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CASE STUDY: SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

Abstract: Second language acquisition for learners with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and other forms of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a vastly under-researched field, yet language facilitators have these students in their classrooms every day. Nevertheless, educators do not have the correct training and information to help learners achieve their language goals. This case study provides insight into how to create more inclusive classrooms for students with high functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome. It provides research on second language acquisition with learners on the autism spectrum and reveals the importance of inclusivity in language learning classrooms. The case study follows a University undergraduate student in his English for Specific Purposes courses for two-years at the University of Costa Rica. The case study provides insights and recommendations for language teachers to help ASD students acquire a second language.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, education, Asperger syndrome.

Imagine yourself in the following situation: You have just asked the class to work in small groups and one student sits alone in the classroom with his book open, actively working on the task but none of his classmates ask him to participate. On other occasions the student has worked with a group but dominated the conversation and had trouble moderating his tone of voice and understanding the other students' point of view; the other students in the group did not know how to respond to his behavior, so they simply avoided him the rest of the semester. Does this situation sound familiar? For many of us, if we have had students on the autism spectrum, it does. "Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is one of the most common childhood neurological disorders (Autism Society Canada, 2010), which is characterised by problems in communication (i.e., delay or lack of language development), social development (i.e., lack of development of peer relationships, impaired non-verbal behaviour), ritualistic behaviour and resistance to change (American Psychiatric Association, 2012)" (Lindsay et al, 2013). This condition continues into adulthood and, thus, we have these students from pre-school to university classrooms. Nevertheless, as familiar as it is, we often do not know how to mediate the situation or to help the student feel included while keeping a positive classroom atmosphere or how to best help them in the acquisition of a foreign or second language. However, as educators, we know that: "The provision of inclusive and accepting social climates within schools is necessary to help children reach their full potential and for them to feel important, welcome, and appreciated" (Lindsay et al, 2013). Thus, we ask ourselves: What do we do as educators to make sure everyone is included in our classrooms? How can we ensure each

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student feels comfortable? How do we balance that with the needs of others in the group? How do we motivate and work with students on the autism spectrum without disrupting our classroom methodologies? As Lindsay et al explains, "With more students with ASD in mainstream classrooms, educators are expected to create an inclusive educational environment, often with few or no guidelines on how to do so" (2013). This leaves us with many questions and good intentions but very few strategies or resources to help us achieve our goal.

The situation described above has happened in my English classrooms at the University of Costa Rica on various occasions and circumstances. In some courses, I have received guidelines and recommendations from the university's special education department during the first week of the course, but they usually include adaptations such as: student requires extra time on oral presentations or student needs to present privately. They also hold meetings but there are many professors and the information is still fairly general, although we have more opportunity to hear from the student him/herself and ask questions. Even then, there is little contexualition or insight on how to truly help the student other than adaptations during evaluations. For instance, in a forth year oral course, it will not give me information on how to evaluate a student's rhythm and intonation or help them gain these skills while teaching pronunciation; likewise, it will not tell me how to help this student communicate with other students in group projects when group projects are the main focus of the methodology of the course. They simply do not have this information and there is little research in he field. On other occasions, I have received no adaptations for such students; I have simply had a teacher's "hunch" from experience that a student may have Asperger Syndrome or ASD that has gone undiagnosed or was not reported to me. It was not until I started researching that I truly became aware of the subtleties of the fairly common condition and, thus, became more sensitive on how to better work with these students. Inclusion of students with ASD "is a challenge because the professors are not trained. One study in the UK for example said that most teachers have one student with autism in their class but only 5% received training. This leaves teachers discouraged and unable to help autistic kids reach their full potential" (Lindsay et al, 2013).

