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The Experience of Emerging Adults in an Entry-level College Hebrew Course

Sarit Moskowitz
Lesley University

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THE EXPERIENCE OF EMERGING ADULTS IN AN ENTRY-LEVEL COLLEGE HEBREW COURSE

A DISSERTATION

Submitted by

SARIT MOSKOWITZ

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Most colleges require students to take at least one foreign language course in order to graduate. Some students tend to put this requirement off to the end of their program due to language learning anxiety, and attrition rates in these courses are high. This study asks the following question: How do emerging adult students in an entry-level college Hebrew class describe their experience? Do factors such as awareness of peers and language-learning anxiety affect their self-reported learning experience? The findings are important to the field of language learning because there are no studies available that specifically evaluate the experience of emerging adults in an entry-level college Hebrew classroom. It is also significant because it adds to both the fields of language-learning anxiety and emerging adulthood. In this qualitative study, the following seven instruments were emailed to the participants: a demographic survey, initial interview, a published anxiety scale, two reflection questionnaires, a second application of the anxiety scale at the end of the semester, and a follow-up interview. This research revealed that language-learning anxiety actually increased during the semester despite the overall positive experience reported by the participants. This anxiety was experienced by both heritage (students with prior experience with the language) and non-heritage learners (students with no prior language experience), but it was not considered debilitative. Additionally, the presence of both heritage and non-heritage learners in the same classroom was considered a positive factor and students benefitted from working together in small groups. Lastly, the anxiety scale results did not correlate well with anxiety levels reported by the participants. The language-learning anxiety noted in this study may have been related to the emerging adulthood developmental stage of the participants. This study concludes it is possible that a measure of low-level anxiety is facilitative and is in fact important for the process of language learning to occur. Recommendations were
made for language programs, Hebrew teachers, and for future studies. The findings of this study will assist language educators to better understand the role of language learning anxiety in the learning process as well as provide new insight into the stage of emerging adulthood.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin this acknowledgment by mentioning my dear grandmother, D’vorah Beerfas, who often spoke to my mother about me when I was a child saying, “Let this one study, she can go far”. My grandmother was a Holocaust concentration camp survivor who immigrated to Israel after the war with my mother, her only family member that survived along with her. In the war, she lost her husband and oldest son, Hershel. This year, as I was occupied with the task of writing my dissertation, my mother shared with me for the first time that her deceased brother, Hershel, was killed by the Nazis while he was in medical school. The knowledge of this fact closed an emotional circle for me. My uncle, whom I never met, was not permitted to fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor, and I, who also had a life-long drive to study and fulfill my dream, became the doctor he wanted so much to become. I would like to take this opportunity to dedicate this work to my uncle, Hershel Beerfas. I also would like to dedicate my dissertation to my parents Esther and Moshe Signer, who encouraged me throughout my life to follow my dreams and to never give up. Their lifelong perseverance and dedication was a model for me to emulate.

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Sarit Moskowitz
May 17, 2014
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Research Question

This study examined the learning experience of seventeen college students in an entry-level Hebrew course through surveys and interviews administered at several points during the semester from the first day until the end of the course. It asks the following question: How do emerging adult students in an entry-level college Hebrew class describe their experience? Do factors such as awareness of peers and language-learning anxiety affect their self-reported learning experience?

How I Came to this Study

Over the past 33 years, I have taught Hebrew to students ranging from nursery school age through adults. I chose to teach Hebrew because I felt confident and knowledgeable about it. During the past seven years, I have taught all levels of Hebrew at the university level. Due to my own personal experience of having to acquire my higher education in a foreign language (English), I was able to relate better to students’ difficulties and I became keenly aware of those who experienced more anxiety than their peers. The informal observations that I made through my years of teaching in various levels of Hebrew instruction led me to think about the unique predicament of entry-level Hebrew students. I noticed a range of emotions displayed by my students taking elementary Hebrew, ranging from excitement to various degrees of anxiety. I realized that some of the emotional experiences of anxiety were unique to students at the beginner level. Although I observed the existence of various degrees of stress in other levels of Hebrew classes, I mostly observed an increase in confidence and a reduction of nervous behaviors, among students who progressed to the higher levels of Hebrew learning. Although
my students often exhibited signs of anxiety, they usually completed the course with passing grades. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) noted that there is a difference between mild facilitative anxiety and severe debilitating anxiety. They agreed with Brown (as cited by Oxford and Ehrman, 1995) that low-level facilitative anxiety could be motivational. Although in the past, I had observed stress and anxiety in all levels of Hebrew learning, I wanted to investigate the entry-level classroom to see what role anxiety might play in the students’ experience.

**Personal and Professional Positioning**

My connection to this topic stems from my personal as well as my professional background. I was born and raised in Israel to a mother and father who each immigrated to Israel from Poland in 1950 and Romania in 1946, respectively. Although my parents spoke both Yiddish and Hebrew to each other, they only spoke Hebrew to their children. Hebrew was my mother tongue; however, it was not the mother tongue of my parents and I always felt a slight lack of confidence on their part when it came to higher-level oral and written expression in Hebrew. I noticed that since they immigrated to Israel as teens, they were sometimes at a loss for words in their mother tongues as well as in Hebrew. Their lack of language proficiency affected their capabilities to fully express themselves both in writing and speech.

I also immigrated in my late teens and found myself living in America. Although my knowledge of Hebrew was very solid, I had to navigate and negotiate in English, which was a foreign language to me. It was a challenge for me to complete all of my undergraduate and graduate education in English, as it is not my first language. Although my English has improved with the years, I am still not as proficient in it as I am in Hebrew. Taking various courses for my undergraduate and graduate degrees in English was an interesting experience for me, as I was always acutely aware of the superior language ability of my peers in the classroom and my own
language deficits. Initially, this awareness caused me to shy away from courses that required writing papers during the undergraduate level. I experienced various nervous reactions in the classroom such as reluctance to participate, shakiness when I was called upon to answer a question, heart palpitations, and much anxiety prior to any oral presentation that was required in the classroom. I always believed I had to rely on others to proofread my work and I felt less independent and, to some degree, even incompetent. I operated with much anxiety in the classroom and was always worried that I would be called upon to answer questions in front of my peers. I was also worried when I was required to write something that would be seen by my teacher and peers without being able to run “spell check” or to have my work proofread.

Later, as an experienced teacher of children, teenagers, and college students, I noticed a striking contrast between the anxious reactions of emerging adult students in the entry-level Hebrew language classes and the generally less anxious attitudes of younger children. In fact, the younger children were usually very excited about learning and participated in any learning activity very willingly and often. Although college students seem to also be very excited about learning Hebrew, their excitement was often mixed with a sense of anxiety about learning the language. Typically, the entry-level college classroom presents the most challenging situation for the teacher as well as the students. These classes usually consist of emerging adult college students of various backgrounds and abilities in Hebrew (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2007). Students appear to be less anxious as their knowledge level increases and the composition of students becomes more homogenous and students’ abilities become more equalized.

Over the past seven years, as a college instructor in Hebrew, I have observed students manifesting various levels of discomfort in the entry-level class, in the form of several types of nervous behaviors. Similarly, Cohen and Norst (1989) describe the physical nervous responses to
foreign language-learning anxiety to include “blushing, trembling hands, pounding heart, headache” (p. 61). Ely (1986) explains that this discomfort is connected to and negatively affects risk-taking, classroom participation, and class sociability. Some students ultimately drop the course, while others persevere and succeed in completing it. In my experience, it seemed that most of the students in the college entry-level classroom experience anxiety to some degree. Throughout the years of my teaching, I tried to understand the reason for the varying degrees of students’ anxiety in the entry-level Hebrew classroom. I wondered if the discomfort students experienced in the beginner Hebrew course was due to the newness of a foreign language, the level of technical skill required, the requirement to perform in front of the teacher and peers regularly, the students’ developmental stage of emerging adulthood, or a combination of some or all of these factors. Another possible reason for college students’ language-learning anxiety could be related to the dynamics of the language classroom and the awareness of peers, as they compare their abilities to others.

**Significance of this Study**

This study is important because it makes a connection between the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and language-learning anxiety. Many aspects of the developmental stage of emerging adulthood have been explored previously. The same is true for language learning. However, the literature is very sparse about the impact of emerging adulthood on language learning. This study attempts to understand the total experience of emerging adults studying entry-level Hebrew in college. It also tries to understand the role of anxiety in language learning particularly among my elementary Hebrew learners, viewing this phenomenon from the perspective of their developmental stage. This study is unique because it focuses specifically on college students taking entry-level Hebrew. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive
examination of the participants’ experiences due to the collection of data throughout the entire semester.

**Theoretical Background**

Emerging adult students studying a new language present a unique challenge. In many colleges, students are required to successfully complete at least one semester of a foreign language course. Some students choose to study a language that they have studied previously in high school such as Spanish, German, or French; others choose to learn a language that is completely new to them and offered in college. This chosen language may differ greatly from English, since the selection of languages offered in college can be much broader than those offered in high school. Often a variety of non-western languages, such as Hindi, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew, are available to choose from in many college settings. Aida (1994) notes that these languages may be more difficult for native English speakers to learn because they are very different from the English language.

**Emerging adulthood.** The developmental stage of many college students may be an additional factor in the discomfort they may feel in a college language class. Most students who attend colleges are in the age group of late teens to mid-twenties and are termed by Arnett (2008) as “emerging adults” (p. 4). In his research, he found that these students tended to exhibit characteristics common to this age group. One of the important observations that Arnett made was that emerging adults are still going through their identity formation phase. In the industrialized countries of the world, this identity formation phase does not end in adolescence but instead continues through the years of emerging adulthood, which he observed as the period between ages 18 and 25. Since emerging adults still rely upon external sources of approval and validation, the importance of their peer groups’ opinions increases as they transfer their source of
support and validation from their family to their peers (Baxter Magolda, & King, 2004). Students in the foreign language classroom are required to negotiate their way and demonstrate their communication abilities in front of their peers. This demonstration may create a difficult situation for them. Some students may have performance anxiety that could apply to any classroom. However, performing and communicating in a foreign language may intensify this state of anxiety, adding a new dimension of potential inadequacy and instability to the act of performing before peers. Emerging adult students may feel especially vulnerable in situations that pressure them to take risks in front of classmates, since they are concerned about the opinions of their peers during a stage in which their identities are still forming.

I wondered about the connection between the emerging adulthood stage of development and a heightened state of anxiety when learning a foreign language. Members of this age group in particular visualize personal identity through the eyes of their peers. Tanner and Arnett (2011) as well as Rovira (2008) note that peer relationships often exceed family relationships in importance during this developmental stage. Guiora, Brannon, and Dull (1972) stated that an integral part of our identities is how we sound to others and ourselves when we speak. Rovira (2008) adds that “culture, identity, and language may be inextricable from each other; all create identity, or, at least, important aspects of identity” (p. 68). A student in a foreign language class, therefore, takes on a type of new identity when speaking the new language in that class. Since, a language class demands that emerging adult students take risks and perform repeatedly in front of their peers, this requirement can intensify their performance anxiety every time the students are faced with an oral performance task in the classroom. MacIntyre, (in Robinson, 2002) notes that language learning is distinguished from other subjects studied in college because of the emphasis on culture and psychological identification with specific cultural groups, which
requires changes in the identity of the learner. According to Dornyei (2001), it also requires the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors, and even an alteration of the self-image of the learner, to develop a temporary identity to fit the language. The adoption of a new identity may be a scary prospect for emerging adults, who are not yet fully secure with their own identities to begin with. I found no information in the literature about the topic of emerging adults learning elementary Hebrew in college. It was my hope that my findings would contribute to a better understanding of the connections between emerging adults and language learning. I wanted to determine how the students were affected by the presence of peers having multi-level abilities and varied backgrounds.

**Language-learning anxiety.** From my experience, it seemed that most college students experience a wide range of emotions in the entry-level Hebrew classroom. In discussing emotionality, Brookfield (1990) explains that learning always involves a degree of emotions. He notes that for students, these emotional reactions to learning can vary from profound embarrassment at one’s inability to seem assured and confident, to deep anger and resentment. More optimistically, students may feel aroused and excited at the prospect of being able to break out of conventionally expected ways of thinking and behaving, and they are exhilarated when they can perform difficult tasks. Similar emotions to what Brookfield describes may be present in the entry-level Hebrew classroom. It is reasonable to expect that students experience different levels of these emotions in the Hebrew classroom. Brookfield sums up the process of learning as not entirely joyful but rather often distressing and disturbing. He argues that learning and teaching are both passionate emotional activities and that keeping the classroom free of emotions is to deny much of the learning process from occurring.
Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) discuss language-learning anxiety as a specific type of emotion that is related only to language learning. They do not, however, distinguish between the anxiety experienced by elementary language learners and more advanced learners. They define the anxiety, which occurs in a foreign language classroom as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Learning a new language requires that students practice speaking in front of the classroom, which can produce anxiety, especially when they are aware that other students may be more proficient than they are. According to Young (1990), students considered speaking the target language to be the most anxiety producing activity in a foreign language class. Indeed, some students look forward to learning a foreign language while others dread the thought of learning a second language and even postpone this task until the last semester possible (Young, 1991). Why do some students feel uncomfortable when learning a foreign language? In studying these emotions, researchers examined two different types of anxiety.

Two key forms of anxiety are discussed in the literature related to language acquisition. One is defined as “trait anxiety,” which according to Phillips (1992) is a “relatively stable tendency to exhibit anxiety in a large variety of circumstances” (p. 14). A person who has trait anxiety will exhibit a predisposition to feeling anxious in many different situations. However, researchers identify foreign language anxiety as a “state anxiety” (Horwitz, 2001, p. 113), which is a situation-specific type of anxiety that an individual might experience only in a particular setting or situation. Examples for known state anxieties are test anxiety and math anxiety, as well as performance anxiety. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) some students experience a state specific anxiety that is related to foreign language learning. They identify this
specific form of state anxiety and call it “Foreign Language Anxiety” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 127). This type of anxiety includes the areas of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Learning a language is unique in the sense that it requires constant communication and performance in the form of participation in the classroom along with learning a new skill. Students who take a foreign language course are required to actively participate in a classroom that typically differs in style from that of a lecture course. Foreign language class instruction is often a more collaborative experience. This type of learning relies heavily on the students’ participation and performance in front of their teacher and peers. The literature presents many possible reasons for cases of state specific language-learning anxiety. Some of the most common causes listed for anxiety in the foreign language classroom include fear of performance and fear of negative evaluation. Both of these possible causes involve students taking perceived risks in speaking the new language in front of peers.

