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# The Benefits of Living in Foreign Language Housing: The Effect of Language Use and Second-Language Type on Oral Proficiency Gains

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Many colleges and universities in North America employ foreign language housing (FLH) as a means of exposing students to a second language (L2). However, little research examines the effectiveness of these houses on L2 use and gains. The purpose of this study was to examine whether L2 learners living in FLH use the L2 more and whether they make greater language gains than classroom-only learners. This study also evaluated what kinds of tasks predict greater gains and whether such gains are related to the L2 studied. FLH learners of French, German, Russian, and Japanese were matched with classroom-only learners based on age, gender, and proficiency. Both groups took a preprogram and postprogram oral proficiency interview (OPI) and reported their L2 use. Results revealed that FLH students used the L2 more and made greater language gains than classroom-only learners, although differences across the 2 groups were related to the L2 they were studying. In addition, results revealed that using the L2 in particular tasks predicted greater language gains. Such findings suggest that FLH, as portrayed in the current study, with students grouped by language and 1 native speaker per apartment, provides an environment in which students can improve L2 oral proficiency.

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IN THE MID-1990S, SEVERAL SCHOLARS IN second language acquisition (SLA) called for a more “context-sensitive” (Long, 1997) approach to examining language learning (Block, 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; van Lier, 1994). Since then, a number of studies have answered that call. In addition to the growing number of qualitative studies, quantitative studies have

also examined the effect of the learning setting on SLA. Much of the quantitative research has investigated the formal academic classroom for adult students (Collentine & Freed, 2004), but other studies have examined uninstructed learning in the naturalistic environment (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Perdue, 1993), study abroad (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1993; Freed, 1995; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Isabelli, 2007; Matsumura, 2007), and immersion (Broner, 2000; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Liskin-Gasparro, 1998). Many of these studies have focused on comparing language gains in one setting (especially

classroom-only settings) to those made in other settings, such as study abroad and domestic immersion.

Comparisons of study-abroad, domestic immersion, and classroom-only language learning demonstrate that different settings improve language gains differently (Collentine, 2004; Freed et al., 2004). For example, Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) demonstrated that both classroom-only and study-abroad students improved their listening comprehension over a 5-week period, but study-abroad students improved in top-down processing (in which learners first utilize their background knowledge to process the main idea of a text before trying to decipher individual words), whereas at-home students improved in bottom-up processing (in which students process individual units of speech before processing larger units of meaning). Similarly, Dewey (2007) found that study-abroad learners have a greater breadth of vocabulary, whereas students in immersion programs have a greater depth of lexical knowledge. Collentine (2004) found that study-abroad learners developed better narrative skills than classroom learners, but classroom learners did better in terms of grammatical development. Freed et al. (2004) compared the acquisition of oral fluency in three learning contexts: at-home (classroom only), study abroad, and intensive immersion. Their findings indicate that the study-abroad group improved significantly more than the at-home group in fluency, but the oral fluency of the immersion group improved more than either of the other two groups. As Collentine and Freed (2004) concluded in their review of the literature, there is “no evidence that one context of learning is uniformly superior to another for all students, at all levels of language learning, and for all language skills” (p. 164). Although “education folklore” (Collentine & Freed, 2004, p. 158) has proclaimed that study-abroad settings accelerate acquisition more than other settings, evidence does not always bear out this assertion. In fact, findings suggest that domestic immersion can be as beneficial as study abroad.

One factor that may influence learning outcomes in various settings is the type and amount of second language (L2) use outside of the classroom, which can vary significantly depending on the learning environment (Freed et al., 2004). It is generally assumed that study-abroad contexts afford learners more—and more varied—opportunities to use the language outside of the classroom. Some evidence supports these beliefs, particularly studies of the acquisition of Russian by study-abroad learners (Brecht et al., 1993). How-

ever, more recently, work by Wilkinson (1998) and Tanaka (2007) has demonstrated that this may not always be the case. Their research demonstrates that opportunities for interaction in the L2 can be limited by the native speakers (NSs) with whom they interact.

Although Freed et al. (2004) found significant differences in language use among the various learning settings, they also found that study-abroad students did not necessarily use their L2 more than at-home students, and, in fact, they used their L2 less than immersion students. Moreover, study-abroad students reported using more English than French on a weekly basis during their overseas experience.

The difference in L2 use in various settings is of particular significance, as research has demonstrated connections between the amount of out-of-class L2 use and the development of proficiency in the L2 (Cundick, 2007). Greater exposure to the target language may account for gains for study-abroad students in such diverse areas as pragmatic development (Cohen & Shively, 2007), grammatical proficiency (Isabelli, 2007), cultural sensitivity (Martinsen, 2010), pronunciation (Howard, Lemee, & Regan, 2006), and even writing (Sasaki, 2007). Other researchers suggested that engagement in particular tasks may better predict language gains than overall measures of language use. Dewey (2007), for instance, found that only a small number of tasks correlated with vocabulary gains. Moreover, he found that the tasks that correlated with vocabulary gains were different for study-abroad learners than for immersion students. Likewise, Wood (2007) found that using formulaic speech helped Japanese learners of English in study-abroad contexts improve their L2 fluency. In fact, as Mathews (2001) emphasized, merely participating in a study-abroad or immersion experience may not be enough to ensure language gains; instead, participation in specific tasks while in these settings develops proficiency.

Taken together, research indicates that the learning setting plays an important role in language learning, although no one setting appears to be uniformly better than another. Nevertheless, some common settings for language learning have been largely ignored in the research literature. One such setting is foreign language housing (FLH). FLH provides a domestic immersion experience for learners. However, nonnative speakers (NNSs) provide most of the input. The setting of FLH is unlike classroom or study abroad and differs greatly from the domestic immersion programs, like Middlebury College’s Summer

Language Schools, which have been the subject of recent studies (Dewey, 2007; Freed et al., 2004; Rifkin, 2005). The main purpose of this study is to examine the effects of FLH on SLA. In addition, this study also examines what types of students benefit most from living in FLH.