Unfortunately, with the case I described above, I was a new professor and I did not recognize the signs or have any training. I just let the student isolate himself to not make the others feel uncomfortable. Rather than employing strategies that would be enriching for the group as a whole, I let a student work alone and a class lose an opportunity for a lesson in inclusivity and the benefit of working with someone with a different way of perceiving the world. I have had the same student in two more courses since the initial unsuccessful course. Later I realized: "This student is not 'weird' or 'aggressive.' He just socializes and communicates differently;" later the student disclosed to me that he has been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome but did not go through the university to receive adaptations. From this realization onward, he and I developed a much better learning/teaching relationship and that experience inspired this research project. If there is a lack of resources out there for teachers, then we have the responsibility to start to producing them. Thus, this case study examines this one particular student's progress over two years of observation in a English as a Foreign language environment at the University of Costa Rica. Likewise, it examines current research on 1st and 2nd language acquisition for learners with high-functioning ASD, particularly Asperger syndrome, in conjunction with anecdotal evidence. Since people who have Asperger Syndrome generally do not have trouble with language acquisition in their first language, there is practically no information about second language acquisition, yet in my experience, there are variations in their acquisition with needs that go beyond simple accommodations on assessments. In lan-

guage classrooms that focus deeply on oral communication and the communicative approach, professors who have students who communicate differently need tools so that they can facilitate their learning better. Hence, this project relies on general studies about Asperger Syndrome in education, interviews, case studies and online discussion forums along with the case study conducted in order to compile some general characteristics and recommendations for educators.

Literature Review

In the past, very little research was done on helping students with ASD learn a second language. In fact, these students, who often have trouble in the acquisition in their first language, were simply told not to learn a second language, that they could not, and the process would confuse them in the acquisition of the first language. As Griswold (2016) explains:

> Pediatricians, educators and speech therapists have long advised multilingual families to speak one language — the predominant one where they live — to children with autism or other developmental delays. The reasoning is simple: These children often struggle to learn language, so they're better off focusing on a single one (p. 3).

Yet, she believes this perspective is potentially damaging to multicultural children with ASD. For instance, when the family's native language is not used with a child, aspects of communication get lost in translation particularly when the family member does not have an excellent command of the predominant language of the culture. Furthermore, it can increase alienation and isolation and deprives them of the strong family ties and cultural identity that is transmitted through language. Griswold uses the example of a multi-generational Chinese family with a young boy with ASD. The entire family would speak in Mandarin at home, but then turn to the boy and speak in English, in which some members of the family knew just words or phrases. Griswold suggests that it would be much more productive to include the boy in this rich cultural familial environment and that children with ASD are quite capable of navigating a bilingual environment:

> Bilingual children with autism have language skills on par with monolingual children with the condition, and they acquire social and cognitive skills at the same rate. But these children are twice as likely as monolingual children with autism to use gestures such as pointing when they communicate, according to a 2012 study. This finding suggests that they have a strong command of joint attention and are adept at nonverbal communication (p. 5).

Thus, Griswold proposes that learners with ASD can learn two languages as well as they can learn one and actually thrive in multilingual environments.

While Griswold did find some evidence to affirm her proposition, she stresses there is little research to prove that bilingualism may be useful to learners with ASD and to clear up misconceptions of the past; these studies are still in their infancy. Most of the studies that exist focus on first language acquisition and generally learners with higher levels on the spectrum. Virtually no research exists on learners with Asperger syndrome (AS), a condition on the autism spectrum characterized by higher rates of academic achievement and normal language development. However, even though language development in usually not delayed, communication with people with AS has certain characteristics:

a lack of empathy, repetitions, poor non-verbal communication, intense interest in certain subjects, abnormal gestures, avoiding eye contact, unconventional language use and acquisition, verbosity, missing subtle nuances, formal, pedantic speech and use of tone not appropriate to the situation (Velisek-Brasko, 2014 p. 63)