Heritage and non-heritage learners. Studying Hebrew in college may be quite a different experience than learning other non-Western languages because students have especially varied reasons for wanting to learn Hebrew. Some have personal connections to the Hebrew language due to their Jewish religion or their family ties to Israel. Lee (2005) refers to this type of student as a “heritage learner” (p. 555). He divided language learners into two groups that he referred to as heritage and non-heritage learners. The heritage learners are equated with “native speakers, quasi-native speakers, residual speakers, bilingual speakers, and home-background speakers” (Valdes, as cited by Lee, 2005, p. 555). Thus, the heritage learner category consists of a spectrum of proficiencies in a language ranging from familiarity with the mere sound of the language to actual knowledge in reading, writing, speaking or any combination of the three. Other Hebrew students may belong to other faiths or may not have a faith connection and may
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have never encountered the Hebrew language previously. These students may be curious about the Hebrew language and motivated to study it for various reasons including religious ones, or interest in international politics or the Middle East conflict. Lee describes these students as non-heritage learners who are “true beginners with no previous exposure to the foreign language and culture” (p. 555).

Typically, an entry-level language course is designed for students who are “monolingual speakers of English” (Tallon, 2011); thus the assumption is that all students are at the beginner’s level. In reality, however, an entry-level foreign language course is made up of both heritage and non-heritage learners presenting different language needs and abilities. Since some heritage learners can already converse in the target language, their focus needs to be on reading and writing skills, while the non-heritage learners would be better served by developing the skills of listening and speaking along with writing and comprehension skills. Students who are true beginners may feel stressed by the task of acquiring a new language. In contrast to many other entry-level language courses, most students who enroll in the elementary Hebrew classes have some kind of previous connection with the Hebrew language. This is not because they studied it formally in high school, but rather because they have come into contact with it during their religious studies or because of a connection to Israel. Those students who enroll without any prior connection to Hebrew might feel anxious about their disadvantage when they compare themselves to the Hebrew heritage learners.

The motivation to learn a foreign language can vary from student to student and may impact the students’ tenacity and likelihood of success. In a pilot study I conducted prior to this study, I found the participants were motivated to learn Hebrew because of some connection they had to the language: religious connections (Non-Jewish as well as Jewish), or a connection to
Israel or to the Bible (historical, archaeological and cultural). These connections varied in strength. Some students were strongly connected to the language and had relatives who speak it and live in Israel, while others were very interested in exploring the Hebrew language due to a desire to connect with it. It seems most students who choose to study Hebrew in college tend to do so because they have a prior connection with the Hebrew language. From my own experience, only a small minority of students in the Hebrew classroom lack any kind of prior connection to the language. In the current study, I was interested in exploring how these differences in connection or heritage backgrounds among the students affect their learning of Hebrew in the entry-level classroom. In addition, I was also interested in how the participants would respond to a classroom environment in which students would work in small groups and pairs.

**Research Approach**

My research approach is based upon the epistemological framework of constructivism. The general assumption of this methodology is that “reality is socially constructed…individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience… [and that] multiple meanings” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 9) can emerge out of this study. I was interested in discovering what meanings my participants constructed in the classroom, and how they were able to make sense of their experiences. Therefore, the constructivist perspective suits this qualitative study. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) maintain that the constructivist approach represents an array of perspectives in which the learners construct their own knowledge stemming from their own experiences. The constructivist approach emphasizes transformational learning and allows for reflective practice to take place. The participants’ past and present experiences were of interest to me as they shaped the students’ interactions with their
environment. I sought to understand the participants’ learning experience as it occurred in the classroom environment and to explore why the students felt, believed and behaved the way they did. Schwandt (2000, as cited by Mertens, 2010) suggests that researchers from the constructivist perspective should “attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (p. 16). According to this epistemology, the researcher is involved in a more personal and interactive way during the data collection phase. The concept of objectivity is not of interest as it is with the post-positivist paradigm; it is replaced by “confirmability” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, as cited by Mertens, 2010, p. 19). The methods employed in this study supported confirmability by producing data collected from several sources and by utilizing multiple collection instruments.

The qualitative research approach is appropriate for a study that begins with assumptions about language teaching and learning and that requires inquiry into the meanings students ascribed to their experience. Throughout my research process, the main focus was on the meaning the participants held about the problem or issue studied and not the meaning I attached to the problem. Although I had assumptions about the role of anxiety in the language learning process, I was interested in what the students reported regarding what they felt and how it affected their learning. To accomplish this, I utilized several instruments to carefully examine the thoughts and feelings of the participants as they went through the experience of learning elementary Hebrew. In order to study this problem, data was collected during the semester while students were actively involved in taking the Hebrew course. Data was collected online through an anonymous survey, interviews, reflection questionnaires, and language anxiety scales. I developed all instruments used in the study, with the exception of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). My
analysis and interpretations were influenced by the context of the class comprised of the participants, as well as by my previous experience as a Hebrew teacher (Creswell, 2007).

The natural setting of the study was the elementary Hebrew classroom, and the issue investigated was the nature of the learning experience. A qualitative study is usually utilized for small-scale research (Denscombe, 2010). Qualitative research assumes that social realities cannot be understood when separated from their context. I sought to discover and understand the meanings the participants attached to their experiences. As the researcher, I posed the research questions and generated meaning from the data I collected. Data analysis started during the data collection phase and continued throughout the investigation. During this study, I put aside my own assumptions about anxiety as well as my assumptions about the effect of the classroom environment on the students’ experience.

Study Setting

In this study, the participants consisted of students enrolled in the entry-level Hebrew college classes I teach at the State University of New York in Albany, New York, (SUNYA) and Skidmore College. Skidmore College is a small, private liberal arts college located in a beautiful, historic, summer tourist town; and SUNYA is a large state university. Skidmore College enrolls approximately 2,500 students pursuing Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degrees in more than sixty areas of study. It was founded in the early 1920s as a women’s college and began admitting men to its regular undergraduate program in the early 1970s. In order to fulfill the foreign language requirement at Skidmore, students must complete one foreign language course offered by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature or Classics. The College offers traditional classes in French, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish; these are languages in which students may declare a major or minor. For languages
such as Arabic, Hebrew, Korean, Portuguese, and Russian, Skidmore offers a Self-Instructional Language Program. The Department describes these languages as “less commonly taught languages,” and students cannot acquire a major or a minor in these languages. Self-Instructional Language students work with textbooks and meet with a native speaker who tutors them for two hours a week. Tutorials include oral discussion, reading, and grammar exercise. Students can progress from an entry-level course in these languages to more moderate and advanced levels. Typically, if students are interested in pursuing more than the entry-level course, a succession of four semesters is available to them for three credits each semester. For students who wish to pursue one of these languages further, individual study with the tutor is offered for one credit a semester. A final examination is given at the end of the semester during finals week by an outside examiner approved by the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs from a neighboring university. As the tutor for the Hebrew language students at this College, I was not involved in grading these students.

The second college I engaged was SUNY Albany, which enrolls approximately 20,000 students and houses a large Languages, Literatures and Cultures department, which offers PhD, MA, and BA degrees in Spanish, as well as minors in French, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Additional languages offered are Arabic, German, and Latin. Students at this University are required to complete at least one semester of a foreign language in order to fulfill graduation requirements. I am employed at this University as a full-time Hebrew lecturer, teaching three levels of Hebrew courses each semester. Each fall, I offer an entry-level course designed for students with no prior Hebrew background. The enrollment in this course usually exceeds the course limit of 25 students. In this course, my responsibilities include teaching elementary Hebrew, evaluating the students, holding office hours for additional assistance, and
grading the students. The grading in this class consists of a weekly vocabulary quiz as well as a midterm and final exam.

The textbook and methods that I use for teaching the elementary Hebrew class are identical for both the small College and the University. The participants in my study at both Skidmore College (not graded by me) and SUNY Albany (graded by me) were those enrolled in my entry-level Hebrew class during the fall semester of 2013. I combined the two groups into one for the purpose of the study. The anonymous methods by which the data was collected prevented me from being able to distinguish between the participants’ institutions. The fact that I evaluated the students at SUNY Albany but not at Skidmore did not impact the data, because I did not know to which group any student belonged. I also made sure to inform the students that their responses were completely anonymous, and I took measures that protected their identities and prevented me from recognizing any given individual within the collected data. This was accomplished through a Google application that conceals the return email addresses of participants, as well as through the use of pseudonyms.

Assumptions

I came to this study with five assumptions related to language-learning anxiety and its impact on students’ learning experiences. The first assumption was that students in the entry-level Hebrew classroom would present some level of foreign language anxiety due to the various factors discussed above. One potential cause for this anxiety is that students compare themselves to one another in the classroom. On the first day of class, both at Skidmore College and at SUNYA, I introduced the course and the way it would be conducted. I also introduced myself to the students as their tutor/teacher and as the person who would prepare them for their final oral exam to be graded by an outside examiner at Skidmore, and as the grading teacher at SUNYA.
In the first class, students introduced themselves to the class and described their connection to the Hebrew language as well as any background they may have had learning Hebrew and/or other languages. I assumed that discovering each other’s prior Hebrew language backgrounds would cause anxiety for many students right from this early point in the semester.

My second assumption was that since this was an entry-level Hebrew course, all of the students enrolled in the course would have minimal or no knowledge of the Hebrew language. Although some students might have personal connections to the language through Jewish religious studies or family in Israel, I assumed that no one with significant proficiency in Hebrew would enroll in an elementary-level course. Typically, an entry-level language course is designed for students who only speak English (Tallon, 2011); thus, my assumption was that all students would be at the beginner’s level. However, each semester I find that the entry-level foreign language course is usually made up of heritage and non-heritage learners with differing language needs and abilities.

The third assumption I made was that anxiety and stress in the entry-level Hebrew classroom would contribute to students doing poorly in the course, and they would drop out of the course or have a very unfavorable experience with it. Since this course requires the students to constantly participate orally in front of their peers and communicate with others in the class, their anxiety would likely intensify. I assumed that emerging adult students would be concerned about how their peers would perceive them because the approval and acceptance of peers is crucial to their process of identity formation.

I also assumed that students’ attitudes toward their peers would be a source of stress and negativity, since they would view them as a threat when they compared themselves to each other.
I assumed this comparison would cause students to feel resentful of their peers and be yet another cause for anxiety.

Lastly, I assumed that students who were heritage learners would not experience any anxiety since they had a background in Hebrew and would, therefore, feel confident learning elementary-level Hebrew. In contrast, I assumed students who were true beginners and had no background in Hebrew would be the only ones who would experience higher levels of anxiety, since they would feel they were at a disadvantage. These assumptions will be reexamined in Chapter 5.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This Chapter contextualizes the question of how awareness of peers and classroom environment in the entry-level Hebrew classroom might affect the experience of learning for emerging adult college students. It sets out the primary and secondary research questions, describes my personal and professional roots, and discusses the theoretical framework, approach, study setting, and assumptions on which this dissertation is based. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on heritage and non-heritage learners, language-learning anxiety, adult learning theory, the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and identity development in college students, and the effect of peers on the learning experience. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology, explaining the rationale for using the qualitative approach and describing the sample population, as well as the methods and instruments that were employed across the phases of data collection. Chapter 3 also provides an in-depth description of the procedures used for data analysis, as well as their limitations. Chapter 4 reviews the findings of the study. Generated data is presented in tables and charts in order to clearly convey results. Chapter 5 interprets and discusses the findings, analyzing significant patterns and themes, as well as integrating them into
the larger framework of this study. This Chapter also explains how the findings answer the research question and how they relate to the literature, as well as to my initial assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The fifth Chapter ends with my conclusions and recommendations for future research.

I undertook this research with the hope of adding new information to the body of literature already existing on language learning, language-learning anxiety, and Hebrew language learning. Although language-learning anxiety has been extensively researched over the past 20 years, the connection between the age group of emerging adulthood and language-learning anxiety in the entry-level Hebrew class has not yet been examined closely. This is the gap in the literature I sought to explore in my classrooms. In addition, the area of heritage and non-heritage learners in college entry-level Hebrew courses has not been thoroughly explored until now. It is my hope that the topic of college-age language learning, especially in an entry-level classroom, will continue to be explored further.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In many colleges, emerging adult students are required to successfully complete at least one semester of a foreign language course. Some students choose to study a language they studied previously in high school such as Spanish or French. Students who choose to take an entry-level course in a language they have already studied in high school are referred to as False Beginners (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). Since the selection of languages offered in college is much broader than those offered in high school, other students choose to study a language that is completely new to them and may vary greatly from English. Often a variety of non-western languages such as Hindi, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Hebrew, are available to choose from in college settings. These languages may be more difficult for native English speakers to learn due to the fact that these languages are less similar to English than are romance languages (Aida, 1994). Hebrew is fundamentally different from English because of the prevalence of gender rules (Guiora, 1983). Whereas Hebrew is a language that favors early development of gender identity and uses maximum gender loading, English uses minimum gender loading. Furthermore, Hebrew differs from other non-Western languages due to the varied reasons students have for studying the language such as strengthening their connection to their Jewish identity or culture. The majority of students who study a foreign language choose to study Spanish, which is considered the most commonly taught foreign language. In addition, Hebrew is considered to be one of the sixteen most commonly taught languages in higher education (Brod & Welles, 2000). There have been very few studies, if any, describing the experience of emerging adult students in
an elementary college Hebrew class. This literature review covers topics related to second 
language acquisition that may pertain to Hebrew language learners as well.

This literature review examines five bodies of literature that are related to the experience of 
learning a foreign language in an academic setting. Concepts, theories, and data from these five 
areas are discussed. Some gaps in the literature that led to this present study are presented. The 
review begins with a description of a common situation that occurs in entry-level language 
classrooms related to True and False beginners as well as Heritage and Non-Heritage learners.

Presented next is a review of research related to foreign language anxiety. Additional review is 
provided about leading research and theory regarding adult learning theory. Following this, I 
provide a review of the literature related to the developmental stage of emerging adulthood 
including the topic of identity formation. This Chapter concludes with a review of the effects of 
peers on the learning experience.

**Heritage and Non-Heritage Learners, False and True Beginners**

In college entry-level foreign language courses some of the students choose to study a 
language they previously studied in high school such as Spanish, French, or German, while 
others seize the opportunity to experience a new language. This creates a complicated situation 
in the entry-level language classroom; a mixture of students who are false and true beginners. 
False beginners are those students who studied the language formally prior to college (Oukada, 
2001). True beginners are those students who have never been exposed to formal learning of the 
language (Klee & Rogers, 1989; Fukai, 2000; Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). College entry-level 
French classrooms consist of about one-third false beginners and similar Spanish classrooms 
consist of about two-thirds false beginners. This situation is most problematic in the first 
semester language courses in many institutions of higher learning. This can cause anxious
feelings and a lack of self-confidence among the true beginners, especially when the true beginners compare themselves to their peers. True beginners are more anxious than false beginners and often achieve slightly lower grades than false beginners (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). Fukai (2000) notes that in comparing false and true beginner students, those who had prior formal learning of a language such as Japanese rarely felt shy or nervous in class, which resulted in more willingness to take risks in speaking the target language. On the other hand, students who were true beginners experienced anxiety in speaking the target language in front of the class and feared “being called on” (p. 9). These students hardly ever volunteered to speak in the classroom and reported being afraid of negative evaluation by the teacher and classmates.

