive a car is extremely helpful in learning to drive a bus (L3); the concepts are generally the same, but the starting point is not that of an absolute beginner.

In learning each new language, Ruth discovered that her knowledge of previous languages, even her native language, was helpful. Generally, she found that vocabulary and grammar were the most helpful, "That's huge because if you don't understand the grammar in any language, you're gonna speak it, but you're never gonna necessarily understand it" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). In some cases, the similarities were extremely helpful (e.g. the alphabet).

The How-to of Language Learning and Upkeep

SUBTITLES IN VISUAL MEDIA. Ruth's earliest form of learning a language was by way of Portuguese subtitles for television programs in other languages. She credits Portugal with having an incredible subtitle system; the translations flow with the spoken language so that nothing is lost, "I've always learned a language in their natural, raw form, but I read it in Portuguese" (personal communication, July 26, 2016). Because of this, she believes that the Portuguese, in general, are better at speaking English than their Spanish neighbors, who dub their television programs. Despite what the "experts" say, she is very much in favor of using subtitles. However, the caveat is that the subtitles should be true to the native language.

WORD REPETITION. To build on her use of subtitles, Ruth practiced repeating the words that she heard in the other languages and related them to their Portuguese translation. She shared a particular story about an instance where she was intrigued by a word. When she was very young, her mother and neighbor were watching an episode of Dallas, an

American soap opera from the 1980s. While she was not usually watch this show with her mother, she happened to hear one of the characters speak the word “yesterday”:

I would pay very close attention to what they were saying and I would repeat it back.... She said said the word “yesterday.” And to me, I thought it was interesting. I was like, “Yesterday.” And I kept repeating it, “Yesterday.” And then I’d keep reading it [on the subtitles] and ... I said, “Oh, it means *ontem*.” (personal communication, July 26, 2016)

She proceeded to repeat the word over and over and came to realize what its meaning was in Portuguese. This was one of the early strategies she used for learning languages. In this case, and I’m sure many others, she found a way to utilize the subtitles to help her understand the words she would hear and repeat.

SCHOOL COURSES. Ruth feels that taking language courses in school is necessary for learning grammar and syntax. In her opinion, “Even natives, we learn vocab at home, right? But we learn and understand language, in terms of grammar, syntax, and all of those, in school, whether we are taught at home. So we learn it in a structured environment” (personal communication, August 6, 2016). So it is equally important for a non-native speaker to have a structured environment in which to learn. If this does not happen, Ruth feels that non-native speakers will still be able to communicate, but they will not be able to achieve their full potential in the language:

If a Ukrainian lives in Portugal, which there’s [sic] a lot of Ukrainians because of what happened in Ukraine a few years ago. They speak the language, but unless they go to school, they will always gonna [sic] be deficient. Now, they can communicate with you for sure, right? But they will never be able to do it to a point that they can really communicate. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

Furthermore, she believes that taking the time to learn a language in school then prepares language learners to immerse themselves in the culture by visiting the native country. The combination of these two things, Ruth asserts, will aid in better understanding the language and culture.

TRAVEL AND IMMERSION. Ruth believes that immersion in a culture is imperative to learning a language, “I believe in immerse [sic] myself in the culture. And so, living, you know, surround [sic] myself with those who speak the language, it is imperative” (personal communication, July 26, 2016). For nearly all of the languages she knows, she has travelled to or lived in countries where they speak the language.

Although Ruth does feel that attending school is essential to learning a language, she believes that schooling must then be supplemented with immersion in the culture. That is where learners put into practice the things that they learn in class:

The Arabic department [at BYU] is very adamant in taking students ... to the Middle East ... because the only way that you can then, “Oh.” The language sinks in. What do [sic] you learn in the classroom sinks in then. You are in contact with the people every day. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

Furthermore, Ruth believes that learning the language should not be an end goal. The aim should be to use the language to converse with and learn about people from other countries, “So to me it’s like, I’m learning Turkish, we gotta go to Turkey. It’s not like, ‘Oh I’m gonna learn Turkish and that’s it’” (personal communication, August 6, 2016). This was an idea that she expressed on several occasions during our interviews. She feels very strongly about getting to

know native speakers of the language, visiting countries where the language is spoken, and immersing oneself in the culture in order to truly use language in a meaningful way. In fact, in speaking with Ruth, I was reminded of a quote by Seelye (1993):

In the final analysis, no matter how technically dexterous a student's training in the foreign language, if the student avoids contact with native speakers of that language and lacks respect for their world view, of what value is the training? Where can it be put to use? What educational breadth has it inspired? (p. 21)

Ruth summed this up very nicely in her adamancy that all language learners should immerse themselves in the culture by visiting the countries where the language is spoken and speaking with native speakers.