Velisek-Brasko explains that AS is can be difficult to identify and, therefore, diagnose, so sometimes we may have these students in our classrooms and not know it. "For example, Mandell, Novak, and Zubritsky (2005) surveyed different factors associated with age of ASD diagnosis and found that those with high-functioning ASD are diagnosed significantly later than individuals diagnosed with Autistic Disorder, and that a severe language impairment is the strongest predictive factor of an earlier age of diagnosis" (Kwok et al, 2014, p. 218). Furthermore, it can affect people with various intelligence levels; they are not necessarily "geniuses" which which is a common myth. "Some people with Asperger's Syndrome have cognitive skills which are well developed and have an IQ which is in the normal or above average range, while others may have an intellectual disability as a concurrent condition with their Asperger's Syndrome" (Vize, 2010). The condition itself is named after the Austrian pediatrician, Hans Asperger, who published a paper about children with these characteristics during World War II. During this period of the Nazi's eugenic practices, "every deviation and hereditary disability would have been exterminated" (Velisek-Brasko, 2014 p 64). Nevertheless, Asperger defended children who he called "little professors" writing: "We are convinced, then, that autistic people have their place in the organism of the social community. They fulfill their role well, perhaps better than anyone else could, and we are talking of people who as children had the greatest difficulties and caused untold worries to their care-givers" (Asperger in Frith, 1991). This essay was written decades ago, but we are only now truly integrating these students into the fabric of society and acknowledging the role that they play.

During my research, I found one successful case study looking at multilingualism with AS in a regular elementary school in Serbia with an inclusive education program. Velisek-Brasko (2014) conducted a case study about an 8-year-old boy who had educational difficulties and behavioral problems and who now speaks Serbian, Hungarian, and has an interest in English. He has a very large large vocabulary in both his native language (Hungarian) and the language of the school he attends (Serbian). He receives classes according with an individualized approach in the school and has good interactions with his classmates and teachers due to the inclusive, individualized program. He is bilingual from a minority group:

> He is consciously using both languages. He has difficulties in language usage, word order, pronunciation and following the rules of grammar in his mother tongue as well. In pre-school, to the surprise of the family and his speech therapist, he adopted the language of the community on his own at a very fast pace. His vocabulary in both languages is very rich, predominantly in topics favored by him. Interestingly, he gladly uses language- specific expressions, idioms, and phrases in both languages (p. 68).

This shows that although he does have some language difficulties, learning another language had no negative affect on his mother tongue. Furthermore, when he was having trouble with concepts in math, he started learning to do math in English and was able to grasp the concepts that he had not been able to previously. She again critiques that there is no data about autism and bilingualism but we know cases are out there; her particular case study shows that ASD children can acquire a second language and this has "a positive impact on their social and cognitive development" (p. 73) She concludes that "the stimulating effect of bilingualism and

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multilingualism on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of the observed child" was impressive and warrants further research (p. 73).

To conclude this literature review, I would like to briefly discuss how other students perceptions of students with cognitive disabilities in the classroom affects atmosphere and the success of inclusive education. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, the student I observed for this case study was often isolated in the classroom and had difficulty making friends and interacting socially. I was unsure at first how to handle the situation. According to research, there are many factors that play a role in the success of inclusion of students with disabilities in schools. These can include: "attitudes of teachers (Norwich, 1994), class size (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) and type of disability (Stoiber, Gettinger, & Goetz, 1998)" (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012, p. 380). However, the attitudes of "typically developing students" also plays an important role:

> Stoneman (1993) states that negative attitudes may be just as obstructive as physical barriers, limiting those with disabilities from participating fully in schools and communities. Nowicki and Sandieson (2002) even suggest that the attitudes of regular students towards those with disabilities are one of the major problems in inclusive education (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2012, p. 380).

Thus, de Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2012) conducted a study to find out which factors produce a positive attitude and inclusion of students with disabilities by typically developing students. Their research revealed that in general girls have a more positive attitude than boys, students have the least positive reaction to students with behavioral disabilities, mental disabilities only slightly higher, and physical disabilities having the most positive attitudes. They found that the factor that had the most positive role on students attitudes was experience with and knowledge about students with disabilities. The researchers stressed the importance of including students with disabilities in social participation and that even though the overall attitude of students towards inclusivity in the classroom was neutral, that even a few negative kids can make life difficult for the student. Thus, as the educators ourselves, we can help other students include students with disabilities such as AS in the classroom environment by first adjusting our attitudes and then implementing strategies in order to help them achieve academically and socially integrate with their peers.