Students’ willingness to participate is not only a component of their personality and positive experience, but also of their increased self-confidence due to prior communication experiences (MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998). On the other hand, as language anxiety increases it reduces one’s self-confidence and willingness to participate (Spielberger, 1983, as cited by MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998).

In addition to prior formal language education from high school, there is another situation that further differentiates the true from the false beginners: students’ prior connection to a language that does not occur in a formal education setting. A student that has a personal connection to a language with varying degrees of proficiency is considered a heritage learner. Students who are Heritage Learners are defined as those who have been exposed to a foreign language at home, acquired some level of proficiency in that language, and/or have been exposed to the culture of the language (Van Deuren-Scholl, 2003). These students speak or at least understand the target language, and have obtained some proficiency in the target language. In comparison to non-heritage learners, the heritage learners may be quite advanced in some areas
and more limited in other areas (Valdes, 2001). However, heritage learners are not equal in their abilities and knowledge, since their education is not formal, and may vary quite a bit from learner to learner.

A heritage language is defined as the language associated with the student’s cultural background, which may or may not have been spoken in the home (Cho, Cho, and Tse, 1997, as cited by Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Some heritage learners display the need to explore their heritage and a desire to regain a neglected piece of their ethnic and cultural identity (Lee, 2005; Weger-Guntharp, 2006). These heritage learners often desire to deepen their understanding of their cultural heritage and reconnect with their families through learning to communicate with relatives in the language of their cultural background (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Heritage learners have varying degrees of familiarity with the target language from a variety of sources. These sources may include the language-spoken at home, visits to the country where the target language is spoken, relatives or friends who speak the target language, or exposure to the target language in prayers, religious rituals, or Sunday schools, summer camps, or any combination of these. It is difficult to classify students into heritage learners or non-heritage learners since there are many learners who fall in between the two categories (Lee, 2005).

Most students who choose to study Hebrew typically have a prior connection with the Hebrew language. This connection may be a formal learning background similar to the false beginners. These students may have already studied the Hebrew language in Hebrew day schools and attended those schools anywhere from kindergarten through high school. Such students will have studied Hebrew for as little as one year or as many as twelve years. Other Jewish students have often studied aspects of the Hebrew language previously in Jewish religious schools and possibly for the purpose of their bar/bat mitzvahs. In his study, Lee (2005)
quotes Jewish students who express their connection to the Hebrew language due to growing up Jewish. Some Jewish students have relatives in Israel and some have parents who are Israeli and might speak Hebrew in their home. Others may have visited Israel one or more times and have been exposed to the Hebrew language there. Some students are connected to Israel or the Hebrew language because of their interest in history, political or religious beliefs, or any combination of these. Most Hebrew heritage learners acquire their knowledge of Hebrew through religious school education in elementary or middle school. This prior study of Hebrew often results in knowledge of the alphabet and possibly reading and writing. However, rarely does it result in significant levels of comprehension, fluency in speech, or knowledge of grammar.

Other non-Jewish students in the Hebrew classroom may have no apparent religious or cultural connection to Israel or Hebrew. These students may treat Hebrew like any other foreign language course in college. One of the reasons they may choose to study Hebrew is because they are interested in the Bible and they want to be able to read it in the original language it was written. Another reason students may choose to study Hebrew might be the desire to fulfill a language requirement with a language that is totally new to them. These students are the minority amongst the Hebrew students in a typical college Hebrew classroom and they are referred to as “non-heritage learners” (Lee, 2005, p. 555). Lee defines them as true beginners who have had no prior experience with the foreign language or its culture. Those students with less of a connection to the language may feel a greater level of apprehension than those students who have a stronger connection to the language. This may be due to the fact that they lack familiarity with some aspects of the language that the other students may already have. Language learners experience a sense of competitiveness in the language classroom when they
compare themselves to other students since they may perceive themselves as less proficient than the others (Bailey, 1983).

These differences in background knowledge of the language can contribute to some of the anxiety in the foreign language classroom. The level of anxiety can increase for those students who are considered non-heritage students because of the presence of heritage learners in the classroom (Tallon, 2011). He explains that non-heritage students having to speak in front of heritage students, who know the language better to varying degrees, might result in the non-heritage learners experiencing higher levels of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. According to the literature, this situation exists in many entry-level foreign language classrooms and from my experience as a college Hebrew teacher is very prevalent in the Hebrew entry-level classroom as well. The dynamics between students of different backgrounds in the elementary Hebrew classroom can teach us about the complex connections between emotions, social awareness and language learning.

**Foreign Language Anxiety**

Spielman and Radnofsky (2001) stated they found language-learning anxiety existed in the classroom even though the students did not indicate they felt anxious during their interviews. However, they were able to detect language-learning anxiety and communication apprehension when observing the students in the classroom. Learning a new language in itself can pose many challenges for new language learners. This experience is an extremely unsettling psychological undertaking since it directly threatens an individual’s self-concept and worldview. One’s native language plays a role in holding together one’s psychological integrity (Guiora, 1983). Hence, embracing another language may be accompanied by a fear of “losing the grip on the psychological integrity for which native language serves as such a powerful anchor” (Guiora,
1983, p. 8). Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) noted that learning a new language requires the learner to assume a different personality, which some students find uncomfortable while others treat it as a pleasant surprise. They used the term “euphoric tension” (p. 261) to describe the type of facilitative anxiety they observed to be conducive to language learning in their program. Students who are true beginners not only have to assume new language personalities, they also have the added task of acquiring a new language as well as getting acquainted with the new culture that accompanies the language. This may result in higher levels of language-learning anxiety for the true beginner learners.

Typically, an entry-level language course in college is designed for students who only speak English thus the assumption is that all students are at the beginner level with no previous knowledge of the foreign language (Tallon, 2011). However, in reality, the entry-level foreign language course consists of false and true beginner students as well as heritage and non-heritage learners, all of who present different language abilities and needs. Tallon further explains that since some heritage language learners are already able to speak and comprehend the target language, they need to concentrate on learning and improving their reading and writing skills; on the other hand, true beginners benefit more from learning how to listen and speak the target language in addition to literacy skills. Klee and Rogers (1989) presented surveys, which indicated that in college beginner Spanish classes two thirds of the students enrolled have already had two to three years of high school Spanish instruction. They indicate that this fact presents a real problem to students who are genuine beginners. Some false beginner students who register for these entry-level courses may be motivated by the desire to take an easy course and hope to achieve an easy A, in order to improve their college grade point average (Klee & Rogers, 1989; Oukada, 2001). Similar to some false beginners, heritage learners may also seek out language
courses in which they hope to achieve an easy A and make use of their heritage language skills to fulfill their language requirement (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Other heritage learners may genuinely believe they need to start from the beginning in order to refresh their language skills. Regardless of the reasons motivating false beginners and heritage learners to take an entry-level foreign language course, a problematic situation exists in which there are a variety of backgrounds related to prior knowledge and connection to the target language (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). This situation introduces another layer of complexity in foreign language education where instructors are placed in the difficult situation of having to accommodate the needs of both types of students (Lee, 2005). The difficult situation described often becomes a source of anxiety for the students who have no background in Hebrew at all since they may feel less knowledgeable than their peers and do not want to appear inept in front of them.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define the anxiety which occurs in a foreign language classroom as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Horwitz et al. compared language anxiety to anxieties that occur in other disciplines of study. They noticed that just as anxiety occurs for some students in learning science or math, which manifests itself by tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry, a similar type of anxiety can occur while learning a foreign language. They consider language-learning anxiety to be a state anxiety, which is situation specific and related to language learning, as opposed to trait anxiety which one experiences in a variety of situations and is seen as a personal characteristic of an individual. State anxiety is not necessarily associated with individuals who are prone to experiencing anxiety in a wide range of situations. Instead, state
anxiety is a situation specific anxiety that varies with particular situations that cause anxiety in some individuals that would otherwise not be anxious (Toth, 2010).

Many students in the foreign language classroom exhibit a cautious behavior as they watch each other quietly, attempt to avoid embarrassment, and contemplate what their place in the social structure of the classroom will be (Dornyei and Murphy, 2003, as cited by Dewaele, 2011). Students typically worry about their linguistic abilities and fear their peers may be more competent and proficient than they are. These feelings of insecurity, lack of confidence, and discomfort, which are also due to an incompletely developed sense of identity, may contribute to foreign language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety stems from students perceiving their own speaking ability to be poorer than their peers and native speakers (Kitano, 2001). This perceived deficiency in ability becomes readily apparent in the foreign language classroom as students continuously display their abilities in front of their peers and teacher. Those students who perceive their ability to be less than that of their peers often become more self-conscious and anxious.

For several decades many studies have been conducted to investigate the role of foreign language anxiety. However, the work of Horwitz et al. (1986) was the first to define this anxiety as distinct, identifiable, and specific to the context and situation of the college language classroom. They noticed that students who experienced language-learning anxiety were affected in their communication strategies. Specifically, higher levels of language anxiety affected students’ writing and speaking abilities in the classroom. These students wrote shorter compositions and participated less in classroom discussion and some tended to avoid most or all oral participation. In addition, students with high anxiety said less in the classroom and produced shorter communication units, as opposed to students who were less anxious (Phillips,
Anxious students tended to avoid studying and skipped classes entirely in an attempt to alleviate their anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Research indicates a negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and students’ academic performance and oral proficiency levels (Aida, 1994; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Young, 1986). Foreign language students suffer more often from communication apprehension (Toth, 2010). Aida (1994) also reports that more anxious college students of Japanese received significantly lower grades than less anxious students. It was also found that anxious students were not able to concentrate solely on the task of learning because they had to divide their attention between the demands of the task and the preoccupation with their worries. On the other hand, less anxious students were able to devote more attention to the task of learning. Anxiety might affect the learner at three critical learning stages: the stage of input when they receive the information, the processing stage when they organize, store and assimilate the input, and the output phase when they speak or write in the target language (Tobias, 1979).

Horwitz et al. (1986) addressed the lack of an adequate instrument to quantify foreign language-learning anxiety, and based on their work with college foreign language students they developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Horwitz et al. identified three components of anxiety in the foreign language-learning situation that relate to performance evaluation: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension involves anxiety related to communicating with others and speaking in front of groups. Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety that arises from the fear of failure. Fear of negative evaluation is an anxiety a student may experience when expecting to be evaluated by others and anticipating a negative evaluation.
The more the students are concerned with their self-image the higher the level of anxiety they will experience if they anticipate a negative evaluation by their teacher or peers. The stronger one’s motivation to portray a certain image of oneself and the more one doubts his or her ability to do so, the more anxiety he or she will experience (Toth, 2010). He further notes that negative evaluation can be related to people’s beliefs about themselves and they can become anxious in social situations not because they lack the necessary skills to perform the task, but rather because they think they lack the skills and consider themselves incapable (Leary, 1982 as cited by Toth, 2010). This has been described as perceived self-efficacy, which involves the functioning of both skills and self-beliefs of efficacy to use the skills effectively. Self-efficacy is defined as people’s belief in their own ability to complete the tasks needed to achieve a desired level of performance. The concern is not the actual skill that they may or may not have, but rather their self-judgment of what they can do with the skills they possesses. People tend to avoid tasks and situations that they believe exceed their capabilities (Bandura, 1986). Several studies indicated the existence of a close link between self-perception of foreign language competency and anxiety, suggesting that learners who perceive themselves as less competent tended to score higher on the anxiety scale, while others who rated themselves more capable seemed to score slight anxiety (Toth, 2010). Communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation were all found to relate to foreign language learning. This anxiety has been observed to affect one’s self esteem, leading to avoidance or minimizing the amount of communication due to one’s sense of disparity between the true self and the limited self that is presented to others in the foreign language classroom. This is a distinctly different type of anxiety that is unique to language classes and is different from other types of anxieties.
experienced in other subject classes where a student feels more capable of expressing and representing their true capabilities and true self (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Researchers have evaluated which foreign language classroom activities provoked anxiety among students. They concluded that activities related to speaking in front of their peers and teacher produced the most anxiety (Young, 1990; Price, 1991). The students indicated that they did not like being “in the spotlight” (Young, 1990). In another study, speaking was found to be the activity associated with classroom discomfort since it possesses a risk of embarrassment and diminishment of social status (Ely, 1986). Additional studies concluded that speaking the target language in front of their peers and being evaluated by others were the most frightening activities for students in the foreign language classroom. They all expressed fears of being laughed at by others and of making a fool of themselves in public. An additional source of stress mentioned was the frustration of not being able to communicate effectively to others and sounding incompetent like a baby (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991, Palacios, 1998). This is considered to be an anxiety, which is caused by the inability to understand others and make oneself understood (Foss & Reitzel, 1988; McIntyre & Gardner, 1989). In a study conducted by Ohata (2005) students indicated a fear of “losing face” (p. 14) in front of others as well as lack of self-confidence in language proficiency especially in competitive situations, which occur in the classroom.

One of the most important exercises in learning a new language requires the students to frequently practice speaking in front of the classroom, which can produce anxiety, especially when they may perceive that their peers are more competent at this than they are (Kitano, 2001). Horwitz et al. (1986) note that this anxiety stems from the threat to the learners’ self-concept of competence. Although self-concept is considered a personal trait, which is different for each
student, those students who start out with a self-perceived low ability level in foreign language are most likely to be anxious in the classroom (Young, 1991). Students who were anxious believed that their language skills were lower than other students in the class and that their peers were looking down on them (Price, 1991). This anxiety is often caused or aggravated by the learners’ competitiveness when they compare themselves to their peers in the classroom and see themselves as less proficient than their peers. Baily recalls from her own experience as a new student in French class how the feeling of not being able to compete with other students made her highly anxious (Baily, 1983). Many students believe that their language skills are weaker than those of other students, which is a belief that may be a potential source of anxiety (Bailey 1983; Price, 1991).

