

**Fostering the Communicative Competence through Immersion Courses at Missouri
State University.**

**Fomentar la competencia comunicativa a través de cursos de inmersión a la Universidad
Estatal de Missouri.**

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Abstract

In this article the most frequent factors for the improvement of the communicative competence are analyzed, in this case, English. This was possible thanks to a case study of 6 students of B.A the English program from Universidad La Gran Colombia, who offered to this research all their experience in this kind of immersion course. They shared that experience by some interviews and life stories which were really important for the final result. For this research, the participants made an immersion course at Missouri State University; some of them in 2013 and others in 2014. In this way, the research gives a perspective about how to act and which aspects should be taken into account in order to improve the communicative competence as much as possible in short immersion spaces.

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Key words: Linguistic immersion, inclusion and diversity, communicative competence, English as a second language, Universidad La Gran Colombia and Missouri State University.

Resumen

En este artículo se analizan los factores más frecuentes para el mejoramiento de la competencia comunicativa, para el caso, en inglés. Esto se realizó gracias a un estudio de caso de 6 estudiantes del programa de licenciatura en inglés de la universidad La Gran Colombia, los cuales ofrecieron a la investigación toda su experiencia en estos cursos de inmersión; ellos compartieron su experiencia mediante algunas entrevistas y historias de vida las cuales fueron muy importantes para lograr un resultado final. Para la investigación los participantes realizaron a curso de inmersión en la Universidad Estatal de Missouri, algunos durante el año 2013 y otros durante el año 2014, esto para mostrar que incluso si es el mismo lugar, son periodos de tiempo distintos y en un año las situaciones cambian demasiado. Se da una perspectiva referente a el como actuar y que aspectos se deben tener en cuenta para mejorar la competencia comunicativa lo mejor posible en espacios cortos de inmersión.

Palabras clave: Inmersión lingüística, inclusión y diversidad, competencia comunicativa, inglés como segunda lengua, Universidad La Gran Colombia y Universidad Estatal de Missouri.

Introduction

To improve in any language is not an easy task. People have to study and practice as much as possible and in some cases it is necessary to take some risks and take the opportunities life gives in order to face real contexts. This article is made by some steps in order to show people the diverse aspects that can possibly help people improve their communicative competence during a short period of time in a foreign country.

First at all, the problem analysis and all the aspects that make an idea become a research was not a process of one day, but a continued wondering of different aspects of the language, and how it can make an impact in language learners themselves. Taking into account that this is an explorative research and it is indeed a research that not too many people investigate, the next part of this research focuses on the aspects some authors think are important when a linguistic immersion course happens.

Then we will see the objectives and methodology that were used along all the process in order to give a satisfactory proposal to language learners in their future immersion course when they take place. All of these of course take into account the problem analysis and the guiding question.

Moreover, it is possible to see how the sample was taken and taking this into account, I want to thank Alejandro, Alberto, Jessica, Anthony and Danny for being part of this research and for sharing those experiences that make this article take life. Also it is necessary to say that I am part of the research, not just as a researcher but as a self-checker of my own process and show how it can also contribute to give an answer to this research.

The instruments which were used to get the data are shown next, in which we can see why to use them is useful. Please, see the appendix for interviews and life stories provided by the participants in order to round out the investigation. There is a chart in which can be observed the answers of questions from 4 to 13 (because they are the useful ones for the research) and a little quotation when it applies. These complement the answers of the interview and give a comparison or contrast between the ideas of both story life and interview.

Finally, we have the results of the analysis and why all those aspects highlight more than others, and of course a conclusion for the research and a possible answer to the guiding question.

Theoretical Framework

Diversity: The Way Linguistic Immersion Works

Actually, when someone talks about immersion it is mandatory to talk about inclusion and diversity too, because when someone is immersed in a new culture they are being included in that country. So it is important to take into account that inclusion is not just for disabled people, because this term is usually used for that, and when it is treated in this context, it is important to have this term very well defined, but it is not just that, also when referring to immersion it is important to talk about diversity, as (Arévalo & Santos, 2007, p. 93) who quote (Zentner, 2005) “is when all people have the same access for programs, services, employment without discrimination of any type as race, geographic origin, religion, age, sexual preferences, etc.” So in this way to see this meaning we can say that in linguistic immersion courses at Missouri State University,

diversity can be found. That is because that university offers programs in which students, not just from Colombia, but from different countries such as Korea, China,

Tunisia,



Mongolia, Laos, Afghanistan, Palestine, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and some others, as we will figure.1, it is really interesting to see how

Figure1. (Anonymous, 2014) No title, United States, Missouri, Springfield downtown

people from those different parts of the world co-exist and in somehow need to understand there are differences because of so many reason so as (Renato Lourenço, Dórdio Dimas, & Rebelo, 2014, p.124) says “to speak about diversity is, above all, to consider the differences between group members” and that what is really important to see, that understanding is sometimes something difficult but necessary to grow up together.

When there are so many people from many different countries, in which the only communicative channel is the use of communicative competences in order to stablish a conversation or as it is mentioned before, to interact and in that way to practice and improve this important competence. Moreover, it is necessary to remember that diversity and inequality are not opposite terms, but are closer to one to another. Guedes (2005, p. 115) makes a reflection which affirms “it is necessary to cultivate diversity and reduce inequality. The first one promotes an equality sense, while the second one implies the risk of injustice”. And in those terms is a strong view of equality but the right one because to reduce and try to abolish the unfair differences makes us to be the same with the rest

of the world, because all of us are human beings and that is not going to change even if someone is from Colombia and the other one from Pakistan or any country. So this diversity is an important part and is not separate from immersion courses. Nowadays Missouri State University has a department of diversity and inclusion and here is mentioned the main goal for them about this topic:

The Division for Diversity and Inclusion at Missouri State University strives to enhance the diversity of our campus and to build an inclusive community in greater Springfield in accordance with overarching and enduring commitments outlined in the Long-Range Plan. Modeling inclusive excellence, our initiatives and services intentionally engage the rich diversity of faculty, staff, students and the community. Our goal is to educate 21st century students for success in our global workplace(Missouri State, 2015, paragraph 1).

This department is very committed in its goal and does the best for trying to make students feel comfortable, no matter their nationality, race, sexual preferences, etc. They just want to let the students know that the university is like their second home; which is something very important in a learning process.

Communicative Competence

The term communicative competence was not used before the work of Dell Hymes in 1996, this term offers something really important and is that as (Cook, 2003, p.42) says that Hymes observed is that “a person who has only linguistic competence would be quite unable to communicate” and that in some reason it is true, because a language is social itself and to be just grammatical would be a mistake. It would mean

that a person can just produce sentences with literal meaning and that person will not be able to communicate things with social meaning.

It is really important to mention that to be communicative competent is not just speak with good grammar or even talking, It means that even non-spoken communication is important because the goal is to fill the requirement of understanding between two or more people, who have some way of communication in common. That is why *context* makes a really big impact, because not in all places a word or a gesture has the same meaning, so that is why to have a good communicative competence in a determinate place is so important.

According to Cook (2003, p.42) “a competent speaker knows what is formally possible in a language” and that is why are capable to use the language very flexible. Cook (2003,p.43) mentions something really important and is that “ a communicative



competent speaker may know the rules, be capable of following them, but nevertheless break them deliberately” and this means that a person has the capacity to modify those rules to give a better understanding of a sentence.

Figure2. (Nielsen, 2014)First day at the Hotel, United States, Missouri, Hotel reception

Communicative competence a term that contributes to the growing of a language and makes it better in its use and expands the area of knowledge of the target language; this means that it makes the language more flexible and for social communication, and that why a language was created for.

Fluency: Proof of a Good Communicative Competence

First of all, it is important to define the term fluency which is very important when a person talks in a foreign language because it is the usual way to measure the oral skill which is involved in communicative competence.

Valls Ferrer (2011, p. 61) thinks “fluency is the product of the operation of the speech production system of both native and non-native speakers” so, when it is native language the speed and intelligibility of the language goes with no effort at all and more natural but when it is second language as a non-native speaker, the production of the language takes more effort, the speed of the production is slower and with no self-confidence and not pretty intelligible at all.

Other meaning of fluency can be as Ledezma, Zanin, Galazari, & De Bortoli, (2010) who quote (Butman, Allegri, Harris and Drake, 2000) who explain that fluency is “the capacity of producing spontaneously the fluent speaking, with no excessive pauses or mistakes in the searching of words” and it is divided in two kinds of verbal fluency: Semantic and phonology”(p.209).

Semantic concerns the use of grammatical rules when a person is speaking. The correct use of grammar provides a good communication channel and in that way speakers can say what they want in the tense they need and the communication is going to exist in a correct way. On the other hand, phonology is important too because it does not matter how much a person knows about grammar if they do not know how to pronounce the words they want to say. If that happens, it is not going to exist a real communication because the message is not going to be understood. Taking this into account, it is possible

to say that a dichotomy exists between both semantic and phonology, because both have the same relevance in order to transmit a message in an information exchange.

