The Effects of Motivation and Other Factors on Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study on Achieving Advanced Oral Proficiency in English

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Abstract:
This paper is based on a case study of Raya, a Palestinian Arab undergraduate student, at the University of Jordan, who has achieved level B1 according to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in listening and reading comprehension ('accomplished') and CEFR level B2 ('superior') in language form and meaning in English according to the TOEFL Junior Exam. Based on multiple data sources (i.e. interviews, observation, questionnaires and document analysis), the study aims to highlight how Raya's multiple identities as a language learner, avid film watcher, YouTube user and online gamer, and a (non) member of a target language community have contributed to her oral proficiency in English. The study also aims to emphasize some personal attributes that Raya has as a language learner in order to uncover the factors which have assisted or hampered her acquisition of English. The main finding of the case study is that Raya's English language proficiency has been enriched because of two overriding factors: firstly, integrative motivation (i.e. her love of English) highlighted through her immersion in the target language by her online identity, films and social interaction; and, secondly, instrumental motivation (i.e. using the language as a means to academic and professional advancement) in the sense she realized English was a way of helping her to achieve her goal of leaving her hometown and studying abroad. It is hoped that this study will inspire and inform both language learners and educators alike, as to some of the steps to success in acquiring proficiency in English or any other language.

Key Words: advanced speaker, integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, learning styles, second language acquisition

Introduction
The fact that some language learners (in retrospect generally only a small number) achieve native-like proficiency while most do not, has been the subject of much debate in the existing literature such as the work of Leaver and Shekhtman (2002) and Byrnes (2006). Perhaps, due to this limited number of learners who achieve such proficiency, there is actually very little research about them and how they have come to be proficient in the target language. More specifically, research is sparse on how the personal and linguistic profiles of learners who achieve such high proficiency have assisted or hampered their second language acquisition is sparse.

In order to gain some insight into second language oral proficiency, the researchers report on the results from a case study of Raya, a Palestinian Arab undergraduate student (of one of the researchers) at The University of Jordan, Amman, who has achieved level B1 ('accomplished') according to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in listening and reading comprehension and CEFR level B2 ('superior') in language form and meaning in English according to the TOEFL Junior Exam. According to the Educational Testing Service (2016), these tests are "intended for students ages 11+ [and] are an objective and reliable measure of […] students' English communication skills." (p.1). A learner who scores between 845-900, i.e. 'superior' "consistently demonstrates comprehension of complex written and spoken materials, drawing on knowledge of complex language structures and vocabulary" (Educational Testing Service, 2016, p.1). A learner who scores between 785–840, i.e. 'accomplished' "often demonstrates comprehension of complex written and spoken materials, drawing on knowledge of complex language structures and vocabulary" (Educational Testing Service, 2016, p.1).

This study aims to emphasize some personal attributes that Raya has as a language learner and her personal relationship with the target language community in order to uncover the factors which have assisted or hampered her acquisition of English. In doing so, the researchers hope to shed some light on Raya's linguistic journey in order to show other language learners as well as educators how sometimes, against all the odds, one can achieve language proficiency, especially when motivation (both integrative and instrumental) has a major role to play. Throughout the paper, Raya's interview comments and questionnaire responses will be referred to in exemplifying the factors behind her successful language proficiency. Reference will also be made to the comments of outside observers of Raya, namely her university lecturers, as further support to the claims posited.

Communicative Competence and Second Language Proficiency
As the knowledge of second language learning began to increase significantly in the 1970s, so did the realization that "no single research finding and no single method of language teaching would usher in an era of universal success in teaching a second language"(Kroll & De Groot, 2005, p.132). It was also recognized that despite particular methods or techniques of teaching, some individuals appear to be more successful than others with regard to second language acquisition (Kroll &De Groot, 2005, p.132). It was at this point, that the recognition of individual variation occurred with the conclusion that "certain people appeared to be endowed with abilities to succeed [whereas] others lacked those abilities" (Krol & De Groot, 2005, p.132).