According to Tasnimi (2009) it is important to identify the causes of language-learning anxiety and loss of self-confidence and eliminate or reduce them. However, Scovel (1978) indicated that both facilitative and debilitative anxiety work together to motivate and to warn as the student attempts to become proficient in the new language. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) note that although most of the studies indicate that all language learning anxiety is debilitating (Horwitz, 1990, as cited by Oxford and Ehrman, 1995), they disagree with this view. Oxford and Ehrman argue that some language-learning anxiety is not detrimental but rather somewhat facilitative if not carried too far. They believe that Brown (1987, as cited by Oxford and Ehrman, 1995) was correct when he claimed that both facilitative and debilitative anxieties exist. Oxford and Ehrman noted it is important for educators to learn how to distinguish between the facilitative and debilitative types of anxiety to promote more effective language learning. Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) explained that when students of a foreign language have to scale down their communication skills they will experience anxiety since they perceive this as a
threat to their identity. However, some students soon discover this is now an opportunity to reinvent themselves via a new language identity and they experience a euphoric counterpart to the anxiety. Anxiety may then be reduced or balanced by a euphoria that is facilitative to learning.

**Adult Learning Theory**

Processes adults undergo when learning a second language may be complex. Issues of inadequacy in one’s ability to express the most basic of thoughts can affect one’s self-esteem. Languages are intricately connected to cultures and identity and as one immerses one’s self in a foreign language, one necessarily enters a new cultural environment. Some students may actually experience transformational learning if they are successful in mastering the language. Learning a second language does not solely involve learning new vocabulary, syntax and grammar. Learning a new language requires the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and even an alteration of the self-image of the learner to develop a temporary identity to fit the language (Dornyei, 2001). Developing such temporary identities and close associations with a new culture may pose a challenge to emerging adult students who are in the process of forming their own identities. The difficulty to the learner involves not only coping with the new material that is learned as well as dealing with the discrepancy between how they perceive themselves and how they present themselves in front of their peers. This is due to a discrepancy between their knowledge and their ability to articulate it in a foreign language. This struggle not only involves learning the new material itself but also involves dealing with a “distorted self-image” (Foster, 1997, p. 37). This can place a heavy burden on the students, who are going through a process of transformation “in which one loses and grieves for a part of the self” (Foster, 1997, p. 37). Language learning, unlike other courses, requires the student to acquire and use a new language
as a means of expression and communication, as well as a tool to explore other cultures and people and this process may be, according to Foster, “destabilizing” (p. 35) to the learner.

The process of acquiring a new language may involve not only obtaining technical skills, but it also requires full engagement and change that can include transformational learning. Adults are capable of change throughout their lives, and each change may present a challenge to the person’s value system and worldview (Mezirow, as cited by Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Transformational learning is often painful; it involves a disorienting dilemma at its core, which gives rise to a motivation to learn, followed by internal reflection, and a decision to make a change in self-perception and identifying with the target language group in order to learn (Mezirow, 1991). The immediate interaction with the foreign language and its culture can be perceived as a direct threat to one’s self-concept and worldview (Guiora, 1983), thus constituting a disorienting dilemma. The limitations the students experience in their ability to communicate in the target language can cause the learner fear, panic, and a heightened sense of self-consciousness. The limited display and representation of the self in the target language may undermine the learner’s sense of identity. Students of a foreign language in college may find themselves not only struggling with the technical learning of the new language but also with a distorted self-image, which may place a heavy burden on them (Foster, 1997).

**Emerging Adulthood and Identity Formation**

Why do students compare themselves to others? Why does this comparison often take place in the context of the foreign language classroom? Why are college students more likely to compare themselves to others, and fear speaking in front of them? It is common for students to compare themselves to their peers, especially since the level of knowledge varies among the students in the entry-level language classroom. Foreign language students might be anxious due
to their competitiveness and the way they compare themselves to others, which could be a manifestation of the learner’s character and need to outperform other learners (Bailey, 1983; Toth, 2010). Bailey recorded her own experience as a new learner of French, noticing that she often compared herself to the other students in the class. She recalls being highly anxious because she believed she could not compete with the other students. Even during the first hour of the class, she seemed to be “sizing up” (p. 74) the other students in the class. Bailey was actually mentally evaluating which peers would be the greatest and least threat to her. Her feeling of inadequacy and discomfort in the new language were further aggravated when she compared herself to other students in the classroom. This led her to seek out allies amongst her classmates, and react negatively to other students.

Moreover, during the college years there is a heightened awareness of peers since college students, as Bailey (1983) noted, are very concerned with how they are doing in comparison to their classmates. Since a language class is typically an interactive type of class, which requires much communication and sociability, students are quite aware of each other in the classroom from the very beginning. Most students in the college level language class are in the emerging adult stage of development. They are all in a similar state of flux as they engage in the process of exploration and formation of their adult identity, which is one of the tasks of this developmental stage. Their sense of self is not yet fully formed and external social factors are extremely influential on the formation of their identities. Since identity is related to language, language learning is fundamentally different from learning other skills or subjects due to the fact that language and self are closely related if not identical (Cohen & Norst, 1989).

Emerging adults experience much change at this time in their lives. According to Arnett (2000) emerging adulthood, which is defined as the age of late teens to late twenties, is a distinct
developmental period which exists only in cultures that allow young people to prolong their period of role exploration. At this stage individuals reexamine the beliefs they have learned from their parents and families and form a set of beliefs that is uniquely their own. Most emerging adults pursue their identity explorations on their own, without the influence of their families. At this stage of life students shift their focus from family to friendships, which surpass family relationships in their importance. Relationships with friends may reach their highest levels of importance during the stage of emerging adulthood as families are relied on less. Peers at this stage are considered the primary source of social support (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry & Tanner, 2011). During the emerging adulthood stage, college students are very much aware of each other, as their peer group becomes more the focus of their attention and their source of support and identity validation.

One of the issues that commonly arise during the stage of emerging adulthood is identity formation. Adolescence is marked by the challenge of identity crisis (Erikson, 1950, 1968, as cited by Arnett, 2007). This crisis now takes place during the emerging adulthood stage when identity exploration becomes more noteworthy and serious (Arnett, 2007). Erikson’s idea of identity crisis that took place in adolescence occurs later now in highly industrialized countries (Erikson, 1950, 1968 as cited by Arnett, 2000, 2007). The developmental stage of emerging adulthood is not considered a universal period in human development. Rather the postponement of entry into adult roles and responsibilities would most likely be found only in recent decades in some cultures, affecting those who are in their late teens to their late twenties (Arnett, 2000, 2004). In this process young people are faced with the challenge of evaluating their abilities, interests, and influences while forming their adult identity in making choices about love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000, 2007). Arnett (2000, 2007) agrees with Erikson (1950, 1968) that
the identity formation process may begin in adolescence. However, he proposes that identity formation now continues into later years and takes place mainly in the period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This stage is a crucial time for the development of worldview as an aspect of the development of an identity (Arnett, 2004).

In this distinct developmental period of emerging adulthood, identity issues have a prominent role, as emerging adults by the end of their twenties undertake the psychological task of forming a stable and functional identity that can sustain the adult commitments of love, career and worldview (Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005). This stage of emerging adulthood is not only an exciting period in life but also a very precarious one (Arnett, 2008). This stage of identity exploration is an especially full and intense time of life, while the explorations are not always pleasant (Arnett, 2000). Tanner (2010) terms this stage the age of feeling “in-between” (p. 8), in which one may experience instability, exploring identity, believing in possibilities, and engaging in self-focus. She explains that emerging adults spend these years in finding out who they are and where they want to go with their lives. Emerging adulthood is a stage in which formation of identity and a sense of self are of the utmost importance and this includes the conception of one’s values, abilities, and hopes for the future (Arnett, 2008). Although the actual age of the students in a second language class is not of great significance to their ability to learn, their developmental stage may indeed be significant in affecting their learning.

College age students are at a stage in their lives where they may be progressing from an external source of influence to an internal orientation. This indicates that these emerging adults are beginning to follow their own meaning making structure and depend less upon an outside entity to do so (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Most of them are at a “crossroads, which reflects a mixture of external and internal orientations” (Baxter, 2012, p. 14). The crossroads is
defined as a turning point in which some letting go of external control occurs and it is replaced by a beginning of one’s internal voice (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Students at this age begin moving toward self-authorship and thus begin to shift from uncritically following the advice and opinions of authorities, to actively authoring their own identity, relationships, and beliefs (Baxter Magolda, 2004). The process of identity development occurs on a continuum: at one-end students use meaning-making structure with an external source, relying on external authorities to determine various aspects of their identity; at the other end is self-authorship, where students use their own meaning-making structure, which relies completely on internal orientation. Most students are at different places on this continuum, which is a mixture of external and internal meaning-making structure. Thus, college students whose identities are in the process of being formed would have a meaning-making structure that would not be completely “solidified” (Baxter Magolda, 2012, p. 15). This means that they would not completely trust their own internal voice.

Emerging adult students in the foreign language class are at the age where gaining the approval of teachers and peers is still very crucial for their self-identity and self-worth, as the teachers represent the authority figures and the peers consist of their social support. For many emerging adults the concept of self may begin by how others define and limit their experiences (Zaytoun, 2003, as cited by Taylor, 2008). At this stage of life, some emerging adults may consider participating and performing frequently in the foreign language class as taking a great risk to their sense of identity and self-worth, since they still depend on others as external reinforcers of their sense of self.Teenager foreign language learners are probably more afraid to appear ridiculous while making mistakes in language class, than younger children or adults who take on the task of learning a new language (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). Learners of a foreign
language often report that being incorrect in front of the teacher and peers and looking or sounding “dumb” (Young, 1991, p. 429) provokes anxiety among them. Guiora (1972) claimed that a different self exists in foreign language learning, which he termed “language ego” (p.112). This means that the learner feels like a different person when speaking the foreign language and sometimes even acts differently (Guiora, 1972; Guiora & Acton, 1979). Acquiring a second language requires that the student adopt a new identity to a certain extent (Guiora, 1972). Acquiring a new foreign language identity may be a difficult task for emerging adults to take on during this phase of their development, since they are not yet fully secure with their own identities. This difficulty may be a source of anxiety for these students.

Emerging adulthood is the age that identity exploration takes place (Arnett & Tanner, 2008). This stage is not a traumatic stage; however it has its share of anxiety. Many emerging adults experience anxiety about the instability and identity formation issues in their lives (Arnett, 2007). This anxiety can intensify in the foreign language classroom when students are faced with the task of acquisition of new skills and are introduced to a new culture. Anxiety in the foreign language classroom is intensified since students directly interact with a new language and culture, which can threaten their incompletely formed self-concept and world-view. Add to this the constant requirement to speak in front of the class in a language they do not feel confident to use to express and represent themselves. It is no wonder that their incompletely formed sense of self-image feels threatened. These factors place a heavy burden on any student, as their sense of identity is threatened (Foster, 1997).

Major components of what emerging adults perceive as their identity include their immediate social group, their relationships and social network. Emerging adults are concerned with features of themselves that make for immediate group acceptance. Since complex and
critical thinking emerges at this age, some emerging adults display emotional problems due to polarizing thoughts with associated dependence on societal norms and acceptance of peers. Research suggests that emerging adults have difficulty maintaining balanced cognitive-emotional representations, especially when issues about security and survival are activated, as occurs when language-learning anxiety is experienced. This may differ between emerging adults who are secure or insecure (Arnett & Tanner, 2008). Arnett (2007) notes that extremes of behavior and emotions are perfectly normal at this age.

An important limitation to Arnett’s theory is the fact that it is based on research that was conducted solely among college students. Thus this theory is representative of specific emerging adults who are college students and might not be applicable to all individuals in this age group. As Minnich’s (2004) error of faulty generalization suggests, by using only a few members to represent all, in this case the privileged few in a dominant culture; this may or may not represent the others. Similarly, Arnett (2008) states that his theory of emerging adulthood and the delay of entry into adulthood are limited to those whose parents are as follows:

...[R]ich, [they are] smart, [they are] highly motivated, or they are lucky – it promises to be a wonderful privilege that extends their identity formation and enhances their identity options. But not everyone has wealthy parents, is smart, has good emotional health, is bustling with enthusiasm, or is lucky. (p. 113)

Arnett acknowledges that the theory of emerging adulthood needs to include everyone, not just students who are easily accessed to complete questionnaires, and not only emerging adults who are college bound. The samples studied for establishing the emerging adulthood theory, all consisted of university students who represented the more affluent segments of society, thus the
findings cannot speak for the disadvantaged segments of society (Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005).

However, this theory could be very relevant to most students studying foreign language in college specifically to the entry-level Hebrew college classroom, since the students in this classroom consist of the exact population that Arnett surveyed and studied. In the college entry-level Hebrew classroom, students are unable to express themselves well in a language they have not yet mastered and fear ridicule and appearing inept in front of their peers, who they rely upon more heavily now for acceptance and validation. As students progress through the stage of emerging adulthood, their adult identities continue to form. Their behavior in the classroom may be affected by the fact that their identity is not yet fully formed and that these students rely on others during the process of its formation. Language and self-identity are closely related, and they may even be one and the same thing, since there is such a strong link between self-expression and one’s self-image (Cohen & Norst, 1989). When one studies a foreign language one has to develop a different self, which is termed language ego. Thus, learning a new language requires that one incorporate an additional and new identity to a certain extent (Guiora, Brannon, & Dull, 1972). This requirement may be more difficult for individuals in the emerging adulthood stage, who are still in a process of forming and defining their own adult identity. Understanding Arnett’s developmental theory related to emerging adults can be very beneficial to foreign language and Hebrew instructors. Knowing why students who are at this stage exhibit more apprehension in many foreign languages and specifically Hebrew classroom situations can assist the educator in creating an environment and activities that honor and respect the specific needs of students in this age group. I found no studies in the literature addressing emerging
adults learning a foreign language that discuss the effects of this developmental stage on second language acquisition.

**The Effects of Peers on the Language Learning Experience**

The willingness of students to take risks in participating, speaking, and experiencing transformational learning, depends on the sense of how connected and comfortable they feel in the classroom, which is facilitated by the attitude of the teacher and peers (Young, 1991). Some emerging adult college students who consider taking an entry-level foreign language course often end up dropping out of the course due to a fear of not being able to keep up or perform as well as their peers. This anxiety can be experienced by true beginners who perceive themselves as less competent than the other more experienced classmates and fear being perceived as incapable, not smart, and being embarrassed in front of their peers. Interestingly, some false beginners may experience occasional anxiety as well, due to reasons such as apathy and boredom with the familiar material, or due to their fear of repeating past failures with language learning (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). The literature shows that if students do not feel at ease in their language-learning environment, a psychological barrier to language learning may emerge, and if the amount of the anxiety is higher than a certain amount, it can hinder language learning (Iscan, 2011). Most colleges and universities do not have different tracks for different types of foreign language beginners. Since two tracks are often not available to students, other remedies are needed in order to provide additional alternatives to the single-track curriculum (Xiao, 2006).