#### FOREIGN LANGUAGE HOUSING

Foreign language houses have been part of U.S. campuses at least since 1917 (Jordan, 1944). They provide an attractive alternative to study abroad, as the costs associated with international travel have increased. Moreover, students have an opportunity to partially immerse themselves in the target language while remaining active participants in their campus life.

In FLH, students typically live with other NNS learners and one or more NSs of the target language. Many programs require that residents speak the target language at all times while within the FLH. Unlike intensive immersion programs like Middlebury College's Summer Language Schools, students do not devote all of their time to studying the L2. Often their only exposure to the target language occurs at home with native-English-speaking roommates. FLH affords learners opportunities for frequent, informal interactions in the target language. Many FLH programs advertise that learners will gain increased fluency in the target language, yet there are those, like Wolf (2002), who claimed that learners do not interact in the target language in FLH. Pearson's (2007) study of Spanish learners in a language community suggested that learners report interacting primarily in English. Bown's (2006) study, however, offered contradictory evidence: Learners reported speaking the target language 90% of the time they spent in the language residence. The literature on FLH is sparse, and little is known about the amount of language used in FLH. Nor is there empirical data regarding the potential linguistic benefits of FLH.

#### LESSONS LEARNED FROM RESEARCH ON STUDY ABROAD AND IMMERSION

In the absence of studies of FLH, the literature on study abroad and intensive immersion may offer insights into the processes of language learning in a nonclassroom immersion environment. As noted earlier, comparisons of study-abroad, immersion, and at-home language learning do not indicate a clear advantage for study abroad in all areas of language learning or for all learners. The

literature suggests differential effects on different tasks and skills.

Just as the literature shows differential effects of learning environments on acquisition of particular skills (Cubillos et al., 2008; Dewey, 2007; Freed et al., 2004), studies also suggest that different settings may improve L2 learning more for some types of learners than for others. For example, several studies have demonstrated that proficiency level at the time of instruction plays an important role in L2 acquisition (Brecht et al., 1993; Magnan & Back, 2007; Owen, 2002; Rivers, 1998), with most studies showing that less proficient students make fewer gains than more proficient students. However, Regan (2003) summarized literature suggesting that lower proficiency learners make more obvious gains in language skills abroad in comparison to more advanced learners, who make greater improvements in pragmatics. (See Magnan and Back, 2007, for a discussion of potentially confounding variables in these studies.)

In addition to language proficiency, Brecht et al. (1993), in their large-scale study of students on semester and academic-year programs in Russia, isolated several other predeparture variables that were statistically significant in predicting gains during study abroad: gender (men seem more likely than women to improve listening and speaking skills), age (younger students tend to make more progress in listening), knowledge of other foreign languages (the more languages one knows, the greater the improvements in Russian), and grammar and reading knowledge in Russian (a higher score on measures of reading and grammar prior to departure predicts greater gains on study abroad).

Another variable that may affect language gains is the choice of the L2. Although few studies have examined the effect of learning environment on the study of one L2 over another, one study by Cohen and Shively (2007) suggested that study-abroad students of Spanish may acquire L2 pragmatics better than their counterparts studying in France. Omaggio-Hadley (2001) posited that languages less similar to the first language (L1) may prove more difficult to learn in the same setting or over the same amount of time than those that are more similar to the native language.

As noted earlier, the amount and type of L2 use outside of the language classroom appear to influence the development of language skills. The interlocutor with whom the L2 is used may likewise play a role in language acquisition. According to Meara (1994), the amount of social time spent with NSs is a good predictor of language skill improvement. However, speaking the

L2 with NNSs does not appear to promote proficiency. Magnan and Back (2007), for instance, found that study-abroad learners who reported more time conversing with American classmates in French improved significantly less on measures of oral proficiency than did those who spent less time speaking French with other NSs of English.

Yet several other studies offer conflicting findings. Wilkinson's (2002) study of interactions between NSs and NNSs on study abroad suggested that many interactions replicated the didactic pattern of classroom interactions. Dewey (2007) found that time spent conversing with NNSs in the L2 predicted vocabulary development. In his study, learners in intensive immersion programs who interacted more with NNSs in the L2 tended to make greater gains on measures of productive vocabulary knowledge. Freed et al. (2004) also determined that domestic immersion participants, whose primary contact is with NNSs, were able to make significant gains in several measures of oral fluency. In Rifkin's (2005) study of Russian students at Middlebury, the learners made greater gains in oral proficiency than did the study-abroad participants in earlier studies of Russian learners (Brecht et al., 1993). Furthermore, Varonis and Gass's (1985) study of classroom language learners suggests advantages for interactions with NNSs over those with NSs. In particular, the scholars found that interactions with nonnative interlocutors tended to provide more opportunities for negotiation of meaning than interactions with NSs. van Lier and Matsuo (2000) corroborated similar findings in three NNS conversations. Their findings suggest that learners reap different benefits depending on the participation structures in which they interact. Further, they found that even though learners could benefit from interacting with other students at varying proficiency levels, interactions with learners of equal proficiency tended to be more fluid and symmetric. In such cases, learners are likely to work within the Zone of Proximal Development—the difference between what learners can do independently and what learners can do with the help of teachers or capable peers (Vygotsky, 1976). Recent studies also confirm that peers of different proficiency levels can benefit from working with one another (Ohta, 2001; Storch 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 1998, 2002). However, Watanabe and Swain (2007) and Storch (2001) found that this benefit only occurs when the individuals are collaborative, or at the same level of proficiency. Individual differences among language learners may also affect the nature of the interactions, especially for lower pro-

ficiency learners paired with higher proficiency ones.

In addition to the potential linguistic benefits that arise from nonnative–nonnative interactions, the research indirectly posits potential affective benefits as well. Language students may demonstrate greater *willingness to communicate* (see MacIntyre, 2007, for a discussion of this concept) with NNSs than with NSs. In fact, one of the limitations of study abroad occurs for those students who are unable or unwilling to interact with NSs due to shyness or fear of failure (Whitworth, 2007). The linguistic demands and cultural differences encountered in study abroad often induce anxiety that encourages learners to avoid NSs or seek out other English speakers (Allen & Herron, 2003; Ball, 2000). Learners report that they are less self-conscious when conversing with other language learners than conversing with teachers or NSs (Bown, 2006; Bown, Dewey, Martinsen, & Baker, in press). Indeed, Rifkin (2005) suggested that one advantage of domestic immersion over study abroad is that learners in immersion programs interact with speakers (both NS and NNS) who are more sympathetic to their struggles as language learners.