Another influential study by Naiman et al. (1996). aimed to uncover whether there was a relationship between the personal characteristics of learners with high proficiency, as opposed to those who had been less successful in attempting to learn a second language. As Samimy (2008) notes, "the study revealed that good language learners differ from less successful counterparts in terms of their motivation, intellectual abilities, personality and learning preferences" (p.402). Motivation or "orientations" as Donrnyei (2001b) and Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) refer to them, are often identified as two basic types, namely: instrumental and integrative (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) both of which were acknowledged by Raya in accelerating her language proficiency. As Kroll, J. and De Groot, (2005) argue:

> The instrumental side of the dichotomy refers to acquiring the language as a means for attaining instrumental goals: furthering a career, reading technical material, translation and so forth. The integrative side describes learners who wish to integrate themselves into the culture of the second language group and become involved in social interchange in that group.(p.170)

More specifically, Naiman et al.(1996) discovered that good adult language learners appear to employ five strategies, which can also be applied to Raya, namely:

> a) actively involve themselves in a language learning task; b) develop or exploit an awareness of language as a system; c) develop or exploit an awareness of language as a means of communication and interaction; d) realize initially or with time that they must cope with the affective demands made upon them by language learning and succeed in doing so; and e) constantly revise their L2 system. (pp.30-33)

Lightbown and Spada (2006) further discuss the linguistic process of language acquisition by examining learner characteristics that either have a positive or negative effect on individuals' proficiency. Variables included in their analysis were "intelligence, aptitude, learning styles, personality, motivation and attitudes, identity and ethnic group affiliation, learner beliefs, and age of acquisition" (Samimy, 2008, p.402). However, it is also recognized that such studies may be problematic since certain variables are not always directly observable or measurable, self-report questionnaires may not always be reliable and it cannot be assumed on face value that two variables such as motivation and language proficiency have a causal relationship. Nevertheless, in saying so, the importance of such research should not be underestimated for its benefits to researchers, educators and language learners alike in achieving a better understanding of the process of human learning in general and second language acquisition in particular (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, pp.56-57).

Whereas previous studies focused on high proficiency learners' personality traits or learning strategies, Norton and Toohey (2001) examined the relationships language learners have with the target language communities and whether this has any effect (positive or negative) on their language acquisition. It was found that "both adult and child learners were successful in gaining access to a target language community by relying on social resources" (Samimy, 2008, p.403). They did this by employing the assistance of "community or extra-community allies" (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p.318). Such allies enabled the learners to "negotiate their identities from stigmatized identities (ESL immigrant and ESL learner) to empowered identities (multi-

lingual resource and nice little girl)" (Samimy, 2008, p.403). They conclude that we should also "pay attention to social practices in the contexts in which individuals learn L2s" (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p.318), and not just the individual characteristics of good language learners (Samimy, 2008, p.403). The American male 'Mark' in Samimy's study (2008) who is highly proficient in Arabic, although feeling "that there were some personal factors which might hinder his easy access to the target language communities" (p.410), still has 'allies' in the form of native Arabic speaking friends, lecturers and colleagues. This is in contrast to Raya, who in fact has no 'allies', and as explained below, was in effect shunned by a section of the target language community (in this case, online). Hence it is significant that Raya achieved proficiency without the direct help of native speakers.

Given the characteristics of good language learners mentioned above, the aspect of Raya's language proficiency which most struck the researchers after interacting and observing her, was her 'fluency'. Fluency, as argued by theorists such as Faerch et al (1984, p.168), is a component of communicative competence which Carter and Nunan (2001) define as "the ability to use language appropriate to the social context in order to accomplish one's goals" (p.219). Fluency also refers to "speakers' ability to make use of whatever linguistic and pragmatic competence they have" (Faerch et al. 1984, p.168). A component of fluency is 'strategic' competence (especially important for foreign language learners) which is the ability to "cope in an authentic communicative situation and how to keep the communicative channel open" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p.25). As Kroll and De Groot (2008) suggest "an eloquent speaker possesses and uses a sophisticated strategic competence" (p.220). Bachman (1990) goes further to argue that strategic competence is in fact a separate entity of communicative language ability, serving an "executive function of making the final decision" (p.87), whether it be "wording, phrasing, and other productive and receptive means for negotiating meaning" (Kroll & De Groot, 2005, p.221).