The students’ developmental stage of emerging adulthood presents additional psychological issues concerning their identity and independence, which requires educators to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the learners’ unique needs. During this stage of life students tend to be at a crossroads experiencing changes leading toward their adult identity. As educators
interact with these students, it is important for them to remain conscious of the shift that is occurring in the students from parental influence and wishes toward their own wishes and independence. Since the students’ perception of self is evolving, they interact with the perceptions of others who share the classroom’s “social space” (Weger-Guntharp, 2006, p. 8) namely teacher and peers. There is a great deal of literature discussing the topic of foreign language-learning anxiety and the role of peers in the classroom. The main themes that emerged related to peers were the classroom as a community, and the benefits of working with peers.

**Classroom as a community.** Unlike other subjects taught in college, the language classroom calls for constant communication and interaction. This requires that the classroom become a community of individuals who work together toward the shared goal of learning cooperatively. This necessitates that the students as well as the educator become equally responsible for the process of learning. The educator is no longer an authority figure that imposes her or his ideas and opinions and knowledge on the students. Instead, students and teacher engage together in the exploration of what they consider important to learn and relate the material to the students’ interests and goals in a more relaxed, engaged and informal manner. In a language classroom, this may manifest as the exploration of what vocabulary the students are interested in learning and the creation of dialogues and activities that pertain to the students’ daily lives (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). Another decision that can be made by the educator and students together would be the preferred methods of teaching/learning and the preferred activities students wish to partake in and utilize for optimal learning.

Jane Vella (1998, 2002) discussed non-formal education for adults involving the learners determining what will be learned. She advocates a dialogue between the learners and the teacher and amongst the learners themselves in small group work, with mutual respect between learners
and teachers, and mutual listening by teacher and learners. These ideas originated from the work of Paulo Freire (1972, as cited by Vella, 2002) where all learners are engaged in listening to themes brought up by the group, which would make the learners excited to learn things that would help them make meaning of things that matter to the group. In discussing the issue of classroom climate, Vella (2002) explains that the atmosphere in the classroom should be of respect, but more so, the design of the activities and learning tasks should include small groups and an inviting setting for the emerging adult learners. The conditions for facilitating learning include trust, relevance of the objectives learned, and work in small groups where students can find their own voices, trust in sequence of activities and the realization that the environment is nonjudgmental, by validating every contribution from every learner. Affirmation is an essential task of every educator by which teachers do not only empower the learners but also encourage the use of power that each learner already owns (Vella). Students in the emerging adulthood stage of life are striving to become more independent and gain control over their own lives while developing their own identities. These students seem to thrive in an environment that is not authoritarian or oppressive and prefer one that is stimulating, accepting of all ideas and encouraging of growth. In this type of environment, students would tend to take more risks, be respectful to one another and be open to differences (Rogers, 1983).

Emerging adults are very aware of their social environment and experience a period of emotional instability during this developmental stage (Arnett, 2007). Emotions can affect whether learning will or will not take place (Dewaele, 2011). The foreign language classroom can be seen as a social environment in which relations between the teacher and students, and also among the students themselves, occur and affect the well-being of the learners. A good classroom atmosphere can enhance students’ desire to create and preserve these relationships,
whereas a bad atmosphere would be interpreted as threatening (Schumann, 1998, as cited by Dewaele, 2011). In order to learn a foreign language it is essential that one be able to lower his or her inhibitions. The learner must have ego flexibility in order to learn a second language (Schumann, 1975). Emerging adults faced with learning a foreign language might experience anxiety, which would reduce their ego flexibility. An accepting, non-threatening, and socially comfortable classroom would assist the learners’ ego to become less rigid and allow them to take risks helpful to the learning process.

**Benefits of working with peers.** Every classroom is a social environment (Wink & Putney, 2002). Language classrooms in particular involve interactions and communication on a daily basis between students and teacher and between students themselves. It is important to note how students can benefit from working with their peers. Although Emerging adults are highly social, and typically crave social interactions, they are often initially shy and uncomfortable in academic settings such as the classroom. When they are required to perform using a new language, it is often quite difficult for them to exhibit their knowledge in front of the entire classroom and teacher. Even if they have some prior knowledge of the language, they will often have difficulty using it in front of their peers. It is important to encourage students to work with each other and get to know one another, which helps to reduce some of their inhibitions. For most students, working in small groups or pairs helps them learn. Students benefit from learning in smaller groups because more active involvement is required and students report enjoying these types of learning experiences more (Arnett, 2004). Small group work provides the naturally shy students an opportunity to perform and practice in front of their partner instead of doing so in front of the entire class. Another benefit to the small group is the opportunity to get to know their peers, which helps to create a community of people who know and possibly
like one another, and thus are no longer afraid of each other. Working with partners, helps to facilitate the learning process. Additionally, sometimes students find it beneficial to work with peers and/or the teaching assistant (TA), since they may learn better from a fellow student’s perspective.

A theorist who discussed the importance of the social environment in the classroom was Vygotsky (as cited by Wink & Putney 2002, Kao, 2010). He noted that learning is both individual and social at the same time and thus the social context of learning is very important. Language learning is a social practice in which students are active participants in constructing the learning process (Kao, 2010). Learning occurs through the involvement of three elements; the environment, the student, and the teacher (Davydov, 1995, as cited by Liu & Matthews, 2005). Vygotsky (as cited by Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) proposed the view that learning is influenced by the symbols and language of a culture which are created through interaction with other people in the culture. Learning is situation specific, and a context-bound activity, which consists of an interaction between the learners’ community (environment) and their existing knowledge (Vygotsky, as cited by Liu & Matthews, 2005). This theory promotes the responsibility of the learner to learn which is referred to as autonomy. Learning is the responsibility and the task of the learner (Van Lier, 1996). Teachers can encourage and guide the learner but they cannot force the learner to learn. One of the most successful learning strategies among students involves an awareness of an active involvement in the learning process by the student (Sanz, 2005). Although the responsibility for learning should lie with the learner, this responsibility should not be overwhelming or be the cause of too much anxiety. Other people with different skill levels, such as peers, can also assist the students to learn. Working with the help of teachers and peers can encourage the learners to move on to the next stage of
learning or understanding (Kao, 2010). The goal of the teacher and peers’ assistance is to lead the student to become empowered and be able to act completely and confidently on his or her own as self-directed learners.

The process of scaffolding is a metaphorical concept that describes the support provided by the teacher or peers to enable the student to carry out the task, which they would not be able to do without the assistance provided. This type of help will enable the learner to carry out other similar tasks independently in the future. Scaffolding in teaching language may involve according to Read (n.d., p. 4) six features. These are: creating an interest for the task, simplifying the task, keeping the learner on track by reminding them of the goal, pointing out things and showing ways to do parts of the task, controlling the level of learner’s frustration during the task, and demonstrating an idealized way of doing the task. The help provided by the teacher or peers should not be considered as “providing the answers” to the student, but rather its aim should be to develop specific new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding for the student.

Teachers and peers provide a link between familiar knowledge as well as new knowledge through scaffolding. In the case of foreign language learning, the link that is created is between the students’ native language and the target language. The process of scaffolding from first to second language in a formal classroom context is one, which may also promote independent language use as a goal. The process of scaffolding can take place among students of equal or different levels and can be as beneficial to the students involved as when the process of scaffolding involves a teacher and a student. It might be beneficial for those students who have a higher proficiency of the language to assist those who have a lesser proficiency. Peer teaching and learning requires the students to access and utilize different skills that may be helpful to their mutual learning. Providing assistance to students in the form of scaffolding, whether coming
from a teacher or a peer, may function to reduce students’ anxiety in the learning of a new skill such as a second language (Van Lier, 1996).

Language is how students make sense of the world (Vygotsky, as cited by Wink & Putney, 2002). Students in a foreign language classroom need to communicate with others in a new language that is linked to a different culture. Language consists of the identity of the learner and this identity is threatened in the foreign language classroom since the learners’ language and communication abilities are not at their best. This may lead to frustration and fear on the part of the student and much discomfort in the classroom. It should be determined whether the level of discomfort is debilitative or facilitative since a low-level of anxiety could assist the process of learning. Vygotsky argued that “it is through learning made difficult that learning takes place” (as cited by Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 7) which means that some measure of challenge is facilitative to learning. Teachers should guide and scaffold the student and students should assist and work with other students. This could be very helpful in a language classroom where ability levels vary, and students can benefit from teaching and learning from each other. Another advantage of working in pairs or small groups in a language classroom is that it may reduce the anxiety students feel about performing in front of their peers.

Support for these ideas is found in more recent literature. Price (1991) discussed the importance of creating a small, pleasant, and supportive classroom where there is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Schumann, (1998, as cited by Dewaele, 2011) noted that a classroom atmosphere that encourages good relationships between teacher and students as well as between students themselves would create positive social affiliations conducive to learning. Anxiety would be reduced with a cohesive learner group where students’ relationships with each other are strong; it would be a classroom community that students would be happy to belong to.
In this classroom, rules and norms exist regarding tolerance and acceptance in order for students to feel safe and comfortable in taking risks because they know they will not be shamed or criticized even when they make mistakes.

In discussing reduction of anxiety in the language classroom, Horwitz and Young (1991) note the fact that this should be a combined effort made by the teacher as well as the students. Teachers must acknowledge students’ feelings of insecurity and anxiety, and let the students know that they recognize these emotions and are aware that others share these emotions as well. There is a benefit for the instructors to establish a sense of community, which helps reduce the sense of anxiety (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). Several classroom strategies have been proposed to create a more supportive atmosphere for apprehensive students. These include: no assigned seating, which allows apprehensive students to seat themselves where they feel more secure, reduce oral performances, and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities in other ways as well. It is further recommended not to call on students randomly and to provide students with time and opportunity to prepare allowing students to talk with each other as students often turn to peers for clarification or to share an example with another student (Daly, 1991). According to research, students learn better in smaller classes, which require active involvement and facilitate relationship between the students (Arnett, 2004).

Finally, teachers know that students who are anxious or bored will not progress in foreign language learning. Learning and communication will only take place in a classroom that possesses the right emotional climate, where there is an understanding by the educator that learners are emotionally connected to the other learners since emerging adults are in a highly social phase of their lives, and they are very afraid of appearing ridiculous in front of their peers. Although it is impossible to completely eliminate foreign language anxiety in the classroom (nor
should the goal be to eliminate it completely) especially when oral activities are involved, some teaching methodologies might be able to reduce it (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Horwitz, 2001). Foreign language teachers need to recognize anxiety cues from the students, which is not an easy task, since some of the students are silent and conceal their anxiety well (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001; Dewaele, 2011). It is important to address this anxiety since it can interfere with learning and performance (Horwitz, 2001). However, Brown (1987, as cited by Crookall & Oxford, 1991) mentioned that although high levels of learning anxiety can be debilitating, for many language learners, low levels of anxiety could be helpful and stimulating. Therefore, it is important for the educator to recognize their students’ level of anxiety, since a low anxiety level is conducive to learning, whereas a high anxiety level could be debilitating and should be addressed. To help reduce anxiety levels it is recommended to plan activities in small groups and pairs, to address the public speaking anxiety of some students and to provide them with the ability to practice the target language without the entire class acting as their audience.

A new language can seem threatening to emerging adult learners, especially while they are forming their identities. Some students have thoughts in the new language that they never had in their own mother tongue and sometimes report feeling different while speaking in the new language, which indicates the development of their new linguistic identity. This process can be exciting to some and frightening to others (Kramsch, 2009, as cited by Dewaele, 2011). A supportive and understanding teacher who can create a positive classroom atmosphere would help learners in the process of their self-discovery of knowledge experience less fear. It is important to understand the traits of good classroom dynamics and to create an environment where these traits can flourish (Tasnimi, 2009).

**Conclusion/ Summary**
This Chapter presented a review of five bodies of literature relating to the experience of entry-level Hebrew students in the college setting. The first topic described the variety of students in the beginner language classes, which consists of true beginners and those who have some rudimentary knowledge, as well as heritage and non-heritage learners. The second topic identified was language-learning anxiety, as it pertains to students speaking publicly in the target language. The developmental stage of emerging adulthood was then discussed along with its implications regarding identity development, self-perceptions, sociability, and its effects on public speaking in the target language. Finally, classroom environment was explored, specifically the climate and atmosphere in the foreign language classroom. It was suggested that teachers might reduce classroom tension by creating a sense of community thereby facilitating the establishment of a friendly and supportive atmosphere. This can help to reduce students’ fears of speaking in front of their peers and being embarrassed when making mistakes (Aida, 1994). Methods were reviewed to help educators facilitate an atmosphere that addresses the challenges presented due to the students’ developmental stage. The creation of a comfortable and challenging space would assist the anxious and non-anxious students to take risks, participate, and willingly engage in the process of learning.

Two gaps in the literature were identified that were addressed by this research. There were no studies found that address Hebrew language learning in the college/university setting. Through this study I attempted to address and describe the uniqueness of the entry-level college Hebrew classroom. The second gap that I found in the literature related to how the developmental stage of emerging adulthood affects Hebrew language learning for college students. No literature was found regarding the effects of this developmental stage on the students’ ability to learn a foreign language in college. In this study I examined the learning
experience of entry-level college Hebrew students while focusing on their developmental stage and its effects on their emotions, behaviors, and ability to learn Hebrew.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this study was to explore the classroom experience of a sample of entry-level college Hebrew students. Particular attention was paid to the participants’ awareness of peers and the classroom environment as they affected the students’ learning experience. I chose to investigate this topic because, as a college Hebrew teacher, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the students’ experience of learning elementary Hebrew in college. I believe that the findings of this study may contribute to college language educators’ deeper understanding of their students’ learning process. It may also assist language educators to better understand the delicate balance required between challenging and supporting their students. This could help in reducing anxiety to facilitative levels in order to enhance learning and retention of students. This Chapter describes the study’s research methodology including discussion about the following areas: (a) the rationale for the research approach, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the qualitative research approach, (d) the process, (e) the sample and population, (f) the participants, (g) the methods of data collection, (h) the methods and procedures for data analysis (i) the ethical considerations, and (j) the Chapter summary.

Rationale for Research Approach

The framework utilized in this study was constructivism, which is an orientation that maintains that “learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 291). I was interested in the participants’ self-reports of their experience; specifically, how the participants made sense of their learning experience, what it meant to them, and how the experience influenced their
language learning. Therefore, the constructivist framework was a suitable one for this investigation. According to Creswell (2007), the constructivist paradigm is a context-dependent type of inquiry. This approach was appropriate because this study involved investigating the particular context of college students in a particular classroom, which became a sub-community for the duration of one semester.