Methodology

The student, who we call Pablo in the case study, is a 3rd year microbiology student at the University of Costa Rica (UCR) and is enrolled in *Ingles por Areas (ESP)* also at the UCR. The program is a scholarship program at public universities in Costa Rica designed to help create more bilingual professionals. The courses are specialized in the area of the students' major and in this case, the area of Health Sciences. Pablo began the program from the first course as a true beginner, but the case study begins when the student began Intermediate 1, four levels after the first course. The student is observed in three courses total: intermediate 1, an optional course called Academic Writing, and Upper-Intermediate 2: thus, a total of 2 years with a one semester break between. The student has since finished the program.

Main course (14 weeks)	Additional Course (14 weeks)	Student observed?	Professor aware that student has AS?
Intermediate 1	No	Yes	No
Intermediate 2	Academic Writing	Yes, in the optional course, but not in the regular course of the program.	Half-way through the semester
Upper-Intermediate 1	No	No	N/A
Upper-Intermediate 2	No	Yes	Yes

Thus, this project is a longitudinal case study which includes the application of an Oral Proficiency Exam, a survey after the student completed the program, and class observations and interactions while I was the student's professor. Furthermore, I rely on some online discussion forums and other forms of anecdotal evidence of other English students with Aspergers to confirm if Pablo's experiences and perceptions seem to be typical of English language learners with Aspergers syndrome.

Biographical information. Pablo has above average intelligence with very high test scores allowing him to enter into the highly competitive field of microbiology. He is on a full economic needs scholarship and lives with his mother, father, and three brothers over an hour away from the University. He received a late diagnosis of Aspergers Syndrome at 15; it was overlooked in crowded public school classrooms since Pablo has always received good marks. He was bullied a lot in school, but he said that it did not bother him very much and that sometimes he was not even aware that it was happening, but mentioned that it worried his mother. During high school, he was referred to the school psychologist who confirmed the diagnosis. His diagnosis happened after he had had a negative experience with a group project that resulting in a failing grade for all participants even though Pablo had done his part of the project well. After the diagnosis, he was able to complete much of his studies with minor adaptations and received some counseling; he no longer had to work in groups and his teachers adapted his assignments allowing him extra time when needed and sometimes giving him other projects entirely. He decided that he had developed enough strategies that he did not seek accommodations at the university. He expressed not wanting to be stigmatized, so he rarely mentioned that he had AS, instead trying to "pass" as typically developing. He said that this was fairly easy in microbiology because most of the courses are based on individual exams with some research assignments in groups, but they usually just divided the work and were all accountable for their part because they all cared a lot about their education and grades, quite different form the public high school setting he was in before. The hardest thing about microbiology was the competition between students which caused him some stress, but this competition made even group work more individualized which he liked. However, he mentioned that the social factor is more difficult in his English classes as he had to communicate and work in groups a lot. He commented that he loved the courses and was grateful for the opportunity, but in some courses he felt isolated.

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Analysis of Class Observations

Intermediate 1

During this course, the student began interacting with the rest of the group, but would often dominate the conversation. I noticed Pablo did not realize when the others were not interested in his topics of conversation and that he had a flat tone that lacked appropriate intonation. I often wrote "work on intonation" in the pronunciation section of oral quizzes. Pablo did fairly well on grammar quizzes and average on listening. If the listenings were slower or made for language learners, he would do well, but he was less skilled at inferring when I played authentic materials. At some point, he basically stopped working in groups; sometimes, I would let him work individually and other times, I would ask him to work with a specific group. When I placed him in a group, he would participate, but the problems with other students persisted. He was absent one week due to illness and I heard the students gossiping about him. While I was not aware of Pablo's condition, I did ask the students not to speak poorly about other students in the class and told them we should work on inclusion of students who may be a little different. I noticed the group work seemed to improve when he returned. Pablo regularly attended office hours. I reminded him at one point that office hours were for questions and consultations about the course, not just for conversation. He understood and still attended but less often and always with doubts about the material.