Although scholars have largely ignored FLH as a learning environment, the research literature suggests that FLH could facilitate language gains. First, the literature suggests that intensive immersion leads to linguistic gains equal to or greater than the gains made in study abroad, particularly because learners in domestic immersion use the L2 more than their counterparts in study abroad. Second, there is some evidence that interactions among NNSs may provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning and for language-related episodes, in which learners “talk about the language they produced and reflect on their language use” (Swain & Lapkin, 2002, p. 292). Finally, as Rifkin (2005) concluded, participation in immersion experiences, in which learners get additional opportunities to use the L2, is an important component of developing oral proficiency, particularly for category 3 and 4 languages (i.e., languages that, according to the Department of Defense, require the most time—category 1 taking the least time and category 4 taking the most—for native English speakers to reach a particular proficiency threshold), where classroom-only learners may be constrained by a ceiling effect below the advanced level.

However, Wolf (2002) argued that FLH may not provide a sufficiently rich immersion experience because it simply becomes a place where students have the option to use the target language but

generally do not. Pearson's (2007) investigation of a Spanish floor offers support for Wolf's anecdotal evidence: The residents of the floor reported speaking mostly in English.

The research literature on FLH is nearly nonexistent, representing a small number of conference presentations (Bown, 2006; Pearson, 2007) or articles sharing the "lessons learned" from particular programs (Schlimbach & Jordan, 1936). The studies that deal with issues of importance to FLH—particularly the question of the relative benefits of interactions among NNSs—remain largely inconclusive.

## THE STUDY

### *Research Questions*

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether FLH students who interact mainly with nonnative L2 speakers improve their skills and confidence in the L2 more or less than students in a classroom-only environment. In particular, the researchers sought to examine the following questions:

1. Do FLH students spend more time on task (i.e., use the L2 more) and have greater confidence in using the L2 compared to classroom-only students?
2. Does the amount of language use translate into greater gains in oral proficiency for FLH versus classroom-only students?
3. If greater gains are found, do any specific tasks (such as using the L2 in formal conversations or in social activities) predict language gain?
4. Are there differences in the benefits of FLH depending on the L2 studied and the level of proficiency of the learner?

### *Methodology*

To answer these questions, both FLH and classroom-only students were asked to participate in a study spanning 1 academic year (approximately 8 months). These students differed in what L2 they were studying (French, German, Russian, and Japanese) and how much prior L2 experience they had.

### *Participants*

Seventy-eight learners participated in this study, half of whom lived in foreign language housing (FLH students) and the other half of whom had exposure to the L2 mainly in the classroom. Participants were gender-, age-, and experience-matched (number of L2 classes taken, whether they were a major in the L2) across the two groups. In addition, several of the students had significant previous immersion experience in the language, many of them having been immersed in their respective target cultures for 18 months to 2 years. Because this in-country immersion experience had important effects on language proficiency, the researchers also matched students according to this variable.

Students also differed in choice of L2: French, German, Russian, or Japanese. These four languages were chosen because they represent four different levels on the Defense Language Institute scale of L2 learning difficulty and were languages currently represented in the FLH (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). Table 1 provides further pertinent demographic information about the participants.

Students were not evenly distributed across the language houses. For example, only 5 students lived in the Russian house during the time of the

TABLE 1  
Demographics of Student Participants

Language and Setting	Average Age (Years)	Number With Extensive Immersion Experience	Number of Majors	Gender	Pretest OPI Scores
French FLH	20.7	4	7	4m, 9f	8 adv, 5 int
French CO	21.3	4	7	4m, 9f	8 adv, 5 int
German FLH	20.6	3	5	8m, 6f	6 adv, 7 int, 1 novice
German CO	21.8	2	5	8m, 6f	6 adv, 7 int, 1 novice
Russian FLH	20.67	2	1	3m	1 sup, 2 adv
Russian CO	21.26	3	1	3m	3 adv
Japanese FLH	21.22	3	3	4f, 4m	2 adv, 2 int, 4 nov
Japanese CO	22.44	3	2	4f, 4m	1 adv, 3 int, 4 nov

*Note.* CO = classroom-only; FLH = foreign language housing; OPI = oral proficiency interview; adv = advanced; int = intermediate; nov = novice.

study, and only 3 of them consented to participate. By contrast, over 36 students lived in the French foreign language house and 14 of them agreed to participate in the study.

Participants in the classroom-only group enrolled in at least one class in the target language during the study. The classroom-only students were proficiency-matched to the students in the FLH group; specifically, they were matched as to whether they were majoring in the L2 and what types of classes they were taking. For most participants in this group, this translated into their taking approximately 3–6 hours a week of classroom instruction. In addition, at least 3 of these students used the L2 significantly in work or volunteer situations. It is important to emphasize that students in both groups were highly invested language learners, as was determined by informal interviews and their desire to participate in this research study—in fact, some of the students in the classroom-only group had applied to live in the language houses but were not able to do so because of enrollment caps.

### *Research Setting*

The foreign language houses at the university in question are all located within the same apartment complex. Each apartment houses 5 L2 learners and 1 NS of the target L2 who acts as the resident facilitator (RF).

These native-speaking RFs represent an important component of the FLH experience. One RF resides in each apartment of the Foreign Language Student Residence. The RFs, who are compensated with free room and board, not only provide native input but also oversee apartment food expenditures, enforce the L2-only rule, and provide help with questions related to grammar and vocabulary.

As part of living in the house, students are required to speak the L2 in the apartment at all times, must eat dinner with the other students 5 nights a week, and must help prepare the meal once a week. In addition, because the university is church-sponsored, each week students attend 1 hour of church in the target language. Within the apartment, students are also encouraged to watch movies and television programs only in the L2.