For this study I employed the qualitative research approach. This approach can be utilized for inquiring into the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. It is used, according to Creswell (2007), when “we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in the study” (p. 40). Qualitative research strives to understand the subjective experience of humans, which can be added to the measured aspects that are provided by a quantitative type of research (Patton, 2002). The focus of this study is the participants’ perspectives, meanings, and interpretations of their experience in the language classroom. Since this research study was conducted in the field of education, I was interested in investigating the views of college students and documenting their own words. The choice of an approach was dictated by the nature of the research problem, which required exploration into an area that little is known about, as well as a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon. The question of how emerging adults function in an entry-level language classroom merited study in order to gain a deeper understanding of this subject. As I sought to understand the participants’ experiences, I collected the data by asking open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to reflect upon their own experiences and produce their own responses. The information was collected from a small purposeful sample (Creswell, 2008).
Creswell (2007) points out several characteristics of qualitative research that apply to this study. The first one is natural setting, where data collection in qualitative research is done in the field at the site where the participants experience the issue or problem being studied. Questioning the participants and observing them in their natural context was the method of gathering information. In this research, I observed the participants in their natural context: the entry-level Hebrew classroom. The instruments that were used in this study were designed to gather information utilizing the students’ own feelings and thoughts, as they expressed them in writing.

In this qualitative study I was the teacher and also the sole researcher who collected the data through the administration of multiple instruments throughout the semester. As the researcher in this study, I actually studied my own students, a situation that Creswell (2007) describes as a “backyard” (p. 122) researcher. Although it is considered an acceptable practice to study one’s own place of work, Creswell raises the issue of power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, and the concern about whether sufficient data can be collected within this imbalance. On the other hand, such research is considered a convenient situation in which many of the obstacles of collecting data are eliminated. In this study, I found data collection to be very convenient and I made sure that the identity of participants was thoroughly protected by using pseudonyms and a computer program in which I was not privy to anything about the participants’ identity other than their pseudonyms. The fact that I was able to protect the identity of the participants through online data collection rather than interviewing them in person enabled the participants to feel at ease and respond freely to my questions. Several strategies for validation were utilized in order to ensure the information gathered was accurate and insightful (Creswell, 2007). Such strategies included prolonged engagement with the
participants, building trust and knowing their environment well, employing triangulation and using evidence from different sources to shed light on this experience. I clarified my researcher bias from the onset of the study. Although I was not able to use traditional member checking, I utilized two interviews and two sets of reflection questions in order to better understand the participants’ perspectives. I also provided a rich description of the findings in order to enable the readers to determine if the information is transferable to other similar settings.

Creswell (2007) notes the importance of gathering *multiple sources of data* where the researcher typically utilizes interviews, observations, and documents. In this research, sources of data included online interviews, a survey, foreign language anxiety scales, student reflections, as well as informal observation that I employed in the classroom during my interactions with the students. The data gathered from the participants constituted the main body of findings, and it was derived from the participants’ own meanings and views. *Inductive data analysis* was employed in this study to allow patterns, categories, and themes to be built from the bottom-up. Hence, the data was organized into less abstract units of information, as I reviewed the information repeatedly. Additionally, I performed an *interpretive inquiry* as I interpreted what I saw and recorded how I understood it. This was done with the knowledge, background, and perspective that I have gained through years of being a Hebrew language educator. I developed a careful method of organizing and recording the data that facilitated my interpretation. Finally, this qualitative research was a *holistic* study that shows a complex picture of the problem by identifying multiple factors related to the situation.

**Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative study, the researcher is considered a key instrument, according to Creswell (2007). He notes that the researchers are the ones who collect the data themselves, and they do
not tend to rely on instruments developed by other researchers. Patton (2002) wrote that qualitative inquiry means that the researcher has to go into the field, that is, into the real world. The researcher has to immerse in the situation being studied in order to capture what is happening. Patton refers to this immersion as getting your “hands dirty” (p. 48), participating, and getting to know the participants. He suggests becoming engaged with all of the senses and avoiding being distant or detached from the topic studied. He notes, “Understanding comes from trying to put oneself in the other person’s shoes, from trying to discern how others think, act, and feel” (2002, p. 49). Since I was the Hebrew language instructor for the participants, my research benefited from me getting to know the participants well and observe their experience first-hand from the perspective of teacher and researcher.

I have been a Hebrew teacher for many years. In the last several years I have taught in the college setting and worked with many emerging adult college students. I have been immersed in the field of Hebrew teaching for a long time and have dealt with various student age levels. Since I teach every level of Hebrew, I have been in the unique position to observe a difference in behavior and attitude that is unique to the students of the entry-level Hebrew class. It became apparent to me that students in the entry-level college Hebrew class seem to exhibit more anxiety in the classroom than any other level. This is ironic because the expectations at this level of instruction are the lowest, since students are not expected to have any prior knowledge in the subject. This is conveyed to them from the start of the semester; however, they still exhibit a unique type of anxiety.

As the researcher of this study, my role was to teach this entry-level Hebrew course at two different colleges: Skidmore College and the State University of New York at Albany. At Skidmore College I taught elementary Hebrew and prepared the students for the final oral exam,
which was not administered by me; thus I was more of a coach than an evaluator. An external examiner administered the final exam at the end of the semester and I did not assign any grades for the students throughout the course. At SUNYA I was the elementary Hebrew teacher; however, at this university I was the evaluator as well. I administered quizzes and examinations, and I was the person who determined the final grades for the students. The SUNYA students took weekly vocabulary quizzes, as well as a midterm and final exam.

For this study, I expected both the group of participants at Skidmore College and the group of participants at SUNYA to respond similarly to my data collection instruments, since participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous for all participants. For the purpose of this study both groups were merged and treated as one group, thus no difference in settings could be analyzed.

I believe that performing the role of the teacher as well as researcher had both advantages and potential disadvantages. One main advantage of me being the researcher consisted of the fact that I was able to recognize and understand anecdotes and instances the participants described in their responses, since I was present during these occurrences. I also believe the closeness the students shared with me contributed to them feeling safe enough to participate in the study and to be as candid as they could with their responses. A potential disadvantage to me acting as an insider researcher was the power imbalance this situation could potentially present between the students and me as the teacher especially for the SUNYA students, which I graded.

In order to minimize or eliminate this disadvantage, I made sure to protect the identity of the participants by means that were clearly explained to the students in the recruiting invitation I emailed to them. I required that the participants use a pseudonym throughout the study. I utilized a computer application, which only identified the participants by their pseudonym and
did not reveal their return email addresses. All communications were sent to the entire class since I did not know which email addresses belonged to the participants and which belonged to the rest of the students. Thus throughout the study I did not know the identity of the participants. I also provided the participants with an informed consent, which clearly detailed how they would be protected and how they could withdraw at any time during the study with no consequences to them. Since students knew that they remained anonymous during the study, they did not seem to feel pressure to participate in the study. Only about half of the SUNYA elementary Hebrew students (14 out of 26) became participants in this study. Those students who participated seemed to be genuine in their responses since they knew there would be no repercussions to them for honest responses.

In both classrooms I sought to create an environment that was informal and warm, where each student was addressed by his or her name and each student had an equal share of time to practice newly learned skills. I facilitated camaraderie between the students and encouraged them to work in pairs, groups, and individually. I also encouraged the students to meet outside the classroom and practice with each other during their own free time. Although I became familiar with students’ abilities and classroom dynamics, I was not aware of who each participant was since the study utilized anonymous email submissions using pseudonyms selected by the participants. This facilitated a feeling of closeness between teacher and student in the classroom while maintaining anonymity between researcher and participants within the study. Spending time with the participants in the classroom in the role of the teacher enabled me to gain a personal perspective in addition to the participants’ perspectives expressed in the instruments. I was able to view the situations from the perspective of the educator in the classroom, and then to review it again from the perspective of the individual participants. I
believe that designing the study in this fashion provided me with a unique opportunity to acquire insights that would not have been acquired if I was not the teacher in the classroom and not familiar with the events of the lessons.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach due to the social nature of this research inquiry. Due to the nature of the research question, I relied on the views of the participants, asked broad, general, open questions and collected data that consisted of mainly online written responses, and some informal observation performed in the natural setting where the phenomenon of interest occurred. Creswell (2008) notes that qualitative research study is best suited for phenomenon, which the literature might yield little information about, thus increasing the need to learn more from participants through exploration. Guba and Lincoln (as cited by Mertens, 2010) identify the qualitative research approach as the choice method for a researcher that works within the constructivist paradigm. I chose the qualitative research approach because it utilizes inductive logic. Utilizing an inductive approach enabled me to make sense of a situation without imposing my preexisting expectations on the phenomenon, which I was studying. The research began with specific data collection methods, which led to the emergence of categories and themes, which were analyzed as the study progressed.

Since this study was a qualitative study, an emphasis was placed on my role as the researcher because in this type of study the researcher plays a crucial part as the “measurement device” (Mertens, 2010, p. 237). This means that my background, values, experience, identity and beliefs may significantly have affected the nature of the data and its analysis. I made the decisions regarding the particular instruments that were utilized throughout the study. I developed most of the instruments based on my prior experience in conducting a pilot study.
EMERGING ADULTS IN A COLLEGE HEBREW COURSE

(Moskowitz, 2013), and also chose an existing scale to measure language-learning anxiety. The instruments used for the pilot study included a demographic survey, one application of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and an interview as a means of data collection. The pilot study had only seven participants and three data collection instruments. The small size of this study yielded a small amount of data, which made it difficult to draw conclusions or to make any generalizations. In this study I made a decision to increase the number of data collection instruments, to include online initial and follow-up interviews, a double application of the FLCAS, two applications of reflection questions, and a demographic survey, with the intention of gathering more extensive and in-depth data. The reason for the increased number of instruments used in this study was to ensure there would be enough data collected at regular intervals throughout the semester to evaluate changes over the course of the semester and to increase the validity of this study (Creswell, 2007).

Conducting a pilot study with a similar research question, a similar number of participants, and a similar sample type was very helpful for the decisions made regarding this research study. In the pilot study I utilized a sample that consisted of former entry-level students who had already completed an elementary Hebrew course taught by me. However, for this study I decided to use a more suitable sample to address the research question, which meant students who were currently enrolled in the entry-level Hebrew course and were experiencing it during the study. This research required relatively few participants. The participants were all entry-level Hebrew students participating in the same course taught by me at two different schools. Although the participants did not study at the same schools, they had in common the same instructor, same methods, textbook, same material covered, and the same experience of learning elementary Hebrew during the fall semester of 2013 when this study took place. Similar to the
pilot study, I decided to use the qualitative research approach for this small-scale study since the research question for this project was similar to that of the pilot study. In this study the research question required the researcher to be closely involved with the entire process and very close to the data (Denscombe, 2010).

**Process**

The process began by contemplating the wording of the research question. I needed to decide whether I was going to specifically inquire about language-learning anxiety in the entry-level classroom, or whether I should leave the research problem open to find which issues emerged for the students of the entry-level classroom. The pilot study problem was open-ended and general. It did, however, generate a few issues and themes, and it did indicate that the issue of anxiety did exist within the students of the entry-level Hebrew classroom as noted in the literature. Since the population of the pilot study consisted of students who were former students, who had successfully completed the entry-level Hebrew course, it was surprising to me to see that they all recalled issues related to anxiety in the entry-level classroom. Even those who were successful experienced anxiety. One of the major themes that emerged from the pilot study was the awareness of peers in the classroom, which I wanted to explore further in this study to see if a connection existed between this peer awareness and the students’ anxiety level. I decided to keep this research problem general in order to allow the students to draw upon their own experience, without the possibility of me tainting their experience with my assumptions and biases. Themes similar to that of the pilot study emerged including language-learning anxiety and peer awareness.

Once the research question was formulated, I obtained an approval for this study from the Lesley University Institutional Review Board (IRB), as well as Skidmore College and the State
University of New York in Albany (SUNYA) IRB. The next step was to describe the purpose and methods of my project to my students at both the Skidmore College and SUNYA entry-level Hebrew Classes. This was done at the beginning of the fall semester. I invited both classes to participate in my study and encouraged the students to consider participating. I explained that their participation might be helpful for improving this course and also provide information that may have application to more than just our schools. I also indicated that those students who were not willing to participate would still receive all of my email communications throughout the semester, due to the fact that the identity of the participants was unknown to me. The class introduction to the project was followed by an invitational email to the entire class. Participants volunteered for the study by returning the demographic survey.

**Sample and Population**

I chose to use a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) in order to provide information-rich cases for in-depth information about the issues that are central to the purpose of the study. In the prior pilot study, I utilized a sample of convenience, which consisted of participants who took the entry-level course in the past and successfully completed the course with a passing grade. This sample was not the ideal sample for my study since students were removed from the experience by several years. Armed with this knowledge of how important sample selection is, for this present study I made the decision to select an appropriate sample of students who were actually going through the experience in present time. For the purpose of this study, I chose to use a sample of students who were registered for the entry-level Hebrew courses at Skidmore College and SUNYA. I have been teaching Hebrew at Skidmore College and SUNYA for over six years. At Skidmore College, I offer an entry-level class each semester, and at SUNYA I offer this course each fall. At Skidmore the enrollment in this course ranges between five and fifteen
students and at SUNYA it ranges between 22-28 students. Once the class exceeds 10 students at Skidmore College, the Language Department urges me to split the class in order to provide more of an individual interaction and instruction in the classroom. Students are only required to take one semester of a language course at both institutions and, therefore, I typically only teach these students for one semester. However, I do have some measure of retention beyond one semester as some students choose to continue to learn the language for one to three additional semesters following the entry-level course. At Skidmore College I am the teacher who prepares the students for their final exam at the end of the semester. An external examiner administers an oral exam, which determines their grade. At SUNYA my role is to teach the class, create the measures by which to test the students and determine a final grade. I enlisted a current group of entry-level Hebrew students from both of these institutions of higher learning as participants for this study during the fall semester of the academic year 2013-2014. This was the first time I had the opportunity to meet and teach both of these groups.