Charchat-Fichman, Martins Oliveira, & Morais da Silva (2011, p. 78) “Fluency of speech is typically measured by the quantity of words produced under restricted search conditions within a limited time”. Fluency is usually measure by tests and those “consists in generate as much words as possible, phonological and semantically during a minute. Although they are apparently similar, this tasks require different cognitive processes and they activate different cerebral regions” (Ledezma et al, 2010, p. 209) quotes by Villodre, Sánchez-Alfonso, Brines, Nuñez, Chirivella, Ferri y Noé (2006)

Communication

Communication is a very important part in our lives and as human beings represent our way to be able to understand one to another, Braga & Silva (2010, p. 530) point out that “Communication plays an important role in our development as human beings as it is not only part of our previous experiences, but also of those gained every new day”, and in this way communications makes a fundamental part thought all human being lives itself, people can be scientist, doctors, or any profession but communication is the path from where any knowledge it learnt.

Communication is a process of information exchange which starts with childhood and develops while a person is growing up. So in this way a person unconsciously acquires the ability to create a meaning of something while that person uses it. While a person develops their abilities for understanding and producing oral speech, that one makes the need of interacting with more people in order to exchange ideas and know more about

any topic or the world itself. It is the same in a second language, as it is a language itself, it is necessary in order to interact, to be communicative competent (Pilleux, 2001, p. 151) “the speaker can just act successfully in his language if competent in that one”.

It exists an approach which focuses on letting the student get the knowledge as the mother language which is the direct approach; but does it totally work? Because it is just inside the classroom and when someone is learning a language it is impossible to get very well that one if that person is not involved in a real context. As (Goitía, Govea Piña, & Carrasquero, 2009, p. 356-357) paraphrase in (Long, 1981) says that “in order the learners can acquire (in a unconscious as the mother tongue) a second language they not just have to get “Comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985), but they also may to use that input in contexts in which can exist interaction with the target language”. Taking this into account, it is correct to say that if it exists communication with foreign people in that context, it is possible to improve the knowledge as the mother tongue because the learner is going to be allowed to develop the meaning of things by interaction and use of it.

According to (Goitía, et al, 2009, p. 357) who talk about (Henrichsen, 1984) saying that “input, in which everybody is in contact with, constitutes the fundamental core for understanding (Intake), develop and production of the knowledge acquired (output)”, he fosters that input talks about everything that involves language and surrounds a language learner, intake is just what was understood by the learner, and finally the output is the way of use that intake in real life. In this way, (Goitía, et al, 2009,) quotes again in (Long, 1981) who says that “the learners have to be surrounded

in situations which they can produce (in an oral and written way) their ideas, exchange and compare them with their partners through interaction, which when they can be able to give input to their partners and receive it through their output, which happens in the communicational exchange” (p.357). This author also classifies the learners for the grade of interaction they have as high input generators and low input generators. According to this, high input generator are the people who give the receptor more knowledge and the low input generators are the ones who give us just some things to intake but not really relevant. Communication can be divided in two ways; Contextual and Social Interaction.

Communication is Contextual

The communicative process has always to be related with a context, that one creates an environment and will define the interaction and the kind of language that can be used. This is because the use of language and idioms change depending in which context a person is in, so it is very important to know which kind of language has to be used in every moment in life. In a linguistic immersion course, it is really important because foreign students are going to be involved in other contexts, and those students have to be able to adapt themselves to that, and use the appropriate language in the different situations they are going to face. Context is something which is always changing, (Meneses A., 2002, p. 437-438) shows that Schiffrin has two principles:

- **Language always happens in a context.** (Schiffrin, 1987) says that “language always happens in a kind of context. Cognitive shape contexts exist, but also perceptions of the immediate situations exist, or what has been told before; the cultural contexts which are concerned to world visions; and social context,

through which someone can establish interactions” (p.437) so, the context is always involved in any conversation a person is in. Taking this into account, it is important to say that people have to understand that the context is not the last word they have to use when the other comprehension resources fail, because they are always involved on it.

- **Language depends on the context.** (Schiffrin, 1987) warns about “the language does not just happen in a context but also the use of language depends on the characteristics of that specific context” (p.437). This is because, depending on the place a person is in, the kind of language that people use in that specific context is different.

This is an example from Portolés taken by (Meneses A., 2002, p. 438) in order to give a better meaning of context:

Two friends say good bye and one of them say this: At ten, in the cinema doors. All the people who listened can decode the message; however, any of them can go to the meeting because they are lacked of the necessary context for taking the correct inference. Instead, the two friends who know that context can decode it, because of the pragmatic contribution, which is in the conversation which can be comprehended like: [For example]

‘We are going to see each other tomorrow, July 9th 1998, at 10 am, in Coliseo cinema door (1998) ´

Conversation, a kind of social interaction

Conversation is made by intervention between people, so for understanding this event it is necessary to look at how the interaction between them is carried out. This is related with the two fundamental principles of the discourse analysis shown by (Meneses A., 2002, p. 438) and made by (Schiffrin, 1987):

A. Language is always communicative.

It is always head to other, a listener. This other can be immediately or eventual, but is always there.

B. Language is designed for communication.

(Meneses A., 2002, p. 438) Shows that (Lyons, 1977) says that “in the language structures, there is a lot that can just be explained by the alleged that happens for the communication in the face to face interaction”.

It is possible to say that a communicative process is successful when there is a minimum of two people talking and that conversation is interesting to each other, so the communicative act does not get cut. So, in this way the communicative process goes to an end in a correct way until the exchange of information finishes. “Each act of ostensive communication communicates the assumption of its own relevance” mention (Sperber y Wilson, 1986) quoted by (Meneses A., 2002, p. 439). So, if the information somebody wants to transmit is relevant, the communication continues because the listener is interested in the information and a conversation can happen from then on.

Other Conversation Meanings

Conversation is a practice that is into almost all the human activities. This is because without communication some activities, like playing, for example, in a team game like soccer when you are playing, it is necessary to have communication in order to play well. So, it is a practice that allows others to happen.

According to Meneses (2002, p. 446), who paraphrases (Briz, 1998), conversation is “the interlocution in presence, face to face interaction, immediate, it doesn’t exist ‘taking the turn’ (like in a debate) is dynamic”. So, the participants of the conversation take turns when they think they have to talk and can be simultaneous, the conversation is cooperative in topic and in intervention.

Meneses A. (2002, p. 446) shows that (Castilho, 1998) says that conversation is, for the fact that is an oral communicative event, its characterized because is ‘on line’. This is made by an approach (in which the message is said) and an implementing (in which the message is decode) and that happens simultaneously”.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The communicative competence is one of the most important competences to develop when someone is learning a language. According to the Common European Framework (CEF) in this competence there exists three components: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic. All those components are important in some way because those ones help to develop this competence. “Linguistic competences include lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills and other dimensions of language as system” (CEFR, 1997, p. 13) which are so important in a conversation for use of

grammar and shape of it. The most important for this case is the sociolinguistic one because it is the language use according to the way the context is; (CEFR, 1997, p.13) “the sociolinguistic component strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures, even though participants may often be unaware of its influence”. And finally, the pragmatic competence which “are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges” (CEFR, 1997, p. 13), all the possible exchanges are important and more in a specific context and the people on that context have to be prepared for it because is in constant change.

Other aspects also affect the communicative process like the following:

Domain: The domain in which the language is spoken is very important because it determines what is the appropriate language a person should use in a certain case, and also it determines which is the aim that a person has for learning that language. For example, in a case in which the objective is not to learn technical vocabulary but improve the accent, fluency, pragmatic vocabulary, etc., the domain is different from the first case so it is important to recognize which are the domains that the Common European Framework propose. The CEF proposes some domains which are: Personal, public, occupational and educational. All of them have their own aims, but in talking about linguistic immersion courses, it is important to say that according to them and related with the Universidad La Gran Colombia students, the domain is public because they say the public domain is in ‘which the person concerned acts as a member of the general public, or of some organization, and is engaged in transactions of various kinds for a

variety of purposes' (CEF, p.45). The main objective of the La Gran Colombia Students is to improve their English skills with the public they have in context, so it is possible to say that their aim is related with this view. Furthermore, it can be related with the occupational one 'in which the person concerned is engaged in his or her job or profession' because in this case the students are going to develop their skills not just for learning but for their future professions, as well.

External Factors: The external factors are so important when someone is learning a language because the opportunity the speaker and specially the learner has for putting their communicative competence in practice, depends a lot on the external factors in which the conversation is taking place. The **CEF** (p.47) says that the factors for speech are:

- Clarity of pronunciation
- Ambient noise (trains, aircraft, 'static', etc.)
- Interference (crowded street, markets, pubs, parties, discos, etc.)
- Distortions (poor telephone lines, radio reception, public address systems)
- Weather conditions (wind, extreme cold, etc.).