### *Procedures*

Participants were asked to complete four language tasks throughout the study: a pretested and posttested American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) oral proficiency

interview (OPI) as well as a language log of the time they spent using the L2, a frequency of tasks survey, and a survey of confidence in speaking the L2. These will be discussed in detail later. As with most language studies, especially those with considerable length of time between pretest and posttest, this study had some attrition from pretest to posttest. Additionally, some students did not complete all tasks, although the majority did so—in all tests, at least 80% of the students completed the tasks.

*Oral Proficiency Interviews.* Participants were asked to take an ACTFL-certified OPI within the first month of the academic year and then 6–7 months later at the end of the academic year. The interviews were conducted via telephone by an ACTFL-certified interviewer who also scored the proficiency of the speaker. As is the case with official OPIs, each interview was then scored by a second rater, and sometimes by a third one (in the event of disagreement between the first two raters). After all students were interviewed, ACTFL provided the official results to the authors. Because the OPIs were scored officially, the researchers were not informed if any of the interviews were sent to a third rater. ACTFL did not provide information about reliability, but the OPI has been found to be a highly reliable instrument for measuring oral skills in an L2 (Surface & Dierdorff, 2003). Scores cover four categories ranging from lowest to highest language ability (novice, intermediate, advanced, superior) and three sub-levels within these categories (low, mid, and high), except for superior. For statistical purposes, researchers created a 10-point ordinal scale, with “1” indicating a novice-low level, up to “10,” a superior level. This allowed us to statistically measure language gains on this task.

*Language Logs.* Participants were also asked to keep a language log detailing over 1 week how much they used their L2. Prior to the study, the language log was piloted on several FLH students not involved in the actual study. This allowed researchers to refine the language log, adding or deleting tasks, as suggested by the students. Approximately halfway (3 months) between pretest and posttest, students were emailed a copy of the log and were asked to record how often they used the L2 in a variety of tasks. (See Figure 1 for a complete list of activities provided on the language log.)

*ACTFL Guidelines Language Use Survey.* In addition to completing the language logs, students were asked to complete a survey documenting

FIGURE 1  
Example of a Completed Language Log

Each day, record the number of *minutes* that you spend speaking, reading, listening to, or writing in your targeted language while engaged in the activities listed below.

## Language Log

	Mon Feb	Tues Feb	Wed Feb	Thurs	Fri Feb 8	Sat Feb 9	Sun Feb	Total
Getting ready for school/work	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eating breakfast	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
In classes	55	5	55	10	55	0	0	180
Eating lunch	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Talking to friends/roommate	10	20	5	0	145	0	10	190
Watching TV	40	65	20	45	0	0	0	170
Listening to music	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Preparing dinner	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eating dinner	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Working	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cleaning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Studying/Doing homework	90	130	15	80	20	45	0	380
Email	5	5	0	5	0	0	0	15
Internet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reading	5	5	5	5	5	5	0	30
Talking on the phone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sunday School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family Home Evening	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
At work	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teaching Resource Center	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Study Buddy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>965</b>

how often they performed certain language tasks, such as carrying on extensive conversations or apologizing in the L2. These tasks were based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, which indicate what kinds of tasks students should be able to perform at the intermediate, advanced, and superior levels. The complete list of these questions is found in the appendix.

*Confidence Surveys.* Participants also completed an online survey asking about their confidence in completing several tasks. These tasks were selected based on the ACTFL guidelines for tasks for intermediate-, advanced-, and superior-level students. Students filled out the survey approximately 1 week before the posttests. Questions asked how comfortable they felt “using communicative strategies such as circumlocution” or “narrating (talking at the paragraph level; telling stories).” For a complete list of questions asked on the survey, see the appendix.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed to answer the four research questions. To answer the first question of whether

FLH students have greater time on task than classroom-only students, researchers tallied the total number of hours spent speaking the L2 across all tasks for all participants. A two-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA; group [FLH vs. classroom-only] and L2 [French vs. German vs. Russian vs. Japanese]) was performed on the data to determine whether FLH students use the L2 more and whether these differences are predicated on the L2 studied. In addition, similar analyses were performed for each of the tasks recorded (eating dinner, watching TV, listening to music, etc.).

The second question—whether these differences in amount of L2 use translate into greater language gains—was analyzed by performing a repeated-measures two-way ANOVA (group [FLH vs. classroom-only] by L2 [French, German, Russian, Japanese]) on gains from pretest to posttest on the OPI. A similar analysis was conducted on student responses to the confidence survey to determine if FLH students were more willing to communicate in the L2.

To determine whether any of the specific tasks predicted language gains (research question 3), a linear stepwise multiple regression analysis was

performed on the data with responses on the language log, the L2 studied, previous immersion experience, and scores on the language use survey as predictor variables and oral proficiency gains as the dependent variable.

Finally, to answer the fourth question—whether different types of students and different L2s affected language gains in the FLH—the earlier analyses were examined in light of how the L2 and initial proficiency level of the students affected language gains.

## RESULTS

The main purposes of this research study were to determine whether FLH students use the L2 more than classroom-only students and whether these differences translate into greater language gains as measured by the OPI. Moreover, this study also sought to determine whether FLH seemed to help students of some L2s (those studying French, German, Russian, or Japanese) and of differing proficiency levels to improve more than others. The answers to these research questions are given. (See Table 2 for average scores for each of the major analyses of this study.) As shown in Table 2, for some of the analyses, some of the groups were quite small (such as the Russian FLH participants). Because of these low numbers, we computed effect sizes for each of the analyses. These analyses suggested that the effect sizes were within the appropriate ranges.

### Question 1

To answer the first question of this study—whether there is a significant difference in how often FLH students use the target language

compared with classroom-only students—the researchers examined the total number of hours each participant used the L2 for each of the tasks on the language log survey as well as the total number of minutes the L2 was spoken each week. On average, the FLH students spoke the L2 242 minutes (5 hours) a day, whereas the classroom-only students spoke it 91 minutes (1.5 hours) per day. The average number of minutes each group spoke the L2 is displayed in Figure 2.