Participants

Nineteen out of a possible thirty-one enrolled students chose to participate in this study between the Hebrew 101 class level at Skidmore College and SUNYA. I did not screen the participants further, and I accepted any student from the Hebrew 101 class at both institutions who was willing to participate.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (By pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year in College</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Primary language</th>
<th>Prior knowledge of Hebrew</th>
<th>Religion</th>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Native Language</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
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<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>English, French</td>
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<td>Jewish</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Jewish</td>
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<tr>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>Jewish</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Jewish</td>
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</tr>
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<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=19

**Methods of Data Collection**

During the pilot study I conducted prior to this study, I used three instruments to generate data for the study. The instruments included a demographic survey, a Foreign Language Anxiety
Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), and a phone interview. The FLCAS was not introduced as an “anxiety scale” but rather as a foreign language scale, since I did not want to introduce a bias about the interests of this study. From the design of the demographic survey, and the interview questions, I learned about the importance of using precise and clear questions. The pilot study also provided me with the opportunity to practice scoring the FLCAS with a key that was provided in the book, entitled *Becoming a Language Teacher*, by Horwitz (2008, 2013). Since I wanted to obtain more data than I obtained on my pilot study, I adjusted the demographic survey and the interview questions for both clarity and depth. In addition, I applied the interview and FLCAS twice, and created a set of reflection questions, which were also administered twice.

In this study I acted as a participant observer and my observations of the students were strictly informal. These informal observations were only used for the purpose of being aware of the classroom dynamics and becoming familiar with instances the participants mentioned in their answers. Although observation was not one of the instruments officially utilized in this study, being in the classroom with the participants and teaching them the language provided me with the opportunity to be present as the phenomenon I investigated occurred. In addition to the perspective of the participants, this informal observation provided me with another perspective from which to describe the occurrences. My perspective consists of my experience as a Hebrew teacher of many years, as well as my experiences as a student in classrooms where English was the language of instruction, when it was not my mother tongue. The observation that I performed took place in the “Natural Settings” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 197) where the situation occurred. I utilized “Participant Observation” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 206) in order to minimize the extent to which my presence altered the situation being researched. I observed the
participants in their daily life as they were engaged in the situation being studied. I informed my students about my occasional informal observations, and therefore, I participated in the study openly.

Finally, in an attempt to distance myself in the role of researcher from my participants, email was the only means I employed to collect all data from the participants. All of the instruments (the demographic survey, the two interviews, the two reflections, the FLCAS) were sent to the participants via email. The participants were instructed to choose a pseudonym, which they used throughout the entire study. Each instrument the participants emailed back to me was received via Google Docs, which immediately placed the data into a spreadsheet without disclosing the sender’s email address. The identities of the participants were protected and kept completely anonymous through this submitting process and the use of pseudonyms. Anonymity was also important in order to encourage the students to be honest and genuine in their responses and avoid tailoring their responses to what they might assume the researcher wanted to see. Unlike the pilot study, which utilized phone interviews, this study limited all correspondence between the participants and me to online written format with pseudonyms in order to ensure anonymity. No verbal interviews were performed during this study.

This study consisted of several phases of data collection in addition to my periodic observations. I randomly conducted observations throughout the semester and added these observations to my findings in order to enhance the findings that were collected from the participants.

**Phase I.** The first phase of data collection commenced at the beginning of this fall 2013 semester in the entry-level Hebrew classroom. During class time, I introduced and briefly described my study, and I requested volunteers. I notified the students to expect an email from
me in the next couple of days explaining my research in more detail. I informed students that all of them would receive email communication regarding the study throughout the semester, since I was not privy to the identities of the participants. I encouraged full participation from the students, and I explained the purpose of this was to provide me with feedback for the purpose of future improvement of this course and the courses of other language educators. Following this oral introduction, I sent an email to the entire class of entry-level Hebrew students at Skidmore College and SUNYA. In this email, I described my study, discussed the importance of participation, and requested their participation. I also discussed the instruments used in this study; the dates by which each instrument would be emailed and the due date for the return of each instrument. In this email I included the informed consent form (Appendix I), and links to the demographic survey (Appendix II) and the first FLCAS (entitled Foreign Language Scale) (Appendix III). In the informed consent form, I explained that by completing and submitting the demographic survey the students consent to participate in this study. I also explained they could choose to withdraw from the study at any point with no consequence. I introduced each instrument and the approximate time they would take to complete. The demographic survey has twenty-three background questions to discover prior knowledge and past experience of other foreign languages. It also investigated their experience with and connection to the Hebrew language.

**Phase II.** The second phase included emailing the students a link to the first foreign language scale (FLCAS) (Appendix III) and a due date by which to return this scale. This scale was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope were the first to treat foreign language anxiety as a distinct phenomenon that is particular to language learning (Young, 1991). They developed the FLCAS in order to assess the level of anxiety
experienced by students learning a foreign language. I contacted Dr. Elaine Horwitz and obtained written permission to utilize this scale for the purpose of this study. The FLCAS contains thirty-three questions, which are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree.” Some of the questions reflect anxiety and some reflect a lack of anxiety and some of the items are considered reverse-score items. Once the participants completed and emailed the scale back to me, an anxiety score was calculated for each participant by averaging his or her responses on the thirty-three question scale. When the questions were negatively worded, responses were reverse scored and recorded. The theoretical range of this scale was from thirty-three to one hundred sixty five and the higher the score on the FLCAS, the higher the level of anxiety in the Hebrew language classroom. The FLCAS was scored according to a key provided in the book, *Becoming a Language Teacher* (Horwitz, 2008, 2013).

To determine a participant’s anxiety level score, the responses were added up after reversing scores on specific items indicated in the key. The total score was divided by thirty-three, which was the total number of questions. According to the key, students with a score less than 3 are not considered anxious. Students who score around 3 are considered slightly anxious, whereas a score of 4 or above is considered fairly anxious.

**Phase III.** Phase three consisted of the initial interview, which was a written online interview (Appendix IV). This interview consisted of 17 open-ended questions. These questions were designed to enhance the background information received from the demographic survey, along with adding some more information about the participants regarding their Hebrew learning experiences. I wanted to discover more about their backgrounds regarding the Hebrew language and their reasons for studying Hebrew in college. I wanted to explore their prior connection to Hebrew and determine how extensive it was. I also asked them about their past experience with
learning languages other than Hebrew, and how they felt after attending their first Hebrew class in college. I questioned the participants about their peers in the classroom and how they felt about the knowledge and connection their peers had with Hebrew. I inquired about areas of language learning which they found challenging and how they overcame them. I also asked about their feelings regarding their parents’ opinion of them compared with their peer’s opinion of them. Finally, I inquired about the classroom environment and what they perceived as helpful to them in the classroom. This type of data provided me with a broad base of information to begin creating a profile of these participants and their emotional, social, and academic states.

Phase IV. In phase IV of the study I emailed the participants the first set of reflection questions (Appendix VI). These five reflection questions were adapted from Brookfield’s (1990) book *The Skillful Teacher*. The questions were designed to help participants reflect upon their current feelings regarding their experience in the Hebrew class. The participants were asked to reflect upon a time when they felt engaged and comfortable in the classroom during a given week as well as when they felt disconnected and uncomfortable in the classroom. They were also asked to reflect upon what factors they found to be helpful and what they found puzzling or confusing in the classroom during the course of a particular week. The final question requested the participants to reflect upon what surprised them in the classroom during a given week. The goal of this reflection was to use open-ended questions to uncover the participants’ feelings and thoughts at specific times during the semester, which was about one month (or a third) into the course. The email with the questions provided the students with a due date by which to return the answers to me.

Phase V. In phase five the students were sent a second set of five reflection questions (Appendix VI). These were the same questions as in Phase IV. This set of questions was sent
about two months into the semester, which was approximately two thirds of the way through the course. The goal of this reflection was to discover what the students felt and thought about their experience up to this point in the semester, which was about two thirds into the course. The email included a due date by which the students were to return their responses to this reflection.

**Phase VI.** This sixth phase involved the second follow-up interview (Appendix V). This interview questionnaire was sent to the students on the last week of class. The online follow-up interview consisted of sixteen mostly open-ended questions. These questions were different from the questions that were asked in the initial interview. The participants were asked to describe their experience in the Hebrew classroom as the course came to an end, as well as what discoveries they made about themselves in this course during this semester. Participants were asked to note what emotions they would use to describe their feelings during the semester and how they felt about their peers in the classroom. They were asked to reflect upon times when they felt confident and times when they felt challenged in the classroom during the semester. They were asked how they overcame these challenges, and what helped them overcome their difficulties in the classroom. They were also asked to reflect upon the semester’s classroom environment, and state what they would change about it if they were the teacher. The last question in this interview requested them to share any additional information heretofore not discussed.

**Phase VII.** The seventh and last phase consisted of the language scale (FLCAS) (Appendix III), which was emailed in the same email as the follow-up interview during the last week of class. This scale was not altered since its first administration and consisted of the same original thirty-three questions. A due date for both the scale and the follow-up interview was included in this email. The goal of the follow-up interview questions and the second FLCAS
was to document any changes the students experienced during the semester related to their feelings, anxiety level, or thoughts during the semester. Among other questions, students were asked to reflect upon the way the course was conducted and express any constructive thoughts about factors that contributed to their success.

**Methods and Procedures for Data Analysis**

Processing, organizing, and analyzing the data occurred throughout the semester. I received the IRB approval for Skidmore College before the SUNYA IRB approval. Therefore, I administered the first two instruments to the Skidmore students and shortly thereafter to the SUNYA students. Except for this initial difference in starting times, all other phases were timed together for both institutions. The first two instruments included the demographic survey and the FLCAS. The demographic survey information was tabulated and organized on paper for further examination and coding. The FLCAS scores were recorded and calculated according to instructions that were provided in Horwitz’s (2008, 2013) book *Becoming a Language Teacher*. In her book, Horwitz indicated the trickiness of the scoring since some questions reflect anxiety while others reflect the lack of anxiety. However, a score of five always indicates the highest level of anxiety and a score of one is always indicative of the lowest level of anxiety. A list of items was provided for straightforward scoring, while the remaining items were scored in a reverse-score manner. Higher total scores on the FLCAS represent higher levels of anxiety. These scores were also tabulated in a table that included both the first and the second set of scores of the FLCAS, which were generated at the end of the semester. Having the scores of the FLCAS displayed together in the same table assisted in visually identifying any changes that occurred in the scores from the beginning to the end of the semester. The rest of the instruments arrived in separate Google Doc spreadsheets and I retyped all of them into Word format. These
instruments included the two sets of reflection questions as well as the initial and follow-up interviews. The retyping process resembled the process of transcription. My intention in retyping all of the information was to become intimately acquainted with the data and to organize all of the interviews in a way that would be conducive to coding.

In my pilot study I utilized the In Vivo (Saldana, 2009) coding method. This type of coding was very suitable for this study since it preserved and honored the participants’ own words and voice, which was a priority to me in this study as well. Saldana maintains that this type of coding is particularly useful in studies when the participants’ own words can enhance and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon that is studied. I employed several rounds of coding until I decided that I exhausted the data. From the initial interview eight categories of coding emerged including: connection to the language, Israel, positive emotions, negative emotions, the awareness of peers, speaking the language, classroom environment, and learning strategies. From the follow-up interview eight categories emerged, however, some categories were different from the initial interview. The follow-up interview categories included: religion, awareness of peers, positive emotions, negative emotions, a discovery I made about myself as a learner, heritage/ non-heritage learners, speaking the language, and learning strategies. In coding the two reflections the same categories emerged in both: awareness of peers, positive emotions, negative emotions, leaning strategies, speaking the language, and how much I know about myself as a learner. In addition to manually coding the data with the In Vivo method, I utilized an online coding program called Dedoose. Both coding methods yielded the same categories of data, which were also similar to those of the pilot study. This program enhanced the coding I did manually by providing me with some visual charts that were helpful in performing comparisons.
of the data. This program enabled me to evaluate the data as a function of the characteristics of the participants, even when some of the data changed as the semester progressed.

In the analysis phase I engaged in searching the participants’ writings for particular words and phrases that repeated and seemed common to several or most of the participants. This constituted the data reduction phase. Once I obtained these words and phrases, I organized them into themes or categories, which became the main units of analysis. These units of analysis were further described and analyzed in the following Chapters. I drew my conclusions based on the data that was organized, categorized, and analyzed.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study necessitated a major ethical consideration due to the fact that I was the participants’ tutor and teacher during the semester at the time of the research. As the researcher, I wanted to make sure that the students did not feel any threat of coercion to participate in this study. The first step taken to alleviate this problem was to design and utilize the informed consent form, which informed the students about the purpose of the study and how they would be protected if they chose to participate. The students were also informed that participation was optional, and that at any time during the study they could cease their participation in the study without any repercussion. In filing the IRB’s for the study, I acknowledged no risk of harm anticipated to the participants. I provided the participants with my contact information, as well as my adviser’s information which they could use at any given time during the research should they have any questions or concerns.

In addition, I made sure to protect the identity of the participants. In this study they were asked to choose a pseudonym, which they used throughout the study. I had no means by which to identify the participants other than their pseudonym, and thus their anonymity was protected.
Since I did not know the identity of the participants, every correspondence with the participants was sent to the entire class via email, participants and non-participants alike. The participants used their pseudonyms to respond online to the instruments, which were sent to the entire class. The responses returned to me anonymously and were automatically recorded by the computer into an Excel chart in a column designated for each particular pseudonym.

Another ethical consideration was related to my dual role of teacher and informal observer in the classroom. This observation could potentially have posed ethical problems for me as the researcher. These potential problems were related to me acting as the participant observer. The first issue was the concern that none of the participants studied should suffer as a result of being observed. The second issue was that I should be able to demonstrate that the identities of the participants involved were never disclosed (Denscombe, 2010, p. 209). These issues required that I made sure ethical standards and guidelines were maintained, and the observation was conducted in an ethical manner. As the teacher and the informal observer I made sure to reflect upon and record my biases thus remaining aware of them throughout the study. I was also not aware of any participants’ identity throughout the semester. This helped me keep my observations very general and limited to the entire classroom, rather than focusing only on the participants. Since this study was qualitative in nature, the issue of trustworthiness was important and efforts were made to address this issue. This is similar to the efforts put forth by a quantitative researcher to address the issues of validity and reliability. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) describe validity as the degree to which something measures what it was meant to measure. They describe reliability as the consistency with which it measures what it is supposed to measure over time. In seeking to assure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, the following describes the manner in which I addressed the issues of validity and reliability.
**Validity.** The research question guided me to seek information about the entire experience of emerging adult students as they took on the learning of Hebrew as a new language in college. The qualitative inquiry methods I employed enabled me to increase the depth and understanding of the situation that I was interested in, as well as provided me with a wealth of details. Unlike quantitative inquiry, where validity is ensured mainly by the careful construction of the instruments and focusing on their appropriate administration, in qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). According to Patton, in order to insure validity in qualitative inquiry, the credibility of the methods relies on the skill, competence, and rigor of the researcher. As the researcher, I conducted a pilot study prior to this current study, which was very similar to this study. I learned much from the prior pilot study about myself as a researcher, as well as the importance of the quality of my instruments and refined these instruments accordingly. I learned that I preferred to approach the participants online rather than in person, since I found that in person I was worried I might use leading questions and prompt the participants for certain responses. I felt more secure with my questions when I had the time to create my surveys and questionnaires in advance and not have to create questions on the spot. As far as the quality of the instruments used in this study, I learned the advantage of refining and testing the questions to make sure the participants would understand them. In the pilot study I utilized general questions, which led to more general answers requiring more clarification. This research utilized questionnaires that were more direct and clearly understood by the participants. In addition, the usage of multiple instruments helped in yielding richer data about the experience, which was very useful for this study. I collected data at various intervals throughout the semester to evaluate for change over time. In my pilot study I utilized a demographic survey, a short phone interview, and the FLCAS. For this research study I changed some of the questions
from the pilot demographic survey and increased the number of times I administered the interview from one to two times. These interviews took place at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The interviews were conducted on-line to ensure absolute privacy and anonymity and thereby protect the identity of my participants. I increased the number of times I administered the FLCAS from once to twice during the semester. The FLCAS was administered once at the beginning and again at the end of the semester. The administration of the FLCAS at two different times during the semester was instrumental in gathering data to track changes in the anxiety level of the participants throughout the semester. I also added a set of reflection questions that were administered to the participants twice during the semester. In considering validity, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) wrote about the need to employ various procedures involving the “redundancy of data gathering… [as it] is important to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study” (pp. 72-73). Furthermore, Denscombe (2010) suggests that the researcher is not only the instrument that derives the data from many resources, but also the researcher is closely involved with the data. The researcher spends a great deal of time on location, as he or she “tend[s] to be very closely bound up with the research instrument – sometimes an integral part of it… the researcher becomes almost an integral part of the data collecting technique” (p. 299). This results in dependability (reliability), which means that the procedures and decisions made by this researcher could be understood and considered by other researchers as reasonable decisions.