All of those factors are mentioned in the list before are very important factors because the speaker and the listener can have one or more of those factors in the communicative process. Clarity and pronunciation are very important in a communicative process because if the pronunciation is not good the message can be affected and being clear can make a message be transmitted in a better way. The ambient

noise can affect the conversation in the way that some noises can make the message transmitted in an incorrect way. Also, including the context can make people improve their skills so it can affect the message but can be a good help in other ways. Interferences are similar to ambient noise but the noise comes from other kinds of things. Distortion is something that can happen to everybody because for example in a calling the signal can be poor and the message will not be clear but the speaker/learner and speaker have to be ready for keeping the conversation going. Finally, the weather conditions can affect the voice of the speaker because in cases of extremely cold weather the voice can make a vibration because of the cold, so it is important to control it and try to make the conversation as normal as possible.

All the aspects that were explained before are factors that can affect everybody in some way when traveling (in this case the linguistic immersion course a person is on), and the idea is to make people know that the things when traveling are not easy but the best way in some cases are not the easy ones. Experience is invaluable and can make everybody improve with all the difficulties daily life has.

Statement of the Problem

Some students from Universidad La Gran Colombia traveled to Missouri State University in order to improve their English skills in a real context. In a first moment it was possible to see how the people who traveled in 2014 improved their English skills very well. The way people noted how much their level of them improved was listening to them. All of them were shocked when they listened how fast they spoke and with what fluency they could do it, so the questions came up. The goal is to let other people

who are going to go to these kinds of courses, tools with the experience of the people who have traveled before and know how the things are in linguistic immersion courses. In that way it is going to be a really good tool, and people who read this article are going to know which could be useful for them in order to make the most of that linguistic immersion course.

On the other hand, this research is not just going to be done with the people who traveled in 2014, but also with people who traveled to the same place in 2013 in order to give different perspectives in different periods of time. The tools are going to be more and it is going to be a really good information for different experiences and for completely different people.

From noticing that improvement in the communicative competence of these people and how other language learners have a lack in this competence, came the first questions; what makes them different? Just the travel or how they performed on it? So, if somebody travels, how should that person perform in order to improve that competence that well, and finally the main question of this research evolved and became in: ***In which way should students from B.A in English take advantage of immersion courses abroad in order to reinforce their communicative competence?***

General Objective

To explain which are the factors people who have traveled to immersion courses think are the best ones in order to increase the possibility to improve communicative competence.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the primary ways of thinking of people who have already participated in immersion courses.
- To understand the experiences these peoples have had in immersion courses in relation with the improvement of communicative competence.
- To classify a relation between the first and the second objective in order to get the main information for giving an answer to the general objective.

Methodology

This article has a qualitative approach, because the data is going to be obtained through life stories and semi-structured interviews. This kind of research can just be made by qualitative analysis, and according to the text an analysis was made in order to look if according what the research is about the phases of qualitative research came true and it is possible to say that they came up the most (with an initial phase, which is the idea, problem analysis, study design conception, initial sample meaning, data collect, analysis of them, interpretation of the data, and finally, the final report with the results of the research) (Hernández Sampieri, Fernandes Collado, Baptista, & Lucio, 2010, p. 8). Furthermore, the research is emergent, because it is according to what the students think about the things which help them to improve their communicative ability; which are unknown, are going to emerge while the research is taking place, and the data analysis will establish the results for repetition of variables.

The main aim of the research is, to give an idea according to the experiences students who were in these courses felt and experienced, and its relation with the

improvement of their communicative competence. On the other hand as the research is qualitative the reality has not been predicted because it is going to be written. The way in which each participant sees reality is different because each person learns in different ways and has a different way of thinking. It is because of that, that variables will emerge while the research is taking place, “most qualitative studies don’t prove hypothesis, these emerge during the process along with more data being gathered or are a result of the study” (Hernández Sampieri, et al, 2010, p. 9). The variables are changeable and an analysis will be made during the extraction and analysis of them.

Because this research is qualitative it is going to focus on the different ways of thinking of the people. In other words, the respect of points of views, as is mentioned before, the research will be made by life stories and semi-structured interviews. These will help in order that according to the qualities and ways in which the participants see reality, participants who are from the same social context, which is Bogota, more specifically, students from Universidad La Gran Colombia, which makes the context be really specific.

This kind of methodology admits subjectivity; so the hypothesis of the possible results can be established from the beginning with possibility of re-adjusting it. In this case it is going to be from the particular with personal experiences, to general which is to establish the relation of the variables, and the theory and for that reason it will not be just subjective, but also with references from authors which have their own speculations about it. For example, that students in immersion tend to improve if they make the most of that opportunity by trying to communicate as much as possible in the target language.

Speculation it is because the research is in somehow exploratory, which it means that not too many authors have researched about it. So, this research will be kind of new and researchers may be interested in it. The population which will be studied are six people. Even if it is not a big number the idea is not to generalize information, but which it really occurs is that there will be different points of view of groups which experienced the same, but in different periods of time. Furthermore, as the researcher also participated in this kind of course, it is possible that he shares his opinion as another participant which is going to reinforce the point of view of the rest of participants with his own voice.

Sample

The method of this research is a simple Case Study, because it brings, experiences, observations and so much more evidence which can reinforce the results of this research. According what the methodology shows, this research is also exploratory because not many people have researched about it.

The important thing in this research is the depth and quality of the information, not the quantity of it. Furthermore, in this way it is related with the research, which is; 'how the immersion contexts help in order to improve the communicative competence' as the sample is going to be made with six students. It is not a big number of students but the quality of the information is the first class one, because they participated in these kinds of courses and they can talk with all the experience they gained. The topic will be approach as deeply as possible. As the research is exploratory, each variable is going to come up while the research is taking place and an average will be made with the most repetitive variable, which is going to result in the first analysis of data. Also the sample

is also homogenous because the students who are going to participate share some characteristics, which are; to have participated in immersion courses, to be students of English, and to be students from Universidad La Gran Colombia. The mixture of these two kinds of samples which were mentioned before are called 'traditional or intensive sample' as it analyses cases with some similar profiles as the characteristics mentioned before.

Another kind of sample which is related with this research is the convenient sample, because in somehow, the students which are going to participate in this research, are the only ones whom the researcher has access to, because they are students from the Universidad La Gran Colombia who participated in these courses and through that way the data will be able to be collected with the necessary information for this research.

To conclude, the sample of really important cases also is in this research, because thanks to the participants who give their opinion about their communicative competence, this research could not have been possible.

Data Gathering

First of all, an interview was made in order to get the aspects the participants think were useful to improve their communicative competence. This was done in a point-blank range moment, because they were told they were going to have an interview but they did not know the questions. They answered what they thought at the moment which gives a first perspective.

The kind of interview which was used for the data collection was semi-structured because the answers of the participants can be able to generate new questions, so, this

kind of interview would be the correct one for this kind of research. Actually, for giving a proof that the interview was made, the interview was recorded with a written permission of the participants and in this way, to show better evidence.

Furthermore in the interview, it is important to use life stories ‘request of making’ because those are really important for this kind of research. In the life stories, the participants gave a retrospective reflect upon their experiences in the United States focused on the topic of this research, so their experiences were focused on the improvement of their communicative competence. The participants wrote the most significant things they lived and why, also they established a relation between those facts and the improvement in their communicative competence. This also happened with the people they met during the immersion. In this case they had more freedom to write what they wanted with no questions but their own experience doing a good retrospect view of it.