The theory behind communicative competence was born as a contrast to the traditional Chomskyan view (1965), which presented an idealized perspective of language, defining it as an abstract system with universal features. In response to Chomsky's viewpoint, later works by theorists such as Hymes (1972) concluded that language could not be viewed as strictly an abstract phenomenon but rather as a social phenomenon, and they stressed the importance of an individual's ability to employ speech appropriately in a variety of social contexts (See McCarthy, 2001, pp.45-46). Hymes, supported by the earlier work of Campbell and Wales (1970, pp.246-60), believes that linguistic competence was only one component of language competence. He defined communicative competence as a combination of grammatical competence and sociolinguistic/pragmatic competence (see McCarthy, 2001, pp.45-46). According to Hymes, the language user should have "the ability to produce utterances which are not so much grammatical, but more importantly, appropriate to the context in which they are made" (as cited in McLaughlin, 2001, p.1).

Later work by Canale and Swain (1980) aimed to provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework of communicative competence, with the aim of developing a set of effective guidelines for communicative approaches to second language teaching methodologies and more valid and reliable assessment instruments (p.1). They view communicative competence as a sub-component of a more general language competence, consisting of four components, namely: linguistic/grammatical competence; sociolinguistic competence; discourse competence;

and, strategic competence. They also suggested that if emphasis in the EFL classroom was placed on successfully conveyed messages rather than on grammaticality and the appropriateness of one's utterances, then this would encourage the development of more effective communicative skills (1980, p.3). As is the case with Raya, although she was not provided with such a communicative environment within the school classroom, as discussed below, this obstacle was overcome in her extra-curricular lessons at AMIDEAST (America-MidEast), where she was given the opportunity to use English more freely.

For the purpose of the present study, focus was placed on a combination of both knowledge and performance, termed by Canale and Swain (1980) as 'communicative performance', or "the realization of competencies and their interaction in the actual production and comprehension of utterances" (p.6). Therefore, we have classified performance as a reflection (to a certain extent) of a learners' competence. In light of Faerch et al's (1984) definition of fluency competence stated above, Raya was observed for the extent to which she could use the language freely and spontaneously, in a comprehensible fashion. Observing Raya in her 'Oral Skills' lectures gave the researchers the opportunity to assess her language competence more effectively through performance. However, we recognize that the data collected of Raya's performance cannot be viewed as wholly conclusive.

Method

The Participant

Raya is an 18-year-old Palestinian Arab female. She was born and raised in the Palestinian city of Hebron and has come to read for her undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature at The University of Jordan, after being awarded a scholarship for her high average of 97.9%. This is Raya's first time abroad and hence, the majority of her second language acquisition took place back home in Palestine. What is enthralling about Raya's story, along with the fact that she is still so young, is that she does not attribute her language proficiency to her schooling in anyway, but rather to what she herself has done to improve her English. As she says in her own words:

> What helped me become excellent in English is my will and passion towards the language. This gave me motivation to work hard on myself; I couldn't find anyone to help me so I started looking for [other] ways that were available around me. (email statement, 7/4/16)

Approach

This is a single-case study; a methodological approach defined by Cresswell (2007, p.73) as:

> A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.

Following the work of Samimy (2008), the researchers chose to do an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2003, p.136-137), because the interest of this study lies in investigating and hence increasing

one's understanding of a particular case, i.e. Raya as an advanced language learner. As Stake (2003) suggests, the rationale behind studying a single case is that by reading "experimental and contextual accounts by case researchers, we can increase both propositional and experimental knowledge" (p.145). That is, by studying individuals such as Raya, we gain an understanding of how a certain learner may achieve proficiency and whether such findings can be generalized to other cases. Optimally, we strive to establish whether there is something to learn from such individual success or failure to better our understanding of the second language learning process. A purposeful convenient sampling strategy was used in which in "a researcher selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p.35). Furthermore, learners like Raya with such high proficiency are hard to come by, especially those as young as she is, since apart from government testing records, lists of such learners are not widely available (Leaver & Atwell, 2002, p. 279).

There is no doubt there are other learners like Raya with a similar proficiency, but she is perhaps one of the few who is very eloquent about her experiences of second language acquisition and is happy to share her experience with other language learners and educators. Furthermore, Raya's story can be considered somewhat unique given everything she has gone through to get to this stage. Against all the odds, coming from war-torn Hebron and a lack of educational resources, Raya managed not only to be awarded a highly competitive scholarship to study in Jordan, but also to achieve native like proficiency in just seven years, when her second language journey began. As Raya describes it:

> I made a promise [to myself] that I will achieve my dreams and do what I want
> in my life, and here I am, a freshmen at the University of Jordan, studying
> English language and literature. Isn't it amazing how people can achieve their
> dreams if they have the will and patience?! (email statement, 7/4/16)