Academic Writing:

In this course, I discovered that Pablo has AS. This course can be a challenge for students because they need to learn a lot of material and add content, organizational patterns, syntax and punctuation, thesis and topic sentences while using their previous grammar and vocabulary skills. Thus, the course is also a little more individualized with less group work with the exception of peer editing. There is a certain amount of lecturing, which Pablo struggled with in English particularly when I spoke fast or gave a lot of information at once. I noticed he was becoming uncomfortable and his essays were not following the organizational pattern I had explained. One day he seemed agitated and he asked: "What do you want me to do?" At first I felt like he was being aggressive and almost reacted as such, but I took a deep breath and explained the material again. He seemed much more relaxed and I realized the tone of voice I perceived and the directness of the question were not meant to be rude. He literally did not understand how to correct his essay and was simply asking for guidance. That was when I realized he seemed to show symptoms of AS, which he later confirmed. In my office, he explained that it was difficult for him to receive a lot of instructions at once which he called "over-explaining" and "too much information." This usually helps typically developing students, but it confuses him more. He needs the information to be clear and direct. After this realization, I met with him more often and he was finally able to understand the structure of an essay and how to write thesis statements. I tried to be more concise in lectures and make checklists. I would explain more or repeat information to the other students if they needed in feedback sessions, but I tried to be more direct in class and slow down my speech. This change in strategy also helped him to work with peer revisions (which he had trouble with during the first essays) because he understood exactly what he needed to do and check for.

Upper-intermediate 2:

In general, Pablo had acquired a similar level of English as the rest in this course. However, because I knew of his condition, I was able to help him compensate for the aspects of the language that he was not understanding naturally. This course was dramatically different from the first class I had him in. He improved his socialization and relationship with the other stu-

dents and even started making jokes. The three main areas we worked on were: concision, intonation and inference. We worked on intonation in private sessions by practicing with rhythm and expressing tone and explaining that English was more musical and less flat than Spanish. We also worked on being more succinct (which details to include when speaking and which to omit) so that he could make his point faster; I explained that the English culture is more direct. Finally, he expressed that he felt uncomfortable when he did not understand 100% of the language; he is very analytical. These was leading him to stop listening altogether because he felt overwhelmed. By having him to switch the focus from what he does not understand to what he does understand, he was able to overcome the sensation of "overload." Furthermore, I realized that Pablo would not be offended when I was direct, so if he started to "ramble," I could literally tell him "try to get to the point" with a smile. He would then make a joke; other students modeled these strategies and it improved the classroom atmosphere and we achieved inclusivity. I realized just a few changes in my teaching could dramatically alter how the class worked together and improve a student's skills in English along with their confidence.

OPI Interview

As part of the certification of the level of English, the students in the ESP program take an exam to verify their level of English in grammar, listening and speaking. One of sections of the exam is the Oral Proficiency Interview which I applied to Pablo (See Appendix A). The professors who apply this exam are certified through the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL). In appendix A, you can see the types off mistakes and the explanation of his level, but here I would like to analyze how AS affected his production and performance on the exam. Pablo received a rating of Advanced Low which is the target level for students leaving the program. This level means the students can communicate well with native speakers and work in their field in English. They have a strong level of proficiency but still make minor mistakes that generally do not get in the way of communication. They can narrate and describe in the past, present and future time frames and have a fairly extensive vocabulary level. Thus, his rating clearly shows the ability of someone with AS to become proficient in English as an adult learner starting from little knowledge of the language. Pablo's verbosity in this exam contributed to his success as he was able to demonstrate the full range of his language abilities with extended discourse. If Pablo progresses to a high advanced or Superior level, he may need some tools to help him hypothesize and express abstract ideas, but with adequate training, I have not doubt he could master these skills as well.

Survey Analysis

In this section of the case study, I asked Pablo to complete a survey online about his experiences (see Appendix B). The student in general was a little vague on the survey (which may be characteristic of AS if he was not interested in sharing his emotions and perceptions), but I was still able to extract some important information and confirm information observed. The main areas that Pablo mentioned as important in English classes were social interactions, clear instructions and fair evaluations. He indicated that he enjoyed group discussions but that these interactions were also challenging when people did not participate. He again affirmed that listening and grammar were a concern but vocabulary was easy. Basically, the survey confirmed a lot of what I saw in class observations and private work with the learner, but with a little less information. I found observation and student/teacher interaction much more revealing than self-disclosure with this particular student.