Comparison and Contrast

The next chart shows for every question (4 to 13) and a quote of the life story of each participant in order to establish a comparison or contrast and give a better view and a better answer to this research. It is necessary to mention that all of the interview comments and life stories extracts below are included verbatim and no grammar editing was conducted:

| Question | Answer | Life Story | Comparison/Contrast |
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| <p>4 How was your experience in the immersion course in Missouri State University?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “Well, I would say that my experience was really really good, because I learnt a lot of things from native speakers, and also, I learnt from people from other countries who speak English and was the only way in order to establish a communication.”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “Ok, my experience was good, because I learnt different things, this is my experience”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “It was really awesome, I learnt a lot of things about culture, about people, Americans, and it was really good”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Is a good experience, I learnt new words, vocabulary, and improve in my level of English.”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “I spent a lot of time with some of my closer friends in Walmart buying and looking for staff, so, we had the need to communicate with a lot of natives and we tried to make the most of that experience”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “Springfield is the best place that you can visit; you learn many things for your life”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “I start to talk and meet new places of Springfield and also meet a little bit more American Culture which let me improve my oral ability”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 In both cases, it is possible to say that this participant made the most of this experience trying to talk in English as much as possible even with non- native people.</p> <p>Interviewee 2 This participant made a point in how this experience and the place indeed made an inner improvement, not just in English but in life itself.</p> <p>Interviewee 3 In the whole interview this participant made sure that culture was a really important part of the experience and in the whole story life he made a point about it but not that specific but more general.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 The experience was grateful for this participant because of the places mainly and that made the participant to get an improvement in all skills and the “oral ability”</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 5 “oh, actually my experience was really great, ‘cause I learnt a lot, I think few people in Colombia can take this experience, so I decided to take advantage of that”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “Actually I think that first experience I had ever had was last year, summer and I had a fun time with people from different parts of the world and I think it was a good experience for our career also”</p> | <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “At Missouri State University I met a lot of people from other countries so I think I could practice a lot with them because they were Koreans, Chinese, Mongolian and so on, so, the only way to get a conversation was through English”</p> | <p>Interviewee 5 In the interview and the story life this participant made emphasis about taking advantage of this kind of opportunities for improvement.</p> <p>Interviewee 6 This participant learnt from people from other countries a lot because he interacted a lot with them.</p> |
| <p>5 Did you feel somehow that your English level wasn’t enough in order to establish a communication? Why?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “Well, it happened to me once, well the night we arrived to Missouri, we were just trying to buy something, but my vocabulary wasn’t enough in order to ask the seller what I wanted, so, I think that was the only time that I felt that my English wasn’t enough”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “Yes, because I haven’t got vocabulary and I have different grammar mistakes, for those I think it.”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “when I came to Springfield the first week for me was very complicated to get used to that people” (Americans)</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 As the story life of this participant talked is everything he thinks made an improvement, it did not say the difficulties but is remarkable that experience in which the participant assure could not say what the participant wanted to say and had to use body language for communication.</p> <p>Interviewee 2 When the participant says that ‘was complicated to get use to that people’ referring to Americans and what was said in the interview, it is possible to see that the vocabulary was a difficulty and to get used to the accents, fluency and lack of vocabulary was a hard thing to overcome.</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 3 “I felt that I had to improve, but I think that my English level was enough at least to understand and to be understood”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Yeah, when I first time interacted with a person in English, I had difficulties, because my level in English not was good, for this reason, I had some problems when I tried to communicate with other person”</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 “I was really confident with myself, so I ordered a hamburger, but when the waitress talked to me I went in the dark. I just did not know what she was telling me and I could just say “yes yes”. When I realized the bill was so expensive and with another different hamburger! I tried to clear my mind and to understand what had happened, then I conclude “I am nothing” ”</p> <p>“In the journey from Dallas to Springfield, there was a lady who was really interested in us, maybe because we were foreigners and she started to talk with a friend. I tried to understand but I just could not. She was really fluent. “Of course she’s a native speaker” and once again I felt terrible”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “At the beginning it was kind of difficult to understand because my ear wasn’t used to listen in English with a different accent in comparison with the one we use in Colombia”</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 The participant assured that the English level was enough but it is possible to notice that at the beginning was really hard maybe because of the nervousness or the level was not as enough as the participant thought but as well thanks to practice the participant could overcome that situation and improve a lot.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 This participant had too many problems at the beginning. Furthermore, was necessary to practice as much as possible to get use to accent, fluency and so many other things.</p> |
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| | <p>Interviewee 5 “No, actually I think in that immersion course I was understood most of the time and when I didn’t or when I wasn’t understood, I decided to change the words or looking to any synonyms”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “In the US I think, yes, it was. because you know you have the basement and the first floor in order to get an access to the second level and third level, we are talking about to get almost the C1 level yes, proficiency, oral skills and I think that over all skills”</p> | <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 5 This participant said something really important that is that when somebody does not understand what you try to say it is necessary to change the words in order to make the listener to get the idea of what you say.</p> <p>Interviewee 6</p> |
| 6 Do you think your English level increased? | <p>Interviewee 1 “I think so, because actually, I learnt a lot of things, like slangs like ‘actually, so, you know’ which are really important in order to be native-like, and I think also my vocabulary and kind of, my accent”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “every person I met in United States was really important for my oral skill improvement, but of course there are some people or places which are key factors in that development, I like a lot how my english communicative skills improve so I just say thanks to all that people I met there”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 This participant thinks there was really an improvement because of every person and place the participant went but the most useful things were slangs and accent.</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 2 “Of course, I increment my English. Because I was interactuated with different people, obviously I needed to speak in all time, in class, outside in different activities, the malls, in farmers, in drugs, for this reason I think I improved my English in my communicative ability.”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “Absolutely, of course, because I was in a bilingual context, so, I had to understand, to analyze, and of course to improve”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Yes, because I learnt new expressions, I think all the time in English when I speak in English, because after I used to think in Spanish and translate into English”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “yes a lot, because, I decided to take this course because here at the university I was wrong because I was learning English Latin native speakers, with Spanish speakers and in that place I think, just one teacher was Colombian, so the other was</p> | <p>Interviewee 2 “If you need to communicate or do homework”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “I improved a hundred percent and it was not because of classes or the grammar but in a real life context, sharing experiences, thoughts, believes, points of view etc. there in the real field in when you learn how to speak English”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Thanks to these experiences I have been able to improve my English level a Little and to lose the fear to talk”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 2 This participant says that the need to communicate in and outside the classroom made a huge difference between countries in which you usually speak in English just in class and all activities outside were remarkable.</p> <p>Interviewee 3 The participant made a point and is that even with all the hard and embarrassment times, it was possible to overcome and improve “a hundred percent”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 The participant said in both documents that to speak in English all the time is a key factor and that makes people to lose that fear to make mistakes and take them as an opportunity to improve.</p> <p>Interviewee 5 The participant thinks that the main change was the difference between listening Native Speakers and Latin Americans who speak English because it is easier to improve when you hear a native speaker.</p> |
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| | <p>native English native speakers, so I think my level increased”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “Sure definitively. At first at talk skills, later at grammar and we made many writtens so, I think writing as well”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 “During this trip I used to go and talk everywhere, malls, parks, the gym, bars and so on, I think I am conscious of my level and I wanted to improve, that’s why all of us where in there; of course not everybody thinks in that way but I do, so I did my best”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 This participant said that the improvement really happened and that talking everywhere was really important.</p> |
| <p>7 How much do you think was your level of interaction with native English speakers being immersed in the context?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “It was a lot, because I think I did the most of my experience, I talked a lot, I was in Walmart, then, so I had to speak a lot in order to buy things, I was in a lot of trips, so, I had to talk, and I think my level of interaction was a lot in that way”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “a lot of, because I was feel very nervous, because in this moment I think that I haven’t got English level, for this reason I can to interact with native speakers”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “we had the need to communicate with a lot of natives and we tried to make the most of that experience, every time we could we asked for clothes, for the restroom, for every single thing appear in our minds in order to speak with natives”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “If you need to communicate or do homework, it is always in English”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 The participant agreed that in order to improve the speaking part was really necessary to speak in every single opportunity, in that way even if there are mistakes, those can be corrected and it is a way to improve.</p> <p>Interviewee 2 What the participant said in the interview and in the life story can be interpreted that interaction has to exist in order to do anything you want to do and even if vocabulary is not enough, there is always a space to improve that in real life.</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 3 “Well, I think that it was a lot, because actually I took advantage of every single experience, in walmart, in the I don’t know, in the place store to eat, Mc Donalds, everywhere we go, we had to talk, to speak in English, that’s why I would say, it was a lot of interaction”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “yeah, all nights I was leave the different place in Missouri, in the course there was a miss in miss, I interacted with Mark, Mark is a teacher of theater in Missouri State, with this person I all the time, speaking in English, and he learn me different words, I learnt some idiomatical expressions as ‘to be a red, I am blue’ and the other words for example, clearance, I don’t remember what is the other expression”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “Oh, my interaction was like every day, I was talking in English when I went to different places, different specific places when I not just talked with the other friends from Colombia but the other countries”</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 “there at the supermarket (Walmart) we needed to talk, either to ask where was something or just when we were going to pay”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “I had to interact with native people and that was my first experience to develop my oral ability”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “At the beginning of the course at the English Language Institute I felt uncomfortable, it should be about the influence of the culture in the language learning field”</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 This participant made sure that places, to go and talk, a mall in the case of the participant was really important, every time, even for asking anything; the point was to interact and improve through practice in real life.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 This participant made emphasis in how much just one person can make you improve a lot, practicing with just one native and more when is your first experience is really good in order to get confidence and step by step learn with help of friends.</p> <p>Interviewee 5 The main idea of what this participant said is that even if at the beginning you may feel uncomfortable, because of so many different things, the need of interaction makes you try and start to feel better practicing with native and non-native speakers</p> |
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| | <p>Interviewee 6 “During the course I think it was a good experience, because we share the academic environment but also, outside of the campus, we had interaction with foreign people, actually, I mean current people in the town, I think it was the most relevant thing I could learn there”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 “I went to a lot of bars in which I could interact a lot in a different way, I mean, outside the class and more in real life, to drink a beer and talk about everything with natives”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 The improvement is possible when you speak all the time, do your best and live like when you do in your own country but in the target language.</p> |