The researchers utilized several methods (for validity and reliability purposes) as outlined by Merriam (1998) and as followed by Samimy (2008) in his case study of 'Mark', a white American graduate student who achieved high proficiency in Arabic. The first was through accumulating various sources of data, as discussed in the next section. The second was in the form of a 'member check', by requesting Raya to give her responses to a draft version of the paper to ensure that our analysis and elucidation is precise and credible. Finally, the third method was that of a review by asking an expert in the field to assess whether our interpretations accurately reflect the collected data; the latter two of which were both met with positive feedback.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of two months between March and April 2016, from various sources. These included personal interviews, observations of Raya in her 'Oral Skills' lectures, follow-up questions and correspondence via email and telephone, Raya's responses to a learning styles checklist and identification of the styles and strategies she uses when learning English as well as interviews with Raya's English lecturers. Following the procedures outlined in Samimy's (2008) study, the questions raised with Raya were aimed at assessing how her personal characteristics as well as learning styles and strategies as a learner with high proficiency, correspond to those outlined in the study by Leaver and Atwell (2002). Questions included were

(taken from Samimy, 2008, p.406): 1) How do you assess your current proficiency in English?; 2) How did you score in formal educational exams, specifically in English?; 3) Have you studied English formally and if so when and where?; 4) How would you characterize the teaching methodology?; 5) Why did you decide to study English?; and, 6) Have you been to English speaking countries and if so when, where and for how long? In addition, the researchers discussed with Raya her relationships with English speaking communities. Questions included, 1) How do you think the social practices in your environment constrain or facilitate your access to English? and, 2) Have you experienced marginalization that has limited your opportunities to engage in communication with English speaking communities?

Data Analysis
After identifying Raya's characteristics as an English language learner, the constant comparative method by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was employed, comparing the data with that of Samimy's (2008) study, by identifying similarities and differences between the two sets of data, as well as attempting to account for the possible sources of differences.

Findings
Similar to Samimy's study (2008), analysis of the data reveals that Raya has at least three separate but closely related identities: Raya as a language learner; Raya as an avid film watcher and internet user (YouTube watcher and online gamer); and, Raya as a non-member of the target language community.

Raya as a Language Learner
Raya feels strongly that her school education did not have a positive effect on her language proficiency in English, expressing that her teachers did not help her; that they had "funny accents and only taught what was in the book - word for word" (interview, 9/3/16), with little or no opportunity to practice the 'living language' as it were. Similar sentiments were expressed in a study by Jasser et al. (2005) who found that most of the respondents who had high English writing proficiency felt they had not acquired the language through formal classroom instruction but rather, through communication with native speakers and living in a native speaking environment (p.49). In this sense, Raya's linguistic journey is even more unique, given the fact that she had no access to the latter two. She also feels that teachers were not interested in benefiting students, although this did not affect her attitude towards the language itself. She reflects:

> I never really had problems with my English grades in school. I used to study what was in my book carefully then I would do well in my exams. I used to always long for English exams; I thought they were fun! (email statement, 7/4/16)

In 2013, Raya took the TOEFL Junior Exam, scoring 805 from a total of 900. As a result, and because of her high marks in school, she was awarded a two year micro English scholarship from the American Council to go to AMIDEAST extra-curricular classes in English. This opportunity she felt improved not only her proficiency level in English, but also her personality. She states:

> I used to attend the Amideast lectures after school. It was an English communication class. I learned many things there; they taught us how to debate and write and present good speeches and stories. They also taught us how to be leaders by giving us some leadership classes. They gave us books which talked about many things, for example, some success stories of American people.(email statement, 7/4/16)

In 2014, after completing her scholarship, Raya took the test again, scoring 820 from 900, as well as receiving a certificate of achievement from the American Consulate of Jerusalem. At 16 years of age, Raya decided that her dream was to study English Language and Literature at The University of Jordan, and after scoring 97.9% in her Tawjihi (final 12th grade) exams, was awarded a scholarship. Raya's dream had come true; she was not only able to get out of the "box" (interview 23/3/16) she felt she was in (living in Palestine), but also to study English which she loves. Raya believes that her success comes from her own hard work. Her strong motivation is what has helped to her to achieve, as well as the support provided by important figures in her life such as her mother. Raya feels she has further improved since coming to Jordan. She does all the same things she did while she was in Palestine, but now she also has the opportunity to use English with others face to face in her everyday life, as well as study it formally. Raya's English lecturers also recognize her dedication, one of whom states:

> She is a good listener as she tries to understand what is said by paying attention to what I say (unlike many others who might be involved in side conversations with their neighbors). I never had to draw attention to her to stop talking [unlike] other students in class. (email statement 15/4/16)

Raya views her language learning experience humbly by saying "I'm still a freshman; I've still got so much to learn" (interview 23/3/16) and feels learning English is like "climbing a ladder" (interview 23/3/16) with always the next step to climb; the next goal to achieve. In observing Raya in her Oral Skills lectures, she showed confidence and fluency when conversing with peers and the lecturer. She also has an American accent which is very native-like and employs a number of different cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory and avoidance strategies in studying English. For example, she uses repetition (i.e. imitating a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal.) As Raya states "whenever I learn something new, I try to write it down and repeat it every day. I try to always remember what I have learnt, and if I forget I try to go back to my notes" (interview, 9/3/16). One of Raya's English lecturers confirms this by mentioning "she is a good note-taker as she jots down what is new to her, especially expressions outside the textbook material"(email statement 15/4/16). She further uses inferencing (i.e. using available information to guess meanings of new items, predict outcomes, or fill in missing information.) As evidence, Raya comments "whenever I read a text or listen to someone speaking, if there's a word I don't know I try to [guess] what it means from the context [whether it be] spoken or written" (interview, 9/3/16). This is reinforced by one of her English lecturers who suggests:

> She attempts to make associations between what she learns in class (such as vocabulary, language functions and forms, new expressions or grammatical rules, etc.) and what she knows already. That is, she makes use of newly learned material unlike most of her peers who really do not apply what they

learn in class much. In other words, one of her learning strategies seems to be reinforcing what she learns through immediate usage in class. (email statement 15/4/16)

Raya also mentioned 'directed attention' (i.e. the decision to attend to language tasks in general); 'self-management' (i.e. an awareness of the conditions that help one learn better and arranging for the presence of such conditions); 'self-monitoring' (i.e. correcting one's speech for accuracy in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary); 'self evaluation' (i.e. checking the outcomes of one's own language learning against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy); and, 'translation'; (i.e. using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language). For the latter cognitive strategy, Raya uses 'Google Translation' to save and translate words, phrases and idioms from English into Arabic to refer back to at a later date. As one of her English lecturers points out, "whenever I introduce new vocabulary items or some useful expressions which are new to her, she tries to make sure or check her understanding by asking me to repeat what I have said" (email statement 15/4/16). She also employs 'appeal for help' which can include asking for aid from the interlocutor either directly or indirectly, and 'stalling' or 'time gaining' strategies (i.e. fillers or gestures for example) and 'topic abandonment' (i.e. leaving or changing the topic at hand due to difficulty to express oneself). Raya states, "I don't like silence in conversations. I try to always use gap fillers when I speak, or I might just go on to different subjects" (interview, 9/3/16). In addition, Raya identified 'prefabricated patterns' which refer to using memorized stock phrases, affirming "I try to memorize specific sentences to use them when needed" (interview, 9/3/16).

Her responses to the learning styles checklist reveal that Raya is self-confident and has low inhibitions about learning English, as well as intrinsic motivation (i.e. she wants to learn English because of what she can personally gain from it). She also likes to learn from her mistakes as well as finding ways to continue learning language outside the classroom. Interestingly, Raya does not like to take risks, stating "I only use the language I know because I like to give a good impression to the people I talk to" ('member check', 14/4/16), attempting to only using language that she is certain is correct. Raya also stated that she does not like to work in groups, but rather alone. This is because she feels other language learners her age are normally of a lower proficiency than her. In a sense, she doesn't trust them to get the 'job done', although she feels this is not a good personality trait since she puts a lot of pressure on herself to do everything alone. However, this trait of Raya's personality exemplifies that she has high self-esteem and self-efficacy, i.e. belief in her own capabilities to successfully perform a particular activity (Kroll, J. & De Groot, 2005, p.154).