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Discussion

No learner with Asperger Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder will learn in the same way or have the same skills or limitations while learning a second language. For instance, Kwok et al. (2014) explain, "Our current findings suggests that such a disparity in language skills is not a common profile in ASD across developmental stages, cognitive abilities, vocabulary and global language skills, different sources of language data, or method of ASD diagnosis. As always, clinicians should consider the language profile of individuals with ASD on an individual basis." The same can be applied to a second language context even with learners with high-functioning autism such as Asperger Syndrome. Reading discussion forums about people with AS and experiences with SLA reveal just how broad the experiences can be and how differently each of them interpret their own skills, abilities and learning styles; moreover, the interest in the topic on the forums and the lack of research available was striking. People with AS have an interest in and are learning 2nd (and 3rd and 4th) languages but we do not know how they are doing so or what variations exist. However, and perhaps most importantly, this case study proves that students with AS are certainly capable of learning a 2nd language and have much better results when facilitators address and adapt to their specific learning needs. Furthermore, this case revealed that learning communication strategies in the 2nd language (such as inference and the ability to be succinct) improved Pablo's interactions with his peers and his overall sense of belonging and allowed him to acquire the desired level of English in the program. The importance of inclusive education and its feasibility is clear: "Evidence on inclusive education shows that successful implementation of inclusive principles can lead to increased student engagement in social interaction, higher levels of social support, social networks and advanced education goals compared with their counterparts in segregated settings" (Lindsay et al., 2013). We just have to implement it.

As facilitators, we may not even know we have a student with AS in our classrooms, but AS learners share certain characteristics that can help us develop strategies to help them an recognize them. They often struggle with "communication, social skills and interpersonal interactions, activities of daily living, social and emotional development, [and] imagination and abstract thinking" (Kunce & Mesiboy, 1998). This does not mean we should diagnose them, of course; we, without degrees in medicine and psychology, do not have that expertise, but we can adapt to individual differences in a way that can help students who seem to learn differently or have trouble socializing. For instance, Lindsay et al.(2013) claims, "Challenges in including children with ASD, as reported by the teachers interviewed, are as follows: understanding and managing behavior; socio-structural barriers (i.e., school policy, lack of training and resources); and creating an inclusive environment (i.e., lack of understanding from other teachers, students and parents)." Pablo's case illustrates that when we increase our awareness and understanding, educate ourselves on special needs, and simply speak to our students while being receptive to their own perceptions of their needs, we can make a big difference in our students lives. Likewise, we have the power to change others students perception of students with disabilities and help students with disabilities succeed in the areas where they need extra or different types of assistance. Thus, to end this essay, I would like offer some recommendations we can apply when we encounter a student who may have AS or ASD in classrooms:

• Assess whether learning a 2nd language is a priority and their motivation for learning
• Find out the student's learning style and adapt your class to include it
• Discover what makes learning difficult for the student and avoid it
• Give clear, concise instructions and information

- Reduce unnecessary noise, clutter, and distractions
- Give concrete, real life examples (abstractions can be hard to grasp)
- Be direct (any indirect message may be lost)
- Educate yourself on AS and ASD
- Have a clear understanding on inclusion and actively promote it
- Be a role-model for other students
- Have the student work with a group. Try to choose empathetic students. Encourage participation. Monitor and step in when necessary.
- Don't allow bullying (laughing at a student even if they are not present is bullying)
- Have individual meetings to check in and work on trouble areas
- Use role-plays (This helps the student step outside of themselves)
- Use authentic materials and demonstrate how language is actually used

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Appendix A

Tester: Monica Bradley	Interview length: 21:11						Rating: Advanced Low	
Estudiante: XXXXXXXXX Universidad: UCR	**Warm-up:** He demonstrates his ability to create with language and tells us about where he lives, his family, his studies and his hobbies. Tester decides to set the floor at intermediate, but he shows some evidence of being higher.							
Time codes	Topics of conversation	Questions	Functions	Level	Quality of performance at level			Evidence/comments
					Meets fully	Meets mini-mally	Does not meet	
1:20	Microbiol-ogy	What is microbiol-ogy about?	Create	I	X			He answers the question by creating with language and also uses extended discourse and shows some evidence of advanced level.
3:07	Microbiol-ogy	What kind of research would you like to do in microbiol-ogy in the future? FQ: Why Japan?	Future narration	A		X		He answers the question with a single paragraph and extended discourse. He has some pronunciation and grammar problems that occasionally interfere with understanding. He offers a story in the past and can move between major time frames.

