

English Language Learner (ELL) Profile and Assessment
 © Richard McDorman 2012

Part I: Learner Profile

Component	Facilitation
Learner's Background	
Learner's name	Redacted to protect the privacy of the learner. She will be referred to as <i>Learner</i> throughout this profile and assessment.
Gender and age	Female, mid to late-fifties (estimated; out of politeness, I did not ask the learner how old she is.)
Family situation	Married with one adult child
Educational level	Learner is well-educated, holding a bachelor's degree in education and a graduate certificate in educational administration from two universities in Brazil. She has also participated in extensive continuing education and professional development activities related to teaching Portuguese.
Observed L1 proficiency level	ILR level 5 (educated native speaker) with superior L1 verbal skills.
Type of bilingualism	Additive. The learner's first consistent exposure to English took place after the end of the critical period and she has remained dominant in her native language throughout her life.
Country of origin	Brazil
Countries of citizenship	Brazil and Switzerland
Current place of residence	Coral Gables, Florida (Coral Gables is a wealthy municipality located in Miami-Dade County, Florida.)
Profession	Educational administrator and Portuguese instructor
Previous L2 experience	Learner began learning English while in high school and took a few English classes in college, but she acquired the language mainly naturalistically after moving to the United States. She is also proficient in French, which she acquired while living in Switzerland for many years.
Cognitive Psychological Factors	
Learning styles	Sensory/perceptual: primarily visual Cognitive: global, field-dependent, holistic, focused on meaning
Learning strategies	The learner prefers to rely on the written word as an adjunct to aural learning. During most of our tutoring sessions, she asked to "see" how words are spelled when learning them for the first time.
Social-Emotional Psychological Factors	
Personality traits	Extroverted, impulsive, imaginative, creative, empathetic, closure-oriented
Self-esteem	The learner appears to have high self-esteem and a well-developed sense of personal and cultural identity, which are strongly tied to her Brazilian

	heritage and status as a native Portuguese speaker.
Motivation	The learner appears to be intrinsically highly motivated to succeed in her profession but much less so to improve her English proficiency. She has reported that she is generally comfortable with her current proficiency level in English but that she would like to improve her vocabulary and use more complex grammatical structures. I believe the fact that she does not closely identify with Anglo-American culture influences her motivation to continue learning English.
Anxiety level	The learner appears to have a moderate to high level of anxiety. She suffers from a number of serious medical conditions and has incidentally reported stressful episodes in her personal life.
Attitudes toward English	Learner understands that English is somewhat necessary for professional success in the United States (less so in Miami than in most other cities in the United States). However, given the sociolinguistic situation in Miami, where more than 70% of the residents are native Spanish speakers, English is less important for personal success here and so the learner does not feel particularly compelled to further advance her English proficiency.
Level of oral interaction with peers in English/L1	Although Learner sometimes needs to use English to communicate with clients and colleagues at her workplace, the majority of her interactions take place in Portuguese, Spanish (which she “acquired” primarily through adaption of Portuguese, which is very closely related to Spanish) or Portuñol. The fact that she lives in a non-English language majority city is a determining factor in her level of oral interaction in English.
Sociocultural Factors	
Family background	Learner currently resides with her husband and has a close relationship with her adult child.
Family, community use of L1/L2	Learner uses English at home infrequently. She usually speaks with her daughter in Portuguese and with her husband in French. Due to the linguacultural milieu of Miami, opportunities for English use in the community are inconsistent.
Degree of assimilation	Learner demonstrates a low level of assimilation to Anglo-American culture. Her circle of close friends consists mainly of native Portuguese speakers from Brazil and she is very active in the vibrant and growing local Brazilian community. Her exposure to English-language mass media is incidental, as she prefers Portuguese-language music, television and movies, which are readily available in Miami. Learner does not intend to seek permanent residency in or citizenship of the United States of America.
Current English Proficiency Level (ILR Scale)	
Speaking	3 (Professional working proficiency)
Listening	3 (Professional working proficiency)
Reading	3 (Professional working proficiency)
Writing	2+ (Limited working proficiency plus)

Part II: Global Assessment

As an English language learner, Learner has proved to be an interesting and complex challenge for her instructor. Due to the length of time she has spoken English (more than twenty years), her interlanguage is stable and fossilized in most linguistic domains, especially phonology and morphology. A slight increase in her active vocabulary constituted the singular noticeable consistent improvement in her English proficiency by the end of the tutoring period. Learner has spent many years at a high-intermediate plateau of English proficiency and, in the opinion of her instructor, is unlikely to achieve further significant gains in proficiency unless her motivational characteristics or the linguacultural specifics of her environment change in some material respect. Learner is ambivalent about advancing her English language skills. Although she has reported a desire to improve her grammatical accuracy, incorporate more complex grammatical structures into her speech and increase her working vocabulary, she chooses not to take advantage of available opportunities for meaningful English language use in the community. Learner avoids using English in favor of Portuguese, Spanish or Portuguese when possible and has rightly concluded that her current level of English proficiency is sufficient to meet most personal and professional needs, especially in light of the fact that she lives and works in a non-English language majority city. Moreover, Learner's low level of assimilation to Anglo-American culture constitutes an additional affective barrier to furthering her acquisition of English. While certainly not dispositive factors, Learner's age (estimated by her instructor to be in the mid to late fifties) and well-developed cultural identity, which is intimately connected to her Brazilian heritage and status as a native Portuguese speaker, further add to the improbability of additional major breakthroughs in her English proficiency. Both Learner and her instructor are aware, and accept, that future gains in her English proficiency are likely to be incremental and modest.

Learner's personality traits and learning style have played significant roles in her development as an English language learner. Field-dependent and focused on meaning, Learner acquired English naturalistically upon her arrival to the United States many years ago and may have made rapid progress during her initial efforts at acquisition, as field-dependent beginning-level students often do. However, as a focus on form became required for improvement in proficiency, especially at the intermediate level, Learner may have experienced increasingly slower gains in proficiency. Consequently, her *fluency* substantially exceeds her *accuracy*; her focus on meaning has allowed her to succeed at becoming highly communicative in English, although her utterances are often fraught with grammatical and lexical errors that escape her detection but rarely obscure meaning. As a field-dependent learner, Learner may fail to notice certain grammatical features of English, particularly those that are most foreign to native Portuguese speakers (such as the syntax and semantics of modal auxiliary and phrasal verbs). It was for these reasons that promoting learner recognition of errors and encouraging the learner to self-correct were prominent elements of our tutoring sessions.

Learner's greatest strengths are her oral fluency and listening comprehension skills. Even though she sometimes gropes for the right word or uses a flawed structure or incorrect word form (frequently the result of L1 transfer, especially when *faux amis* are involved), she almost always succeeds in communicating her intended message and rarely misunderstands what she hears. She speaks with a noticeable foreign accent, but her pronunciation errors usually do not interfere with listener comprehension. In fact, she is quite comfortable with her accent, which is consistent with (and probably bolstered by) her strong Brazilian identity and low level of assimilation to Anglo-American culture. Consequently, during our tutoring sessions I only corrected pronunciation errors that seriously impeded listener comprehension. Finally, our tutoring sessions revealed

writing to be Learner's weakest language skill in English. Given the importance of written communication at Learner's workplace and in her chosen profession, I will recommend that she focus on improving her writing skills during her future English language studies.