Raya as an Avid Film Watcher, YouTube Watcher and Online Gamer
In addition to shedding light on Raya's experiences and identity as a language learner, it is also essential to portray Raya's online identity since the two roles seem to have an effect on each other. Raya's experience as a language learner began when she was between 10 and 11 years old. Born and raised in Hebron, Raya remembers how her mother loved English and always had the American film channels on. Moreover, her mother instilled the concept of the importance of learning English, and bettering oneself in Raya. With the constant influx of English films in the house, English gradually became a part of Raya's daily life and as a teenager she became consciously interested in the language, using the internet and setting up a Facebook account with a desire to know more about English and talk to native speakers. Since Raya had made a

conscious decision to become more proficient in English, she thought about the best way to go about it, coming to the conclusion that writing emails in English would be helpful and so began to use 'Pen Friends Club', an online site for people to send emails to each other from all over the world. Raya initially contacted native speakers, but nobody replied. She then tried contacting individuals of other nationalities which proved more fruitful, leading to a friendship with an Egyptian girl which has until now, lasted four years. They not only write emails in English but also communicate through voice messages and Facebook. As Raya states:

> I decided I should actually use the language, so I used the online chatting websites, and I sent some emails to people from different countries; some of them replied and some didn't. I ended up chatting with people who weren't native speakers, but at least I was able to talk and express myself. (email statement, 7/4/16)

However, feeling that this had been a failure, Raya stopped using the Pen Friends Club and began to look for something else to improve her English proficiency. Her real goal was to communicate with native speakers and as a result she looked to online gaming. She had been online gaming for two years anyway, but now actively decided to use it as a means to contact native speakers. However, when Raya tried to contact her fellow players beyond the realm of the game itself she felt that there weren't any native speakers who wanted to befriend her.

In Hebron the internet was the only outlet for Raya, at times feeling her life was actually the virtual life she lived online. Feeling hopeless after not achieving her goals through pen friends or online gaming, Raya decided that if she couldn't communicate with native speakers, she could at least listen to them, as she had once done with her mother when watching American films and hence at this point, she turned her attention to YouTube. On YouTube, Raya began to listen to vlogs (video blogs) by two New Yorkers which she felt were helpful for improving her English proficiency since they were easy to understand and at the same time, were by native speakers. Here, Raya's strategy was to imitate the vloggers both in accent and speech, even if it meant talking to herself. Until today, as a strategy after listening to YouTube vlogs, Raya not only imitates the speakers she hears, but also consciously thinks back to mistakes she has made and corrects herself, making a mental note not to make the same error again. Much like the average native speaker, Raya finds it difficult to describe the language, but she knows how to use it, i.e. has a feel for it. In fact, Raya mentions that she finds it embarrassing when lecturers ask her grammatical questions since she finds it difficult to use the correct terminology even though she knows the answer.

Raya as a Non Member of the Target Language Community
In assessing what the dominating factors in either facilitating or hindering an advanced learner's access to the target language are, as Samimy (2008) suggests, it is perhaps the social practices of a given community which provide us with the answers. Just as Mark in Samimy's (2008) study mentions "creating an Arabic bubble in which he immerses himself all day long" (p.409) which has become almost an obsession, Raya too immerses herself in English as much as she can. This might be at university in her lectures conversing with her lecturers and peers, online watching YouTube, connecting with others on Facebook or via email, watching American films, and talking with her siblings or even if no one else is around, to herself.

Yet, actually communicating with native speakers of English has proved somewhat problematic for Raya. In fact, the day one of the researchers met Raya, was the first time she had ever had a face to face conversation with a native speaker. It is not that Raya hasn't tried to communicate with native speakers of English, but more a case of being shunned by those she had attempted to contact. Since she was limited to contact with native speakers online, she somewhat 'hit a brick wall' so to speak and hence, settled for the next best thing; listening to and imitating native speakers and talking to other non-native speakers in English. But this obstacle hasn't deterred Raya. In having achieved her goal of studying at The University of Jordan, Raya is now looking to the future. She dreams of going to a native English speaking country and surrounding herself with native speakers, with the hope of improving her English further.

Discussion

Some of the findings in the present study confirm those from earlier studies on good and advanced language learners especially those of Samimy (2008), as well as others such as Naiman et al. (1978), Norton and Toohey (2001) and Leaver and Atwell (2002). Using the data collected from Samimy's (2008) case study, Table 1 represents the general characteristics of Raya and Mark, illustrating the similarities and differences between the two individuals. Only two of the eight general characteristics are shared by Raya and Mark. Neither have any personal ties with the TL country and both know French, although Mark has reading knowledge of French whereas Raya describes herself as just a 'beginner'. In contrast, Mark was 39 at the time of Samimy's study while Raya was only 18 at the time of the present study. Furthermore, Mark lived in the TL countries, conversing and interacting with native speakers for a significant amount of time, "acquiring the target language and culture in context" (Samimy, 2008, p. 411). On the other hand, the first time Raya left Palestine was when she came to study in Jordan, and she has never been to a native English speaking country.