To determine whether there was a statistical difference between the two groups' (FLH vs. classroom-only) use of the L2, a multivariate ANOVA (group [FLH vs. classroom-only] by language task [eating dinner, watching TV, etc.] by L2 [French, German, Japanese, and Russian]) with the total number of minutes per week a task was performed on the data. The results of this analysis demonstrated a significant effect of group,  $F(1, 41) = 17.102$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .173$ , no effect of language,  $F(3, 41) = 1.025$ ;  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .063$ , and a group by language interaction,  $F(3, 1) = 7.935$ ;  $p < .0001$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .227$ . Further analyses revealed that the only L2 group for which the FLH students did not speak the language more than the classroom-only students was the Russian group. (Why such differences occurred for the Russian group is explained in detail later.) Such findings suggest that the FLH students do in fact speak the L2 more often than their classroom-only counterparts.

The researchers also examined for which tasks the FLH students used the L2 more than the classroom-only students. To do so, researchers ran a series of *t*-tests with the dependent variable being the number of minutes each group (classroom-only vs. FLH) used the L2 on particular tasks (getting ready, watching TV, reading,

TABLE 2  
Means and Standard Deviations for All Major Analyses for the CO and FLH Groups Divided by Language

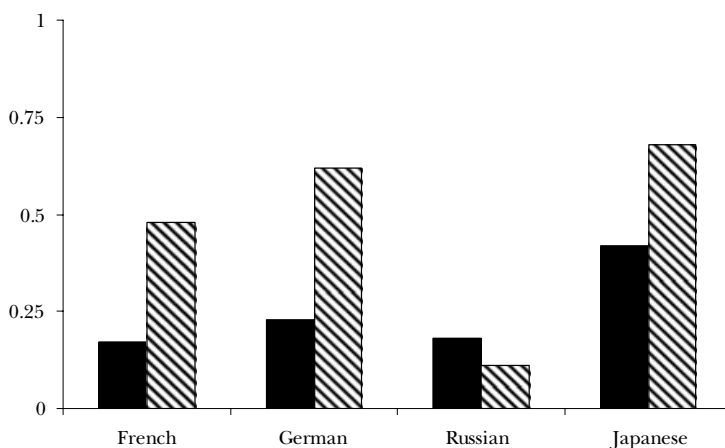
	Total Time Using L2 (in hours per day)	<i>n</i> Total Time	Language Gains	<i>n</i> Language Gains	Confidence Survey	<i>n</i> Confidence Survey
Total FLH	4.04 (2.69)	39	.537 (.452)	24	3.85 (1.02)	23
French FLH	4.95 (2.75)	14	.78 (.27)	11	3.96 (1.08)	11
German FLH	4.13 (.17)	14	.54 (.5)	6	4.12 (.80)	5
Russian FLH	1.47 (.13)	3	.5 (.5)	2	4.42 (.62)	3
Japanese FLH	3.50 (.29)	8	1 (.54)	5	3.34 (1.05)	5
Total CO	1.5 (.36)	39	.36 (.66)	24	3.49 (1.19)	13
French CO	1.07 (.68)	14	.54 (.5)	11	3.88 (.88)	5
German CO	0.77 (.35)	14	.12 (.83)	6	3.35 (1.19)	2
Russian CO	3.18 (.35)	3	.66 (.57)	2	4.45 (.52)	2
Japanese CO	1.88 (.31)	8	.33 (.57)	5	2.57 (1.26)	4

Note. Standard deviations provided in parentheses; numbers of participants in the following column. CO = classroom-only; FLH = foreign language housing.



FIGURE 2

Percentage of time spent in Target Language for CO (Black Bars) and FLH (Cross-Hatched Bars) Students by L2



Note. CO = classroom only; FLH = foreign language housing.

TABLE 3

Differences and Similarities Between FLH and CO Students' Use of the L2 in Various Activities

Activities in Which the FLH and CO Students Differed in How Many Minutes per Week They Performed These in the L2 (number of minutes for each group in parentheses)	Activities in Which the FLH and CO Students Did NOT Differ in How Many Minutes per Week They Performed These in the L2
Getting ready (CO, 11.01; FLH 30.55)	Eating breakfast (CO, 4.09; FLH, 6.11)
Talking to roommates (CO, 128.45; FLH, 296.11)	Eating lunch (CO, 11.28; FLH, 8.41)
Watching TV (CO, 21.39; FLH, 80.90)	Going to class (CO, 126.45; FLH, 140.28)
Listening to music (CO, 33.82; FLH, 94.33)	Working (CO, 60.55; FLH, 16.66)
Preparing dinner (CO, 13.83; FLH, 83.89)	Studying (CO, 149.09; FLH, 173.33)
Eating dinner (CO, 31.36; FLH, 200.55)	Using email (CO, 22.33; FLH, 42.36)
Cleaning (CO, .91; FLH, 7.39)	Weekly social hour (CO, 0.26; FLH, 0.98)
Talking on the phone (CO, 5.00; FLH, 22.77)	Other (CO, 19.55; FLH, 14.44)
Using the Internet (CO, 37.00; FLH, 11.88)	
Reading (CO, 33.33; FLH, 70.18)	
Going to church (CO, 4.54; FLH, 38.06)	

Note. CO = classroom-only; FLH = foreign language housing.

etc.) with a Bonferroni adjustment ( $p < .002$ ;  $.577 > \eta_p^2 > .06$ ). The results of these analyses are shown in Table 3. These analyses found that the two groups (the FLH vs. classroom-only groups) did not differ in how often they used the L2 in class, studying, and working. However, they did differ in their use of the L2 in several everyday tasks, including using email, using the Internet, reading, listening to music, talking on the phone, and watching TV.

The results of this analysis demonstrated that the FLH students do indeed use the L2 more than classroom-only students and do so over a variety of tasks. In fact, students in the FLH use the L2 an average of 5 hours a day. Given that students

spend at least most of the day in non-L2 classes, this is significant and suggests that they use most of their free time speaking the L2.