| <p>8 Could you communicate in an adequate way with native speakers? Give an example.</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “as I said before there was just one time that I couldn’t, but I think the most of the time, I could get communicated in an adequate way, and actually, if I didn’t understand everything, because there was a moment that I talked with a man from Arkansas or from Texas, and he spoke too fast, and it was kind of difficult to understand him, but, actually I think I got the main ideas of it, so, I think my communication was adequate in order to establish a communication with them”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “Ok I remember when I speak with native in the Walmart for example, because I needed to pay the things, the arwem for example, no more, and the teachers, interacting with the teachers”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “In the first times I talked with her(Iness) was really difficult to understand what she tried to say to me”</p> <p>“but I had the oportunity to find that guy who speaks really, really fast(texan), I had never met a person with that speed”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 The participant said that at the beginning was difficult because of accents, fluency, lack of vocabulary and so on but once you take risks is really amazing how much you can improve.</p> <p>Interviewee 2 It is possible to say that going to different places, like malls and speaking/talking with teachers of the target language is one of the most important things to do in order to improve.</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 3 “Of course, because, in my case I was thinking in Spanish and translating but, I used my other techniques to get understood, which was my body language to explain people what was my idea about”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “In my free time when I when I speak with a native speaker, I had some problems, because I don’t understand some, some idiomatical expressions that this persons used with me, in the time to develop a conversation with this person, I understand some words, and I using the some expressions, for example, give a water or take a bus, or saying for example when I don’t have a money, that you see the idioms, in this case ‘to be a red’ ”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “yes, as I told you because when I spoke there I was understood, maybe some, like mistakes in vocabulary but no more, maybe pronunciation that I had to repeat again and again in order to be understood</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 “At the very beginning I should say that I thought that my English proficiency was enough and high, but this statement had to change” “I always tried to translate in my mind before I talk, but once I get used to the environment, this process started to go down.”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “I was so nervous and in some cases I made a lot of mistakes which were corrected talking about pronunciation. But it was fantastic to talk with a native, even if it was difficult to understand what they were talking about, they tried to talk slowly, which helped me with my comprehension”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “my first time shopping the clerk asked me the following question “do you need an extra bag?” and I did not understand it”</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 Here, we had kind of a contradiction and this is what makes this exercise that good because we can see that when people take the time to write the story life there are some things that the interview cannot catch like this in which we can see that effectively the participant could be understood and understand but also at the beginning there were moments that really challenged the participant and mad the participant to think that the level was not enough.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 The idea of making natives to understand that we are not native-like is highlighted in here, where this participant was not able to understand everything, but the participant did what I just mentioned and was really good because step by step, speed, fluency, idioms and so on can be caught but step by step.</p> <p>Interviewee 5 As most of the participants, the first steps are really hard but with eyes on the target everything is possible.</p> |
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| | <p>for example at subway with the word in Spanish 'mayonesa'... mayones so the clerk told me it was mayonnaise, so like those pronunciation mistakes”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “yes, sometimes when we talked in an academic way, we try to be specific but then when you are on the field, you can realize that they speak really different, they use a many slangs and many idioms also, I think that interact with the native people or many Americans in the same place is good as well”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 6</p> |
| <p>9 Do you think...? Your oral ability and verbal fluency increased with this course?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “I would say yes, because my communicative competence increased in order that not just orally I could establish a communication, but also with my hands, with my gestures, I could establish a lot of communications that I couldn't speak because my vocabulary wasn't enough on that time. My fluency was the thing I think increased the most, because I got used to people from... I mean, native speakers, I had to talk fast because they talk too fast, so, I had to talk too fast but there was something I couldn't get which was the accent, that I am going to explain later”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “the moments I spoke with her (Iness) I tried to speak as fast as possible, of course with cohesion and coherence. I can say I improve a lot my fluency because of her”</p> <p>“Nowadays even making mistakes I am able to speak fast and confident and I make jokes of my mistakes trying to correct them but I don't fell shame of my oral skills and my whole english level”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 Different aspects can be noted by this participant, people with high proficiency in English as well as native speakers are really useful. Another important aspect is body language that is really useful when we talk and we have no words to be understood moreover, to emphasize on those methods can be very useful.</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 2 “Of course, because I interacted with the native, with other people that speak English, for this reason I needed to incrementated my oral ability and verbal fluency”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “Of course, they have increased a lot, in terms I mean, fluency because, I tried always to speak little by little, but then I realize, ok I have a lot of fluency now, and it’s because this trip”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Yes because, after this course, my fluency, my verbal fluency is low, after this, my fluency is most faster, for this reason I speak most fast.”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “Yes, a lot because I was immerse in an English context, so the assignment for me was, speak, speak and speak in English, and in Spanish in not the correct way, so the verbal fluency was great, because I learnt to speak faster”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 2 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “I improved a hundred percent and it was not because of classes or the grammar but in a real life context”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “Missouri State University helped me to develop many skills, but one of the most important us the speaking skills”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 2</p> <p>Interviewee 3 This participant said that to face real context, starting little by little and then taking that big step and risk to all what an immersion course can offer is what makes people to improve.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 Speak fast but with fluency and not just a lot of non-sense words is what makes somebody improve and this participant could notice that this courses made a person improve in that difficult part.</p> <p>Interviewee 5 Speaking skills, “speak, speak and speak” that is what makes a person to get used to speaking fast</p> <p>Interviewee 6</p> |
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| <p>10 Which were the moments which helped you the most to develop your oral ability?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “I think was that with my partners from Colombia, we were three of us, which all of us tried to go to Walmart, even twice a day, in order to buy things, and also to establish communication with native speakers, so, those moments that realize that I had to talk and I wanted to talk, not just for example, I met people from other countries, but they just spoke between them, it wasn’t useful because they spoke their language, they weren’t speaking English, so, it was kind of bad, so, I would say, the things which helped me the most were to speak with native speakers all the time”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “In this moment I remember in class with the teachers, and evaluations, when teachers outside to learn, I need to speak with other people, in specific with people that speak English, also I need to improve my listening, when the teacher speak and explanated whatever thing, I need to listen, for this reason, this is my moment for improve”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “she is not a native language speaker, but I spoke a lot with her and she has a really amazing oral skill so I could improve a lot thanks to her”</p> <p>“I spent a lot of time with some of my closer friends in Walmart buying and looking for staff, so, we had the need to communicate with a lot of natives”</p> <p>“Of course I improve in this place(Sunvilla tower)”</p> <p>“the rest of the people weren’t able to speak spanish,so, the only way to speak with them was in english”</p> <p>“I think one of the keys of my oral skill improvement was Master Jennifer”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “Third point, the most important for me was meeting different people from other countries”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 Those moments, were to speak with people in English all the time, even for a candy or anything, to go to different places and try to ask for things, learn from the best English speakers you can find, all that is challenge but the participant assured that it will make language learners improve in a way that is hard to imagine</p> <p>Interviewee 2 To meet people from different countries who are non-native speakers is according to this participant something really useful maybe because of the co-learning and also the accents, being able to learn different accents is something really useful, and this kind of courses offer that indeed. As well of course to listen native speakers and get use to that accent.</p> |
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| | <p>Interviewee 3 “well, actually I would say that in the field of action, I would say, every day, not even in the classroom learning English and American culture, but, of course, in the bus, in the market, everywhere I go I had to like improve, and it’s yes, it’s like every moment I had, it help me to improve.”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Ok, the first moment was, in a mix, mix is a bar, in this place I talked about with different person, and the second was in Mc Donalds, when I bought a mix in Mc Donalds, and the other was in a Latin shops, this is a shop for food Latin, and the other was in a church because when I prayed, I had to talk about with a prayer, I learnt some expression, and other some words about religion”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “when I was shopping there, for example at Walmart when I didn’t find some specific thing for example the razor in order to shave, so looking for that specific word was the most difficult part in the oral ability”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “I think that when we had free time, on weekends, we lose the academic goal and we were interacting with, how can I say</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Thanks to these experiences I have been able to improve my English level a Little and to lose the fear to talk”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 3 “The field of action” something really interesting how this participant thinks about the context as a field in which you develop through you actions. That kind of thinking is what makes people go forward.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 This participant lost the fear to talk in English thanks to this travel and different places in this case a mall as well but also bars and so on can make a big difference because of the language used in every place, so the vocabulary is different and it makes an improvement in learners of course.</p> <p>Interviewee 5</p> <p>Interviewee 6</p> |
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| | <p>let me check, I mean when we were relaxed, in my case I learnt more in free times than in academic, ok, academic is good but academic time was good also because, you can be free and speak in different things, not only essays or you know the academic purposes, you can talk about different topics;life stories, you know, share meals, costumes, you know, different things, it was good”</p> | | |
| <p>11 Do you think there was something you left to do and due to not doing it you wasted a fundamental opportunity to improve your English level?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “I don’t think so, well, I think the only thing I would be thinking in this moment, is that when I was with my partners from Colombia, we used to speak in English, but also in Spanish, and in that moment when you are in the context and you are just one month in there you should speak in English even with partners that knows Spanish, I think it was the only moment that I felt I didn’t use my whole English, but the most of the time I was speaking in English, I tried to make friends from other countries as I said before, so, I was not just listening native speakers, but also people from other countries speaking in English, and the accent of them are different, so, in some cases that is kind of difficult to understand them, and that’s why I liked a lot this experience, because you learn a lot of accents, a lot of things and it’s really interesting”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “it’s the only thing I think I regret to have lost” (accent)</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 One advice from this participant was not to talk in your own language in other countries. If that people who speaks your language knows also the target language why not to speak every time in that language. Also to keep practicing everything you learnt because with that experience the participant got could notice that lost the accent and that is something to regret for.</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 2 “No, because I think that to, one moment, no because I feel I give the best of me in this course.”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “Well, I don’t, because as I said before, I took advantage of every single experience, so I don’t regret at all”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Yes, because one person asked me a question about change my life, but I say, don’t accept this propose, because it was complicated, for this reason I believe, for this reason I think I regret”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “yes I think, take advantage of the other classmates, for example interact with the Korean people with Brazilian people, with other people, the most of the time I was with Colombian people, but those moments when I talked to Colombian people I would take advantage for the others”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “ok, I think that I seriously encourage many people or could be just per groups, or friends to get in there because enjoy, you have fun time and you can learn as well, I think is a good opportunity for everybody”</p> | <p>Interviewee 2 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 3 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 4 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 2</p> <p>Interviewee 3</p> <p>Interviewee 4 Some opportunities can happen in those places and is your decision to take them or not and in this case this participant regrets, but the participant said that those opportunities are things to think very carefully</p> <p>Interviewee 5</p> <p>Interviewee 6</p> |
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| <p>12 Do you think your vocabulary increased in this course? For example?</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “I think so, as I said before, my slangs like ‘actually, you know’ are really important, and for example, I was talking with a man from Texas, who speaks so fast and I tried to understand everything he said but I couldn’t, so, I got the main ideas of it, and also, with my teachers, there is a teacher called Jennifer, who is really amazing in speaking, she speaks with this kind of accent I like too much, so, I learnt a lot from her, her accent, her vocabulary is really big, so, in some cases I couldn’t understand what she was saying, so, I had to ask her, but, for that reason I learnt a lot from her”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 “Of course, I incremented my vocabulary in this course. specifically I remember when the teacher said, ‘ok, do you know what is, give me some sugar, or feel a blue moon’ this is in specific idioms that I learnt in this course”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “yeah, of course, I have learnt some slangs like ‘actually’ and ‘you know’ ”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Yes, because I learnt idiomatical expressions, slangs, and new words, for example, Clancy, idioms as ‘like a father like a son’, ‘I am blue’ this idioms is very</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “some idioms; I use them a lot nowadays and it’s thank to him”(Texan)</p> <p>“I can learn from those mistakes and improve, so, I think one of the keys of my oral skill improvement was Master Jennifer”</p> <p>Interviewee 2 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 3 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 4 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 Idioms, slangs, people who correct when those false cognates happened, the main things this participant thinks are important.</p> <p>Interviewee 2</p> <p>Interviewee 3</p> <p>Interviewee 4</p> |
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| | <p>important, because I say when I have a flu, or when I look at a police officer”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “yes, as I told you, many things or in classes in the classroom, many words that I practiced a lot there, before traveling I didn’t know, now I know and now I practice that word”</p> <p>Interviewee 6 “Sure, vocabulary and different attitudes facing people, because sometimes you know how to say something but maybe you don’t know if it is the right word to express your idea in a proper way”</p> | <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 6 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 5</p> <p>Interviewee 6</p> |
| <p>13 Do you think your accent when you talk in English improved in contrast with your accent before traveling? Explain.</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “In the first moments, I mean when the travel finished, there was a girl called Iness, that she told... she is from Tunisia, and she talked to me, and she said that I had accent, that I could get the accent of a native-like, I would say that not perfectly, but it was enough, I think for trying to improve it, when I arrived to Colombia, I realize that I lost that accent, I can speak fluent, but I don’t have that accent that native people has, so, I think my accent improved, but I have to still improving, because that part is really difficult to improve, when you are not an English person or an American”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 “thanks to her (Jennifer) I could get a kind of accent which for me it’s really difficult to get, but because nowadays I am not used to listen it I lose it and it’s the only thing I think I regret to have lost because I have tried a lot of times to get accent again and I have not been able to do it”</p> | <p>Interviewee 1 Accent is one of the most difficult parts of the language to get according to this participant, besides it needs more than a month in there to get it but the main idea of how to use it can be gotten, but continue improvement is necessary</p> |