Table 1.*Comparison between Raya and Samimy's (2008) participant Mark*

Participant's Characteristics	Raya	Mark
Age	18 years old	39 years old
Learning method	Both non communicative and communicative methods	Proficiency method (a communicative method)
Lived in the TL countries	No	Yes
Personal ties to the TL countries	No	No
Bilingual/multilingual background	Yes, mother knows some English and siblings have a high proficiency in English	No, monolingual family
Current position related to the TL	Undergraduate English Language and Literature student	Graduate teaching associate in Arabic
Other L2s studied	A little French	Reading knowledge of French

Note: TL (target language), L2 (second language) / table taken from Samimy, 2008, p.411

At the time of Samimy's study, Mark was a graduate teaching associate in Arabic, whereas Raya is an undergraduate student in English Language and Literature. Interestingly, Mark learnt Arabic through the 'Proficiency Method' (a communicative method) which he describes as an "intensive learning environment" (Samimy, 2008, p.407). Raya in contrast, describes her learning experience at school as straight from the book, with no interaction or communicative element involved, although her classes at AMIDEAST proved to be more unrestrained. Furthermore, while Mark comes from a completely monolingual family, Raya's mother does know some English and is very keen on her children acquiring and communicating with each other in it (similar to two thirds of the participants in Leaver & Atwell's 2002 study). Raya's siblings also have high proficiency in English, one of whom is currently attending AMIDEAST classes after also being granted a scholarship. As Raya puts it, "they are following my footsteps and I think they are going to be even better than me"(interview, 23/3/16).

Conclusion
Existing literature signifies that there is sparse documentation regarding the linguistic journeys of second language learners who acquire superior proficiency and what makes them unique from those who do not. What is it about such individuals which makes them special? Here, we must account for both motivation and the learning strategies used and how they are combined to produce a successful formula for language acquisition, whether that learner be exposed to the target language community or not. In addition to examining previous studies on highly proficient language learners, the present study explored the seven year linguistic and personal trajectory of a Palestinian Arab undergraduate student, Raya, at The University of Jordan, who has achieved native like fluency in English. The study revealed that motivation can be a powerful tool in linguistic enhancement, in spite of a lack of social networks within the given target language community. In Raya's case, a mixture of both instrumental and integrative motivation ensured her success as well as a combination of different learning strategies, good work ethic and a supportive family. When contact with the target language community is missing, as Samimy (2008) suggests "it therefore necessitates a language learner to create an environment which enhances current proficiency in a given situation" (p.43) as is evident in Raya's case.

More recently, there has been an expansion in the research of advanced language learner needs and innovative approaches to helping them continue to grow in their second language acquisition. However, the extent to which such approaches are effective still remains to be seen. The uniqueness of Raya's language experience is that against all odds she still managed to achieve native like proficiency without the help of allies or mentors, in contrast to previous studies such as Samimy (2008) and Norton and Hooney (2002). Lastly, as both Samimy (2008) and Leaver and Atwell (2002) suggest, there is still much to be learnt from the linguistic journeys of second language learners like Raya. Educators can use such cases to facilitate the language acquisition of other individuals, by closely examining how native-like proficiency is achieved. Stories like Raya's are inspiring to all of us in general and other language learners in the same position in particular, because they reveal to us, that whatever the situation one faces, 'where there's a will there's a way', and Raya has certainly found it. In her own words:

> My advice to all learners out there is to never give up your dreams and never
> back down. You might need time and patience, but you should always keep in

mind that every cloud has a silver lining, so work hard [...] to reach the top and leave your fingerprint on this big beautiful world!(email statement, 7/4/16)

Notes
1. Raya did not wish to remain anonymous.
2. AMIDEAST (American Mid-east Educational and Training Services INC) is "a leading American non-profit organization engaged in international education, training and development activities in the Middle East and North Africa" (Amideast, 2016 http//:www.amideast.org/west-bank-gaza)

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