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE. Not only does Ruth have various strategies for learning languages, she also has ways to maintain the languages she knows

Now social media also helps because with the amount of friends that I have in those nations, I occasionally talk to them on social media.... I listen to the BBC. I read. I watch the news and different channels on those nations purposely. (personal communication, July 26, 2016)

Although she does not employ each language with the same frequency, she does use each language. She tries to incorporate a variety of ways to maintain her languages. Aside from those previously mentioned, she has one-on-one conversations with native speakers or friends who speak the language. She also retains her languages through teaching, translation, and interpretation. When I spoke to her after the initial interview, she had many suggestions for ways that I can maintain my German without requiring funds to travel to a German-speaking country.

Identity

When I asked Ruth about whether or not being a speaker of multiple languages affects her identity, she immediately responded that it does not, "It doesn't affect my identity. I mean, being part of the European Union I often times say, 'I'm European.' I'm a European, but I'm first and foremost Portuguese" (personal communication, August 6, 2016). While she feels Portuguese principally, I get the feeling that speaking multiple languages does, in a sense, define her identity. Not only did she describe herself as Portuguese and European, but also "a citizen of the world" and "part of a mosaic." And at home wherever she lives, "I always call myself a citizen of the world 'cause that's how I see myself. I see myself as part of a mosaic. I am not so Portuguese that I'm not able to make space for everybody else" (personal communication, August 6, 2016). Perhaps identity does not have to be defined in one way. In the previous statement, we see that her identity as a Portuguese native does not prevent her from being inclusive. In fact, she has advice for people who want to travel and use their language:

One of my favorite expressions is, "In Rome, be a Roman." Be part of those people. Understand who they are. Embrace that culture. Learn with them. But also make sure that you know who you are, because then the fusion of those two ideas, those two identities, those two thoughts creates a much better thing, I think. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

In other words, individuals do not have to change who they are in order to learn about and feel part of other cultures. However, they should respect those cultures. In attempting to understand them, people should go in with an open mind and a willingness to learn. Nevertheless, Ruth maintains that speaking multiple languages does not change her identity, rather it enhances it. She is able to be a more inclusive person, allowing people into her culture as well as feeling part of other cultures.

Conclusion

The three main themes discussed in the literature were also present in Ruth's experiences. She discussed how knowing one language has helped her to learn other languages, especially with regard to vocabulary and grammar. Cenoz (2013) discussed the advantages of knowing an L2 when learning an L3. Clearly this can be expanded to a fourth language, a fifth language, a sixth language, and so on.

The identity of language learners was a major theme in various studies (Chick & Breidbach, 2011; Cummins, 2009; Harklau, 2000; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Li, 2014, McKay & Wong, 1996, Norton, 2001; Park, 2011, Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Stroud & Wee, 2007). Although Ruth did not initially feel that her experiences with language learning changed her identity in any way, she did confide in me that she felt these experiences enhanced her identity. She felt as if she could be more inclusive and more accepting of other cultures and languages.

Despite the fact that Ruth had various means of motivation to learn other languages, nearly every language was learned because of a desire to do so. The participants in Li's study (2014), however, were often compelled to learn a language because of school requirements. Although that fits Ruth's original reason for learning French as an L2, she came to love the people and the cultures that belonged to the languages she learned. On the other hand, Li also found that some of the participants saw language learning as a means to climb the social ladder. Park's (2011) study likewise found that the participants felt they could improve their social and professional status by learning the language. At no point did Ruth give any evidence that she desired personal gain from learning a language. If anything, her motives were generally selfless in that she felt compelled to understand the culture and why people think, speak, and act the way they do. In a sense, Ruth's language learning process has been an informal qualitative study of her own. She has sought to understand the human experience, just as I have done here. I hope that we can all strive to do that in our endeavors to learn languages. As Ruth summarizes:

I think anyone that has a little bit of passion though, and a little bit of will, and time, they can do it.

I I think anybody can. (personal communication, August 6, 2016)

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