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| | <p>Interviewee 2 “This question is difficult to me, but I think that, I suppose I improved my accent in this course, but I don’t know, really I don’t know.”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 “yeah, of course, because some of the people I talked to, they correct me, ‘hey you don’t say this word in this way, but, in the other way’ which is the correct, and I would say, yeah, actually I have an example, I said, I have always said, comfortable (exactly how it sounds) and it’s not like that, they corrected me and they say ‘no, it’s not like that, it’s comfortable (well pronounced)’ so I improved a lot my accent, and of course my fluency”</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “Yes, because Mark, is a teacher of Missouri State, he correct me some expressions, or some words that I had bad pronunciation”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 “no, actually my accent has been the same, before traveling, during the trip and now”</p> | <p>Interviewee 2 “This was difficult because the accents are very different, but the advantage is that you had more practice”</p> <p>Interviewee 3 N/A</p> <p>Interviewee 4 “I met a teacher form Missouri State University that I start to talk and meet new places of Springfield and also meet a little bit more American Culture which let me improve my oral ability”</p> <p>Interviewee 5 N/A</p> | <p>Interviewee 2 The participant does not know well if accent was improved because of the difficulty of getting it.</p> <p>Interviewee 3 Not properly accent, but pronunciation.</p> <p>Interviewee 4 No accent, but pronunciation</p> <p>Interviewee 5</p> |
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| | <p>Interviewee 6 “yes, definitively ‘cause the society enforces or makes a kind of pressure if you don’t speak English as they speak because nowadays I am talking with foreigner speakers for example Australians and they say that I speak with American accent ‘cause I learnt during the travel, with experience I had before with American friends, yes, I think or I figure out that if I were living in London for example I could get the British accent you see, or in Australia, the Australian accent so, it’s a matter of situation or place that you were”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 “I could get easier that accent on natives, maybe because of my experience before in Spain it was easier to me but I could, my friends from other countries say that I speak like a Texan guy or something like that, and I like it because that’s the way”</p> | <p>Interviewee 6 Accent which is for the most of the people the most difficult part was easier in this participant maybe because of what he says in the story life. In addition, to speak often with natives you meet in the immersion course would work in this improvement.</p> |
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Analysis

All the participants agreed that it was a really good experience and that they learned a lot in different aspects. For example, participants three (3) and six (6) agreed in the way that they learned not just the language but culture as well as (Keith Johnson & Swain, 1997, p. 259) says “one of the four principal goals of immersion programs in the United States is that students learn about and understand the culture(s) of the people who speak the immersion language”. According to these authors, most of the teachers say that language and culture are completely linked and cannot be separated. Thanks to interaction the participants say their English level increased because of the interaction and that they had to talk all days in English, so not just the oral ability but others abilities improved as well.

Participants three (3) and five (5) said that their level was completely enough to understand and be understood as well, but the other three participants said that vocabulary was the main problem because they did not have vocabulary enough to express themselves so they had to replace some words in order to try to be understood, but in some few cases, even that did not work. Idioms and slangs like ‘actually’ and ‘you know’ were the main vocabulary they got and that it is useful for any context and also that those words make people look more confident and not like a ruler, following all rules, but they learned them because of the lack of them so that was the main vocabulary that was necessary to learn.

Going everywhere was really important to the participants even if there are some places more visited by them like Walmart, any place was great to them to face reality as a way to improve, and particularly, (interviewee6, 2015) “we share the academic environment but also, outside of the campus, we had interaction with foreign people. Actually, I mean current people in the town, I think it was the most relevant thing I could learn there”. When this interviewee makes reference to foreign people, also involves the sociolinguistic component that says according to (CEFR, 1997, p. 13) “strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures, even though participants may often be unaware of its influence” but in this case they were really aware of that cultural exchange, not just with native speakers but also with non-native speakers as well. So those people from many different countries also were a really important part of the improvement of this communicative competence.