### Question 2

The second question of this study was whether these differences in language use between the FLH and classroom-only students translate into greater language gains in oral proficiency (as measured by the ACTFL OPI) and confidence in the language (as measured by the confidence survey). To measure this, a repeated-measures ANOVA was performed on the pretest and posttest OPI scores (i.e., language gains) with residence in the FLH

and L2 as independent measures. The results of this analysis revealed a significant effect of group (FLH vs. classroom-only;  $F[1, 43] = 4.69$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .112$ ), a significant effect of L2,  $F(3, 43) = 4.97$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .287$ , and an L2 by group interaction,  $F(3, 1) = 7.439$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .386$ . Further analyses revealed that the students in the FLH for German, Japanese, and French made greater gains on the OPI than did the classroom-only students. For the Russian learners, the gains for the FLH and classroom-only students were statistically the same.

In addition, the researchers also examined whether the FLH and classroom-only students differed in how confident they felt speaking and using the L2. We ran a two-way ANOVA (group [FLH vs. classroom-only] by L2 [German, French, Japanese, Russian]), with the dependent variable being the overall average of confidence for each of the tasks on the confidence survey. The results of this analysis revealed a significant effect of group,  $F(1, 42) = 3.706$ ;  $p < .05$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .030$ ; L2,  $F(3, 42) = 7.927$ ;  $p < .0001$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .168$ , but no L2 by group interaction,  $F(3, 1) = 1.193$ ;  $p > .05$ ;  $\eta_p^2 = .029$ . These results suggest that all FLH students, regardless of the L2 studied, felt more confident performing tasks in the L2 than did the classroom-only students. It is important to note that this comparison does not measure the differences in changes in confidence between the two groups. Rather, it simply indicates that the FLH students reported greater linguistic confidence at the end of the year than classroom-only students. Moreover, it is impossible to determine whether the increased confidence of the FLH students resulted from their FLH experience or whether their increased confidence contributed to their decision to live in the FLH.

### Question 3

The third question of this study was whether time spent using the L2 on specific tasks may influence language gains in the FLH and classroom-only settings. To answer this question, we ran a linear stepwise multiple regression analysis, with the dependent variable being gain scores on the OPI. The predictor variables were as follows: the amount of time (measured in minutes) each task on the language log was performed in the L2, residence in the FLH, amount of L2 experience, L2 studied, total number of minutes speaking the L2 each week, and estimated use of language tasks from the language use survey. A visual scan indicated that the data would not violate the assumption of normal distribution and that a regression

TABLE 4  
Results of Linear Stepwise Multiple Regression  
Analysis Examining What Factors Predict L2 Gains

Factor	$r^2$	F-Statistic	p-Value
Going to Church in L2	.42	8.71	.01
Explaining a Concept in Detail	.18	8.36	.005
Overall Confidence in Performing Language Tasks	.14	11.65	.001
Eating Lunch in L2	.09	14.80	.0001
Total	.86		

Note. L2 = second language.

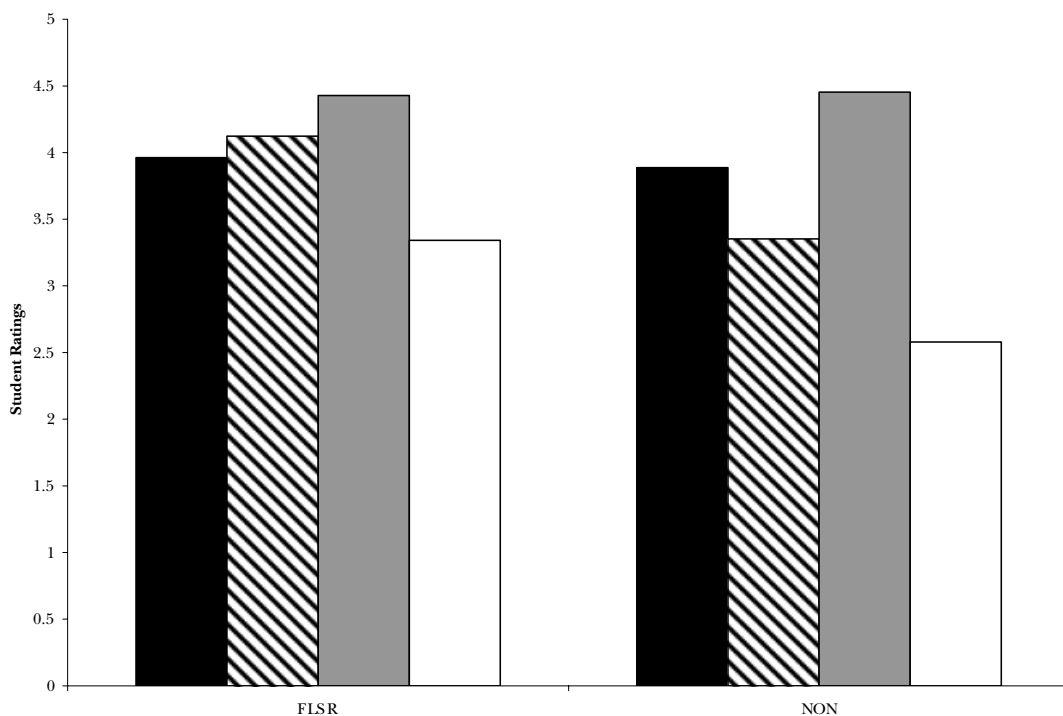
analysis would be appropriate. The results of this analysis indicated that the following factors were related to gains on the OPI: attending Sunday school, two tasks on the ACTFL guidelines language use survey, and eating lunch in the L2. These three predictor variables accounted for an impressive 85% of the variance (see Table 4). Of the tasks on the ACTFL guidelines survey, the two that predicted variance included actively participating in formal conversations and explaining a concept in detail. Of note here is that factors such as L2 learned, total time on task, and amount of L2 experience did not predict whether a learner achieved language gains.

### Question 4

The final question of this study was whether the L2 participants were learning related to whether the FLH was an effective environment for language learning. The earlier analyses provide the answer to this question, but a summary of these results will help to produce a better picture of whether the FLH is effective for L2 learning.