5:05	Japan	How do you think Japanese culture would compare with Costa Rican Culture?	Description	A		X		He gives a long connected description and moves in major time frames, but he makes use of false cognates and has some grammar/pronunciation problems .i.e. Salad for salty, machist for sexist, women(s)/men(s)
7:05	Culture	Do you think it is important for university students to be exposed to different cultures? Why so?	Support opinion	S			X	He tries to answer the question but brings it back to a concrete matter and does not address the "culture" aspect of the question.
8:23	House	Can you describe your house for me?	Create	I	X			He gives a lot of information even giving extended description at the advanced level, although just barely.
9:51	University	Do you remember the first day you came to university here? Can you tell me about that day?	Past narration	A	X			He answers the question completely, stays in major time frame and uses various paragraphs with extended discourse, only occasionally confusing the verbs in the present/past ("I don't want to get lost")
11:47	University	Have you had any classes or professors that have been really interesting?	Past narration	A		X		He gives a long description of topics he thinks are interesting but he remains mostly in the present and does not narrate a story in the past, but he des demonstrate extended discourse.
13:39	University	Have you had a favorite professor in microbiology?	Past narration	A		X		He answers the question but shows some a breakdown of language (i.e "makes us participating" "he did very interesting" "Catch up the attention") and only sustains the minimal discourse for his level.
14:40	Video games	What kind of video games do you like to play?	Create	I	X			He tells about the video games He creates with language.

15:33	Video games	How did you become interested in these games?	Past narration	A		X		He answers the question with a single paragraph, but has some problems in controlling aspects of speech, sometimes confusing the story (i.e childs, couldn't see it, I get scared of it)
16:22	Role-play	Missed an exam, talk to the professor	Situation with a complication	A		X		He handles the situation well giving a long explanation but does show some hesitation and errors.
19:20	University	Have you ever missed an exam?	Past narration	A		X		He tells a long story but sometimes makes mistakes in controlling the past/present verb tenses but it does not interfere with the understanding of the story or the major time aspect.
	Wind down							

Rating Rationale: XXXX is able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times. He participates actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on topics such as family, work, free time, vacations, articles he has read and academic interests. He demonstrates the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present and future) in paragraph length discourse, sometimes lacking control of aspect and generally not more than one-paragraph. He can handle appropriately the linguistic challenges presented by a complication within the context of a routine situation (i.e. reschedule an exam). He employs communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution in such instances. In his narrations and descriptions, he combines and links sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length. The structure of his dominant language is still evident in the use of false cognates and literal translations. He contributes to the conversation with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey his intended message without misrepresentation or confusion, and it can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives. When he attempts to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the linguistic quantity of his speech deteriorates significantly and he reverts back to concrete subject (i.e. culture to microbiology).

Appendix B

What kind of learner are you?
Visual
What challenges have you faced in English classrooms?
When the instructions for a task or activity were not clear. Also when the exams have different items from the activities and practices done in class
What are your best skills in learning English? Grammar, vocabulary, Oral production, listening, reading, writing. Please explain.
Grammar is challenging, but I am good at vocabulary. I prefer writing with people in English

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than speaking because I sometimes have trouble understanding what they say although I have improved a lot.

What is the most challenging for you?
The social interaction in general. I also don't like that exams are standard for everyone.

What activities do you like most during you classes? Which do you find engaging and productive?
I like the practices in class, when all of the class participates. Also, when everyone reads stories and all we talk about this.

Biographical notes:

Monica Bradley is an English Professor in the Modern Languages Faculty at the University of Costa Rica. She has a M.Ed in English Education with a Specialty in Program Management and Evaluation from the University of Science and Technology (ULACIT), Costa Rica and a Master's of Arts in Women Studies from San Diego State University, United States. Her areas of studies include critical pedagogy, cultural studies, intercultural communication, feminist theory and literature, English as a Second Language and English for Specific Purposes.