Communicative competence is not just speaking but also other ways to talk and participant one (1) and three (3) make sure that when it is not possible to express ideas, it is necessary to use other ways like body language. Speaking fluently is one of the things that the most of the participants improved. Actually, Jessica, that it is a need and the reason can be as participant one (1) said ‘I had to talk fast because they talk too fast’ and that need to speak like in the mother tongue language, makes people to learn by trying. Some of the people like participant three (3) and one (1) realized that, their fluency increased when they arrived to Colombia again and noticed the difference in contrast with their general level before the immersion course but fluency was the highest ability. It is possible to say that they could, as specified before, become better at the use of a non-native language and learn how to use it in an intelligible way, with

self-confidence and with each time more natural like the mother tongue, so the interaction in that non-native language did not get broken, which is really important because if this was the most salient ability they lacked before, but thanks to this programs they overcome that weakness.

Most of the participants said that speaking all the time in the context is fundamental, everywhere it does not matter the place, if it is possible to speak in English it should be done as much as possible as (Meneses A., 2002) who quote (Schiffrin 1987) who says that “language always happens in a kind of context. Cognitive shape context exists, but also the perceptions of the immediate situations exist or what have been told before; the cultural contexts which are concerned to world visions; and social context, through which someone can establish interactions”(p. 437). So, in an immersion program in which people have that social context everywhere it is a fundamental opportunity to establish interaction and improve through that social context which usually does not surround a language learner.

Finally, talking about accent, the middle of the participants said that their accent really improved, but as they are not in the context anymore, it is difficult to improve it more. The rest of the participants said that it is really difficult to get this, also it is probable that it is because it is necessary to spend more time in the context or with the language itself.

Conclusion

To improve the communicative competence in any language is really difficult, and is something which requires time, but when the time is limited you need to move faster and learn in the same way. As is shown in the gathering of the information, a short time is enough to improve really well this competence. There are some tools that are more useful than others but people have to have something into account; the first thing that you as a person has to do is to look at yourself and analyze the way you learn faster, and get open to new ways of learning because that is really important. Otherwise, you will always be close to new opportunities in whatever you do.

The results that are shown in the data analysis make us reflect about how to act properly in order to get the most of linguistic immersion courses, thanks to that, it is possible to recommend the following:

- To interact with native speakers and also with non-native ones, this as students from B.A in English will help in order to learn about accents that in some cases are really difficult to understand.
- To let yourselves get involved by the context, as future teachers to learn about context is also to learn about culture, and is general knowledge that language and culture are linked to each other inherently.
- To let all your body “talk”, as was explained in the analysis. Communicative competence doesn't just mean the speaking part; it takes more than that, it is to express with our gestures, with our bodies our ideas, and if the receptor gets the idea, that is communication, moreover, don't feel embarrassed to use your body to express yourselves, sometimes words are not enough to say what you need to say.

- Don't be scared to say something wrong, because making mistakes is one of the best ways to learn. People from other countries love when you try to speak their language and them to try to help you as much as possible, furthermore, get that experience and you'll improve so much.
 - Have fun. As one of the participants of this research is the last recommendation by experience, when you enjoy your time in a place, you make the most of that experience, the learning part comes in an intrinsic way.

So, enjoy your experience and as the slogan of Missouri State University says "Follow your passion. Find your place" moreover, follow your passion for languages and you will learn the language and find your place in the space you are in, and your proficiency will evolve in an indescribable way.

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Apendix

Interview

1. What is your name?
2. In which semester are you?
3. How old are you?
4. How was your experience in the immersion course at Missouri State University?
5. Did you feel somehow that your English level wasn't enough in order to establish a communication? Why?
6. Do you think your English level increased?
7. How much do you think was your level of interaction with native English speakers being immersed in the context?
8. Could you communicate in an adequate way with native speakers? Give an example.
9. Do you think...? Your oral ability and verbal fluency increased with this course?
10. Which were the moments which helped you the most to develop your oral ability?
11. Do you think there was something you left to do and due to not doing it you wasted a fundamental opportunity to improve your English level?
12. Do you think your vocabulary increased in this course? For example?
13. Do you think your accent when you talk in English improved in contrast with your accent before traveling? Explain.

Life Stories Written by the participants

Interviewee one (1)

I could improve my english communicative competences in a lot of ways, there are some places and people which made me improve a lot, so I am going to mention some of them:



Iness Ben Guirat: she is not a native language speaker, but I spoke a lot with her and she has a really amazing oral skill so I could improve a lot thanks to her, actually, she used to speak really fast, so, the moments I spoke with her I tried to speak as fast as possible, of course with cohesion and coherence. I can say I improve a lot my fluency because of her.

In the first times I talked with her was really difficult to understand what she tried to say to me, but, while I continue talking with her, again and again my ear started to be able to catch the words and in that way I also started to speak in the same rhythm she speaks, so, she was a really important person in my oral skill development.

There is a person that I just talked like 10 minutes, a native from Texas, he also make me improve a lot because one part of our homework was to try to talk with native speakers and ask them some questions but I had the oportunity to find that guy who speaks really, really fast, I had never met a person with that speed, and it was a really good experiece because it happened after 2 weeks ‘‘training’’ with Iness, so I could understand almost everything and I got something from that guy which is going to be very useful to me in speeches, which are some idioms; I use them a lot nowadays and it’s thank to him, so, to have met those two people I can say that improve my fluecy a lot.



The people in this picture were so important for my oral skill development but in this case I want to be emphasized in the place; Walmart, was a place in which I improve a lot my pronunciation and this can sounds kind of silly but I also improve my confidence and I think that is really important part in any skill when someone is learning a language. I spent a lot of time with some of my closer friends in Walmart buying and looking for staff, so, we had the need to communicate with a lot of natives and we tried to make the most of that experience, every time we could we asked for clothes, for the restroom, for every single thing appear in our minds in order to speak with natives. We were so focus in our improvement and even in the moments in which we weren't sure about what to say or how to express ourselves we did our best helping each other in the necessary moments. That kind of things made us to get a lot of confidence because even if we made mistakes we were able to communicate with natives and for me, that was really important. Nowadays even making mistakes I am able to speak fast and confident and I make jokes of my mistakes trying to correct them but I don't fell shame of my oral skills and my whole english level, I just try to learn from every single oportunity I have.

This building is called 'Sunvilla Tower' and it was the place in which I live from that amazing month in United States. Of course I improve in this place, there were like 15 spanish speakers, the rest of the people weren't able to speak spanish,so, the only way to speak with them was in english, even making mistakes between us, it was really interesting to grow up together because we always corrected to each other,so, we improved a lot in that environment.



Actually, those people were my first opportunity to communicate with someone, before going to speak with natives, in the first days I didn't have the confidence to speak with natives and I understood the most of the people in Sunvilla Tower were students so I practiced first with them and after I got more confidence, I started to try to talk with natives and then, I tried to make the most of every opportunity I had to communicate in English with any person.



I had really good relations with my teachers (Kurtis, Jennifer and Juan) on my classes, so, I used to speak a lot with them, that opportunity to learn from people who are masters in every single aspect of the language was really important to me, actually, I was corrected a lot of times from my teachers but that made me improve a lot, but I have to say

that Master Jennifer (who was my pronunciation teacher) was the one who corrected me the most, of course because I had a lot of pronunciation mistakes, but was really good for me, actually I like to be corrected, because I can learn from those mistakes and improve, so, I think one of the keys of my oral skill improvement was Master Jennifer. Actually, thanks to her I could get a kind of accent which for me it's really difficult to get, but because nowadays I am not used to listen it I lose it and it's the only thing I think I regret to have lost because I have tried a lot

of times to get accent again and I have not been able to do it, but I am sure I will do it in some how.

In order to conclude I have to say that every person I met in United States was really important for my oral skill improvement, but of course there are some people or places which are key factors in that development, I like a lot how my english communicative skills improve so I just say thanks to all that people I met there, they will always be in my heart and of course in my english.

Interviewee two (2)

Springfield is the best place that you can visit; you learn many things for your life. According to my experience, one of the things that people from other countries can be surprised is the impact of culture, methodology that teachers have to teach different knowledge and another thing that you can see is the acquirer new knowledge that people from other counties give or teach you. Based on pedagogical context, all those tools that I want to talk about are important for the future of my students. Just because someone is not well educated and does not have specific knowledge about something, it does not mean it is not important for the community, also the teacher that does not have methodology can teach anything nor can give knowledge also I learned about culture, pedagogy and people

The culture can be impacting to people from my country because one reason is the respect towards the environment. In Springfield they have two trash cans in every block, the restrooms are always very clean. In Springfield people are very friendly ,when I came to Springfield the first week for me was very complicated to get used to that people, when I walked, had always a different greeting, but when I wanted to cross an avenue, the driver always stopped for me to cross, so I realized that here the pedestrian is first. In addition the campus and close to campus they do not have traffic lights. In Springfield people do not steal anything, because for example, I lost my camera two times but they always returned it to me.