The results of the earlier analyses suggest that the FLH was effective for the students in the French, German, and Japanese houses. They indicated that these students were more likely than the classroom-only students to use the L2 and were also more likely to achieve language gains from pretest to posttest on the OPI. Results suggested, by contrast, that the FLH and classroom-only students of Russian did not differ in their use of the L2 and in language gains, although they did differ in their confidence in using the L2. It should be noted, however, that both the classroom-only and FLH Russian students were ranked as at least advanced speakers on the pretest OPI and that the FLH Russian students did speak only Russian while in the FLH—they simply did not, as

FIGURE 3  
Average Score on Confidence Survey



*Note.* Scores ranged from 1 (very uncomfortable in the language) to 5 (very comfortable) performing these tasks for the French (black bar), German (cross-hatched bar), Russian (gray bar), and Japanese (white bar) foreign language housing (FLSR) and classroom-only students (CO).

noted earlier, speak to each other often. The implications of this difference will be discussed in more detail later.

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether students living in FLH improve their speaking skills in the L2 more than students who have only traditional classroom exposure (classroom-only students) at the same institution. In particular, the current study examined whether these students do in fact use the L2 more and whether this increase in use translates into overall oral proficiency gains. In addition, the current study examined whether the potential benefits of living in FLH are similar for students studying different kinds of L2s and at different levels of proficiency.

Overall it was found that the FLH students used the L2 more and made greater oral proficiency

gains than did the classroom-only students. In addition, the results of this study generally indicated that living in FLH related to greater improvements in the language abilities of students regardless of their proficiency in the L2 or the L2 they studied. A more detailed discussion and the implications of these findings are provided as follows.

### *FLH and L2 Language Use*

The first finding of this study was that the FLH students used the L2 more than classroom-only students and used it in a wider variety of tasks. Of particular note was the fact that they used the L2 not only in social situations and situations where it was required (eating meals, preparing meals, etc.) but also in personal time when it was not required (reading email, surfing the Internet, listening to music, etc.). Such findings suggest that the FLH provided an environment in which the

students were able to explore and feel comfortable using the L2 in a variety of situations. Moreover, it demonstrates that the students can in fact simulate an immersion experience with each other. More research regarding how they used the L2 in these situations is needed. For example, it would be important to know what kinds of topics they discussed while eating dinner together and if their conversations improved over the course of their time in the FLH.

Although this study provides an important starting point for understanding language use in FLH and how it relates to language gains, an important next step would be to compare FLH students' use of the L2 with not just classroom-only students but also students in study-abroad programs—comparing not just the amount of L2 use but also the type and quality of that use. A cursory comparison in the amount of L2 use between the FLH students in this study and Mendelson's (2004) study-abroad students (one of the few studies in which exact hours of L2 use are reported) suggests that FLH students used the language for a comparable amount of time (around 5 hours a day).

Although nearly all the students in the FLH did in fact speak the L2 significantly more than did the classroom-only students (5 hours a day compared to 1.5 hours a day), this was not the case for the Russian FLH students. Several factors may have caused this difference. First, the students in the FLH were already at an advanced level on the OPI at the pretest and may have thought that practicing the L2 was unnecessary—they may have lived in the FLH more because they enjoy speaking Russian or about Russian culture than out of a desire to improve their language skills. In addition, as noted previously, there were very few students living in the Russian house, and from personal interviews, it was discovered that the Russian FLH students did not get along well. These factors may explain why they used the L2 so little throughout their time in the FLH. Moreover, two of the Russian classroom-only students taught Russian and used it in their work experience—and therefore had perhaps more opportunities to speak Russian than did other classroom-only students and perhaps the FLH students. These findings, however, underscore the importance of providing an inviting and productive environment for language learning in the FLH. The researchers are currently investigating what social factors lead to students using the L2 in a variety of tasks at the FLH. Such results will help in improving this learning setting.

### *FLH and L2 Language Gains*

The FLH students not only used the L2 more but also did in fact make greater gains from pretest to posttest on a general oral proficiency exam (i.e., OPI) than did the classroom-only students. Such findings suggest that the FLH students' greater use of the L2 may have led to more language improvement than the classroom-only students experienced. These findings are of interest because they suggest that students in the FLH are making language gains in several areas, as the OPI measures such features as overall proficiency, grammatical and vocabulary accuracy, and the ability to use the language in a variety of tasks. These findings are heartening considering that earlier researchers have suggested that it is important for students to have some immersion experience in order to achieve adequate proficiency levels (Rifkin, 2005).

Further studies are needed to determine whether FLH students can make progress in areas where NS input is especially necessary, such as pronunciation and pragmatics: Is interacting mainly with just one NS enough to provide students with the opportunity to learn these features of the language? Such findings may show important differences (or surprising similarities) between study-abroad and FLH programs.

Although many students in the FLH did experience language gains, as with study-abroad programs (Magnan & Back, 2007) some students in the FLH did make language gains and some did not. What this suggests is that merely living in the FLH, much like studying abroad, does not guarantee language gains (i.e., Mendelson, 2004). Understanding better what makes some students in the FLH improve and others not is another important area of research.

### *FLH Language Gains and Specific Language Tasks*

The third goal of this study was to determine whether specific language tasks predicted whether students made L2 language gains. The results of this analysis suggested four predictor variables: attending Sunday school, explaining a concept in detail, actively participating in formal conversations, and eating lunch—all performed in the L2.

Interestingly, all of these tasks, except perhaps eating lunch, have similarities: All require using a high level of grammatical complexity and a complete grasp of at least one area of vocabulary. In Sunday school, for example, students

discuss abstract concepts and must use a specialized vocabulary. In other words, these tasks may suggest that the learners are interacting at a high level of language—not merely using routinized or memorized chunks of language.