In Missouri State University, teachers are very organized in their classes. They have to prepare each class. They did not use the board; they used technological tools when they explain the topic. Also they made a test for each topic at the end of the week. For each topic we

had a trip where we could learned about the topic .Additionally I look for a methodology that the university has for teachers who teach English. They use constructionism because all teachers have same methodology to make their classes; they use the four competences, different activities that help the student when I begin the course. They gave students binders with all the activities. They taught the correct form to make essays. The listening test was interesting because they use certain quantity of videos that students need to answer with true or false and if the answer is false, the students need to write the correct answer. Moreover, in each homework they put parameters that always have a score. Other thing that I can show is in America they have the quality in education. The government shows importance towards education because in the campus they have different activities that you can do when, you have free time. For example there are gym, a swimming pool, a library that is very big, they have computer labs, one is open twenty four hours. The university campus is almost all Springfield.

Third point, the most important for me was meeting different people from other countries. If you need to communicate or do homework, it is always in English. This was difficult because the accents are very different, but the advantage is that you had more practice. When I start the course everyone had curiosity about the other cultures and people. I learned from Korean and Chinese people a little bit of their culture, for example when they, were born, they already had one year of born. Also I learn about different things about religion and food. When you meet other people from other culture something funny is that all the students ask for “hello” word in other languages. But it is very nice to identify the different features between Korean and Chinese people, the accent when they talk in English and in their own languages. They taught us about their culture, so you change the concept of these cultures. Not everyone is able to change paradigms.

Finally, when you are outside your country especially Colombia, You change any thought; you can realize that our country needs more education, culture, and reading. Obviously some things can never change because Colombia does not have things that are seen in other countries. But you can have special new experiences when you are outside to learn more. When you arrive to your country, you want to change things and apply the culture in our country. It is very beautiful that people in Colombia, for example, do not throw away garbage on the street. But the experience in Springfield that people is very friendly, nice, where you can learn about other people, where you learn to open your mind to other thoughts and things, to other world. America is a country with diversity of opinion, people, especially diversity. The experience that I cannot express easily.

Interviewee three (3)

In this document I am going to make evident some of the situations that helped me to improve my oral ability in the English language. This is dedicated to a friend who was with me at MSU the summer of 2014. Erick, a great guy, a great friend....

At the very beginning I should say that I thought that my English proficiency was enough and high, but this statement had to change. Some students at Universidad Gran Colombia were going to travel to USA so they can be part of a culture and language program in the state of Missouri the summer of the last year. We were very motivated and anxious due to knowing a new country was really exciting.

At the international airport in Miami and after a 5 hours trip and with no rest the previous day, of course we were starving. And this is when my "English proficiency" was going to be tested. We needed to eat something so, we went to McDonalds; I remember very well when our teacher told us, "hey, you are in the united states already, so go ahead a speak English, otherwise you will starve to death". I was really confident with myself, so I ordered a hamburger, but when the waitress talked to me I went in the dark. I just did not know what she was telling me and I could just say "yes yes". When I realized the bill was so expensive and wit another different hamburger! I tried to clear my mind and to understand what had happened, then I conclude "I am nothing".

Here is when my awareness started, "I must improve myself" I said to me. In the journey from Dallas to Springfield, there was a lady who was really interested in us, maybe because we were foreigners and she started to talk with a friend. I tried to understand but I just could not. She was really fluent. "Of course she's a native speaker" and once again I felt terrible.

Once there at Sunvilla tower, we caught up with some Korean people, we Latin men always think about beautiful women, and without extending too much there she was! A beautiful Asian girl. Off course the only way to get along with her was by speaking, once again I hesitated, but this time was different, I just breathed deeply and thought "I can do this" fortunately for me I did it. I believe that when something really touches our heart, likes or just what we are interested in, we will be able to take a challenge so we can get what we want. Love and all this stuff made me fell aware that I had to improve, and somehow I did it, not knowing why of course.

I want to share one more experience and it was in the supermarket "Walmart", in my case and with my friend Erick, we liked to go a spend our money, walk "just two blocks away"² and have a good time, there at the supermarket we needed to talk, either to ask where was something or just when we were going to pay. I started to be really motivated and my speech started to flow, when I do my reflective process I believe that: because I had grammar and everything in my head already set up I just needed a specific situation to put all that into practice.

After 15 days I saw the results, because of the second language environment, classes, the dining hall, our mates from Korea, Palestine, china, Mongolia and so on I was totally immersed in an English community, I always tried to translate in my mind before I talk, but once I get used to the environment, this process started to go down. There were a lot of embarrassing moments that made me feel stupid and ruin, but I took these situations to improve, I am a challenged person and when something is hard, I just go for it.

² I became very famous due to this expression "just two block away" we were going to buy a camera and according to me, the store was near but, it was not. I took us more than four hours walking and around five miles to get there, and it was just two blocks away.

I should say once again that specific situations that are sometimes tough teach you a lot, when somebody mocks on you, shame and embarrassing situations make you change and face the reality.

I improved a hundred percent and it was not because of classes or the grammar but in a real life context, sharing experiences, thoughts, believes, points of view etc. there in the real field in when you learn how to speak English.

Interviewee four (4)

Hello I am and the last summer I had the opportunity to live a immersion process in Missouri State when I met people from different parts of the world as Koreans, Chinese people, Brazilians, Colombians and of course Americans.

During the time I was in Springfield I met a teacher form Missouri State University that I start to talk and meet new places of Springfield and also meet a little bit more American Culture which let me improve my oral ability, because all the time I was with him, I met new people who I was interacting in English.



Furthermore, during the trips I had the opportunity to learn new English expressions, and to learn how to use the currency in there, because that was my first time I had to use that currency, so I met other people in there like an student from Missouri who helped me to understand the use of the currency and how much each coin or bill belongs to which value.

At the beginning it was kind of difficult to understand because my hear wasn't used to listen in English with a different accent in comparison which the one we use in Colombia, and nevertheless, the fluency they in some cases have when they talk, and also the common slangs and idioms they use are really difficult to understand, but while the time was passing I started to improve and understand better when I spoke with them

During the immersion course in Missouri State University we had the an activity which was to developed an survey about the interesting places Springfield has, in this activity I had to interact with native people and that was my first experience to develop my oral ability.



During this activity I was so nervous and in some cases I made a lot of mistakes which were corrected talking about pronunciation. But it was fantastic to talk with a native, even if it was difficult to understand what they were talking about, they tried to talk slowly, which helped me with my comprehension.

In this trip I had the opportunity to research about educative inclusion, in which I interacted with a student who has functional diversity and also, I had the opportunity to talk with the vice-president of diversity and inclusion who taught me about what disability really means.



With Dr. Juan Meraz who is the diversity and Inclusion's vice-president, I could understand the rules and policies the University has through different files he gave me.

Other of the most significant experiences in which I interacted with native people was when I took the bus and went to 'Academy' which is a sport store when I had to ask how to do in order to go there and also can know at what time the next bus was going to come, in order to have time to see and buy stuff I needed. During this experience I learnt to do 'transfer' it is something similar to what we do in here with SIPT, but with 'transfer' a payment means 10 cents, so, people who do that can do what the name says a transfer to other bus before an hour.

Interviewee five (5)

Missouri State University helped me to develop many skills, but one of the most



important as the speaking skills. At the beginning of the course at the English Language Institute I felt uncomfortable, it should be about the influence of the culture in the language learning field.

But, over the time I stepped into the culture shoes of the other cultures and I started

leaning about other cultures. Another thing that was very useful was shopping in malls, groceries stores, libraries, etc.

By my first time shopping the clerk asked me the following question “do you need an extra bag?” and I did not understand it, however several times I listened the same questions when I shopped, finally I got it my answer was “yes, please, it’s too heavy for me!”.

Visiting places like the Budwaser or museums I had many opportunities to ask and discuss about interesting topics



Interviewee six (6)

My experience at the US



My experience in Springfield was really awesome, it's the first time I traveled to United States so it was really good, I have had the experience to live in Spain and there I met a lot of people from USA and other parts of the world so I was kind of used to know how to treat those situations when you are in other country. At Missouri State University I met a lot of people from other countries so I think I could practice a lot with them because they were Koreans, Chinese, Mongolian and so on, so, the only way to get a conversation was through English.

During this trip I used to go and talk everywhere, malls, parks, the gym, bars and so on, I think I am conscious of my level and I wanted to improve, that's why all of us where in there; of course not everybody thinks in that way but I do, so I did my best.



In class as well, I was placed in B2 level so I think it was ok and I preferred to be there because I could interact with people and also enjoy all my travel. I used to talk a lot with my teachers so, I went to a lot of bars in which I could interact a lot in a different way, I mean, outside the class and more in real life, to drink a beer and talk about everything with natives, with people from other countries, no matter, actually my matter was to talk always in English, I think I did it the most of the time, so, I feel I improved a lot.