These findings are also enlightening because the overall time on task did not predict language gains, indicating that merely being exposed to the language or using the language did not help students improve in language use. The findings further suggest that the FLH is an area in which students are able to use language at intermediate, advanced, and superior levels, as shown by their scores on the ACTFL guidelines language use survey, which specifically asked them whether and how often they used language in tasks at each of these levels. This may actually be an area in which FLH and study abroad differ—it may be difficult, especially for shy students, to find NSs willing and patient enough to interact with study-abroad students on advanced topics that are difficult for them to maneuver. By contrast, in the FLH, students have access to NSs and NNSs at a variety of levels of proficiency that are (more or less) required to interact with them in a variety of settings. Moreover, the FLH used in this study may differ in important ways from FLH in other institutions. For example, residents in this FLH live in apartments exclusively with other NSs or learners of the target language. Additionally, in the FLH examined in this study, an NS of the L2 is employed to live and interact with the learners in an apartment setting. Alternatively, at other institutions, FLH may take the shape of large dormitories in which residents have no access to NSs and students are not separated according to the target language. More research on how and why this type of language use and learning environment may help improve language gains is important for students not only in FLH but also in any language learning setting.

#### *FLH and Type of Student*

The final finding of this study was that neither the L2 studied nor the proficiency of the student played a role in whether language gains were achieved. Unlike study-abroad programs for which it is difficult to compare programs to each other (because they take place in different countries and often have different goals), in this study researchers were able to compare students of different L2s within the same setting. The findings of this study suggested that both students of different L2s and of different proficiency levels were able to make language gains in the L2. This find-

ing differs from much of the research on study-abroad programs for which often more proficient students (and perhaps those who can best benefit from NS input) make the greatest gains (i.e., Magnan & Back, 2007).

Such a finding is important because it may indicate a potential advantage of FLH over study-abroad and other immersion programs—perhaps students in these programs, because they interact with each other daily and often with students who are at the same or only a slightly more advanced level, are able to provide input to each other at a level from which they can benefit (Varonis & Gass, 1985). This fits well with the concept of the “Zone of Proximal Development” (Vygotsky, 1976), mentioned earlier and often discussed in the literature on sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000). Moreover, because an NS lives in the FLH with the students and is required not only to provide NS input but also to serve as a resource for language help, even advanced students are able to make language gains. Certainly more research is needed to understand how students in FLH provide and receive input and feedback from their peers, what kinds of error correction and help they give to each other, and what type of comprehensible input is given. FLH may provide both the benefits of interacting with an NS (Suni, 2007) and with NNSs (Varonis & Gass, 1985) and demonstrates that conversing with NNSs provides adequate input and interaction to help students of different types of L2s and proficiency levels to improve their language skills.

Although these results suggest that any kind of student can benefit from living in FLH, it is important to understand what kind of student benefits most from programs such as FLH. Rifkin (2005), for example, suggested that students who are well prepared domestically may benefit the most from study-abroad programs. The results of this finding seem to suggest that students of any proficiency level may benefit from living in the FLH, even those with extensive immersion experience. Future research may indicate whether students who have lived in the FLH may have more productive experience with study abroad, especially because residence in FLH may allow them to improve language fluency before going on study abroad, where they may experience culture shock. This may give them an advantage over other study-abroad students.

It should also be noted that individual differences such as the learner’s personality, learning style, motivation, learning strategies, learner aptitude, among others, may have affected whether participants benefited from living in FLH.

Further research examining these factors is currently being conducted. Additionally, for at least one of the L2 groups (Russian), very few learners participated. Although the findings here are encouraging, more research comparing different L2s is needed where the number of participants across each group is more equally distributed and where there is a larger number of participants. Such future studies would help to verify the findings discussed in this study.

Additionally, this study did not examine other important factors, such as changes in cultural knowledge, which could be affected differently by classroom learning as opposed to residence in FLH or other learning environments.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that living in FLH can lead to improvements in language skills that are significantly greater than those experienced by students in classroom-only settings. Additionally, students in the FLH appeared to have more confidence in using the target language. Findings of this study suggest that the significant improvements in language skills demonstrated by students in the FLH stemmed from participation in certain out-of-class activities requiring specialized vocabulary and a range of linguistic tasks. In addition, the results of this study indicate that FLH programs may also have some advantages over classroom learning: All types of students, regardless of target language and proficiency level, seem to benefit from living in FLH and appreciate the opportunity to use the target language in several different settings with both NSs and NNSs. As Rifkin (2005) argued, students need more than classroom exposure to achieve a high level of proficiency in the L2. The results of this study seem to indicate that living in FLH may be an important means of achieving these goals.

Further study of this learning setting may determine how the unique qualities of FLH help students to improve their language skills. Additionally, given the rising costs of study abroad, more studies could look at the differences and similarities between FLH and study abroad to see how FLH could act as an adjunct, or perhaps even an alternative, to studying abroad.

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**APPENDIX**
**ACTFL Guidelines Language Use Survey and Confidence Survey**


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**ACTFL Guidelines Language Use Survey**

Please rate yourself on how often you perform the following tasks IN THE LANGUAGE YOU ARE LEARNING.

never 1	hardly ever 2	sometimes 3	often 4	very often 5
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**How often do you:**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. initiate conversations  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. actively participate in formal conversations  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. actively participate in informal conversations  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. apologize   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. codeswitch (switch between English and the language you are learning)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. complain about a situation  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. discuss your daily activities   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. discuss your personal information, including yourself, home, daily activities, interests, and personal preferences  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. elaborate on your ideas   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. employ conversational strategies like rephrasing   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. explain something in detail  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. use generic vocabulary   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. have predictable conversations   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. hypothesize  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. narrate (talk at the paragraph level vs. sentence-level interactions) e.g., tell stories instead of asking/answering simple questions  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. participate in formal conversations on professional, and abstract topics   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. participate in informal conversations on practical matters   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. respond to direct questions  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. self-correct   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. debate topics and support your opinions  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. talk about yourself or your family   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. translate literally from English to the language you are learning  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. use cohesive devices (conjunctions to connect your language)   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. use communicative strategies, such as pause fillers, stalling devices, and different rates of speech until you can think of what to say  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. use false cognates (words that have similar forms but different meanings in two languages) Usually, you use a word in English that sounds like what you want to say, but it is the wrong word. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
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