As the researcher, I spent intimate time with the data and functioned as an integral part of the data collection. I have been a teacher at Skidmore College and SUNYA teaching the entry-level Hebrew classes at both of these institutions of higher learning for several years. I was the teacher of the classes that were selected to be in this study, and I met with the students for
several hours each week for the entire semester. I also observed these students closely, as well as developed a close teaching and learning relationship with each one of them. I administered the data collection instruments, analyzed the findings, and drew conclusions myself. In essence, I was part of the experience that I sought to learn about, as I functioned within the experience and as the agent that gathered the information about the experience. As the insider researcher, I was very close to my participants and was able to gain access to information that I might not have been able gather if my participants did not know or trust me (Creswell, 2007). I used multiple sources of evidence during the data collection phase in order to ensure maximum validity (Yin, 2003).

**Reliability.** Yin (2003) explains that the objective of reliability is accomplished when another researcher is able to conduct a similar study and arrive at the same findings and conclusions. He further notes, “The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (p. 37). In carefully documenting the design, instruments, and data collection throughout the study, I enabled any researcher to replicate the study and helped to ensure reliability. I paid special attention to the development of the instruments used in this study, and the timing during the semester at which I administered each one of them. I described each data collection method used, and I provided the rationale for each of the methods selected. In my documentation, I provided information about how each instrument was used and how I tested my instruments. I carefully documented all of the responses and described how I recorded and safeguarded the data. I created a separate spreadsheet for the data generated by each instrument, so that each set of results would be separately documented and organized. I also carefully documented the procedure of coding and the derivation of themes. Finally, I documented how I analyzed the findings and arrived at my conclusions and recommendations.
Limitations of the Study

This research study contains several limitations that are related to the common critiques of qualitative research methodology in general and some that are inherent to this particular study’s research design. In recognizing these limitations I have taken the time to carefully think about measures, which would minimize the impact of such limitations.

The selection of a representative sample suitable to address the research question was negotiated at length. This research was qualitative in its nature, so I knew I could conduct it with fewer participants; however, due to my experience with the pilot study, I increased the sample size in order to generate more data. An issue that needed to be addressed was the type of sample that would best serve to answer the research question. Utilizing the Hebrew 101 class at Skidmore was the most favorable choice, since my role in this class was as the students’ tutor, and my studying this group had no effect on their grades in the course. However, the sample size at Skidmore turned out to be too small and I had to include participants from my class at SUNYA, where I am the instructor who assigns the grades. For both sample groups, the participation of students in this study and the way they responded to my instruments could have been tainted by the fact that I represented the authority figure and their teacher. At SUNYA I was also the source of the participants’ grades, which presented a power imbalance. The participants might have felt coerced into participating, and possibly a desire to impress me or answer questions in a way they may have thought I wanted them to. Although no evidence of any issues related to me doing research with my own students was apparent, it may have been a factor nevertheless.

Another limitation of this study is related to the sample size used. Due to the nature of the study, the research sample was restricted, thus minimizing the possibility of generalizing this
study to other groups and other programs. Since I was only interested in the experience of entry-level Hebrew students, I was limited to the number of students who registered for this class during the semester this study was conducted. Due to the small sample size and its homogeneous quality, since most of the participants were middle class Jewish students, the ability to generalize the findings of this study is limited. Denscombe (2010) defines generalizability as “applying the findings from research to other examples of the phenomenon” (p. 298). Although generalizability was not the intended goal of this study, I was able to address the issue of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008) which means that by the thick and rich description and the detailed information provided by this study, the knowledge generated could possibly be applied to other contexts. Using a small sample size makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other similar instances and other contexts. However, the depth and the amount of details provided about the circumstances studied will hopefully serve to relate the analysis from this study to other situations.

An additional limitation related to the sample in this study was the population sample chosen for this study. This sample consisted of a specific population of participants who attended either a small liberal arts college or a local state university. These students did not represent a heterogeneous body of students, but rather somewhat affluent students from an educated background who attended a small, quiet, northeastern suburban college and the local university whose Hebrew class consisted mostly of down state New York students. Since I did not have participants from other colleges or universities who registered for the Hebrew 101 course, I did not have an opportunity to study a vast variety of student types. Instead, I utilized a small sample of relatively homogeneous students who attended a local college and a state university. Connected to this sample-related limitation are the characteristics of those students...
who chose to participate, versus those who declined to participate. The group of participants
may have had factors in common which led them to take part in this study, whereas the group of
students that declined to participate may not have had reasons in common to do so. This may
have led to a more homogenous sample of participants and a decrease in the generalizability of
the results.

The goal of this study was not to focus on the generalizability of the findings, but rather,
to gain a better understanding of the experience of learning Hebrew in the entry-level classroom.
Educators may benefit from additional studies of this type utilizing larger class sizes at larger
and more diverse institutions with a more heterogeneous student body. In order to determine if
my data and conclusions are unique to the sample studied or if they are applicable to emerging
adult students at most institutions of higher learning, this study should be repeated at several
additional universities. Expanding a similar study to include several additional colleges or
universities would also provide a good opportunity to examine differences between students at
different types of institutions while studying a new language.

Another limitation that existed in the design of the instruments for the study was the
online nature of all of them. In order to minimize the effects that I would have on my students
while collecting data from them, I designed the instruments to be administered online. This
design provided me with a couple of advantages: one advantage was the ability of these
instruments to maintain the anonymity of the participants. This was very beneficial in order to
minimize the possibility of fear or discomfort the students may have experienced while
answering my questions directly during a phone or in-person interview. I also wanted to increase
the students’ ability to be genuine and honest in their answers by not reacting to my responses.
Another advantage of the online instruments is that it gave the participants time to contemplate
their responses without feeling rushed. Due to the fact that seven instruments were administered and the participants were required to fill out and return all of these seven instruments, I found the online approach was advantageous and convenient for both the participants and me. Due to the online approach, I was able to more easily recruit and elicit the responses from the students throughout the semester without overly inconveniencing them and causing them to drop out of this study. However, the online instruments do come with their own share of limitations. The main limitation was that there was no chance of returning them back to the participants for member checking for the purpose of clarification and follow-up questioning. Another limitation may be simply the differences in students; some students may communicate better in speaking than in writing. Thus, students who prefer to speak rather than write may have chosen not to participate in this study, which required online writing. Communication through this study was totally restricted to the online mode except for our shared experience in the classroom, which was kept separate from the data collection. Nevertheless, due to the administration of multiple instruments during several points in the semester, I felt that I was able to gather a wealth of detailed and in-depth information, which contributed greatly to this study. Future studies may be able to expand on this study and add a phase of data collection, which will involve a personal encounter such as a phone, Skype, or in-person interview. Such additional phases may allow expansion and further clarification of the data collected.

A final limitation to this study was also related to the instruments in this study. This study was piloted during the semester prior to the execution of this study. In the pilot study the interview questions were very general and broad. In this study, I fine-tuned the questions for the interview and added more reflection questions with the intention of acquiring additional amounts and depths of data. Although this time I asked more specific questions about the participants’
experience in learning Hebrew, I was very careful not to ask leading questions and thus the questions remained on the general side. I tested these questions prior to this study with one of my former students, who was a participant in my pilot study. The student’s answers were more specific than the answers on the pilot study. Therefore, I assumed the more specific and direct questions used in this study would yield even more detailed and in-depth answers than the pilot study. However, I believe that even the questions used in this research project needed to be more specific in order to yield even more data.

**Chapter Summary**

This Chapter provided a detailed description of the research methodology employed in this study to explore the phenomenon of how entry-level college Hebrew language students describe their learning experience, and whether the awareness of peers or the classroom environment affect this experience. The sample for this study consisted of students who enrolled in two elementary Hebrew classes I taught during the fall semester of 2013 at Skidmore College and SUNYA.

The seven phases of this study were described. All participants received periodical emails throughout the semester including the instruments they were required to fill out. The students returned each of them via email using a pseudonym where their identities were completely protected. The first phase involved an informed consent, which arrived to the students via email along with a demographic survey. The second phase involved an online foreign language scale (FLCAS), which scored their language-learning anxiety level at the beginning of the semester. The third phase included an initial interview, establishing a baseline about their thoughts and feelings as the semester was beginning and learning about their past experiences related to studying a foreign language. Their expectations for this course were also
recorded. In the fourth phase, the students were emailed the first set of reflection questions, to ascertain how the students felt about different aspects of the classroom after about one month of instruction. Phase Five included the same set of reflection questions asked at a later point in the semester to learn about any new information, as well as to compare the participants’ answers with the previous responses they provided in phase four. These reflection questions were asked about two months into the semester. Phase six included a set of follow up interview questions, to learn about the participants’ thoughts and feelings at the end of the semester, and explore for new reactions and compare to their initial interview responses. Finally, the seventh phase was the emailing of the last foreign language scale (FLCAS). The scores from the second scale were used to compare with the initial scores, in an attempt to explore any changes or lack of changes in anxiety levels. This Chapter concluded with a discussion about ethical considerations related to validity and reliability issues. Various limitations of this study were discussed and reviewed and recommendations for future research were proposed.
Chapter 4

Research Findings

Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of entry-level college Hebrew students. Particular attention was paid to any factors that affected their experience such as language-learning anxiety and the students’ awareness of peers. Data was collected to investigate how these factors affected the students’ self-reported Hebrew learning experience. In this study, I was interested in exploring the entire experience of entry-level college Hebrew students from the beginning of the semester through the completion of the course. The literature is deficient about the experience of entry-level students learning Hebrew. This study is unique because, unlike other studies, it focuses on the experience of emerging adult students who elect to study Hebrew in college.

The entry-level foreign language classroom typically consists of a heterogeneous population of students in terms of their background knowledge and their connection to the target language. However, the different student backgrounds and connections to the language may affect their learning experience, comfort levels and motivations to learn. The differences between students usually stem from the type and the strength of their connection to the target language. These various backgrounds may consist of false beginners (those who previously studied the language in a formal setting), and heritage learners (those who have a familial connection to Hebrew or to Israel). Some students may actually be a combination of both false beginners and heritage learners, while others may have absolutely no prior experience with or
connection to the target language whatsoever. The effects of these differences between students have been studied and documented in various college foreign language classes (Klee & Rogers, 1989; Oukada, 2001; Valdes, 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003; Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Tallon, 2011). However, I found no studies about the experience of entry-level college Hebrew language students.

In this Chapter, I describe the manner in which the data was organized, analyzed, and the findings presented. Data collection and organization was based on the process of induction and utilized a large set of data and sought to narrow it down to the fewer important key ideas (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The process of analysis began during the organization and transformation of the raw data into “research finding” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 96). I followed the discourse analysis approach in which words were not taken at face value but rather deeper meanings were sought in an effort to uncover hidden messages (Denscombe, 2010). Therefore, I looked very closely at how the participants expressed themselves through their choice of words and used many of their quotes in order to stay true to their own expression.

This research project was a qualitative study that utilized a sample group of entry-level Hebrew students as participants. The list and description of the instruments used are presented in table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments Used in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd instrument</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In working with the data, I involved a “blend of approaches” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 99); key codes were determined from the prior pilot study. New codes were added as they emerged from the new information collected. The written data that was collected via the seven instruments was retyped and prepared for analysis by organizing and reducing it to categories and themes through the process of coding which enabled me to present the findings in figures and tables for discussion (Creswell, 2007).

The data was generated and collected at purposeful and specific times during the fall semester of two elementary college Hebrew courses. The intention was to collect data at intervals, which represented the entire experience of the students throughout the first semester of learning Hebrew. Therefore, the first round of data that included the demographic survey, the initial online interview, and the first Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was collected in the very beginning of the semester. The FLCAS was entitled Foreign Language Scale in order to avoid tainting students’ responses due to the presence of the word anxiety in the original title. These three data collection instruments provided baseline information about the initial state of the participants regarding their anxiety level about learning a foreign language as well as their feelings and thoughts about learning Hebrew. The following month, the first

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Reflection Questions</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>1st reflection questions</td>
<td>One month into the semester</td>
<td>Thoughts about the learning experience after one month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>2nd reflection questions</td>
<td>Two months into the semester</td>
<td>Feelings and thoughts after two months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>2nd Foreign Language Scale (FLCAS)</td>
<td>End of the semester</td>
<td>Language-learning anxiety scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Follow-up online interview questions</td>
<td>End of the semester</td>
<td>In depth feelings and thoughts at the culmination of the semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reflection questionnaire was administered, which provided me with data about their experience one-third of the way through the semester. The second reflection questionnaire was administered during the following month, which provided the participants’ perspective on the learning experience two-thirds of the way through the semester. Both reflections had the same five questions, which inquired what the participants found to be engaging and challenging at these two points into the semester. In addition, the participants were asked what they found helpful and surprising. The last phase of data collection, which included the final two instruments consisted of the second administration of the FLCAS as well as a follow-up interview, took place at the very end of the semester. These two instruments provided information about the students’ anxiety level at the culmination of the course, along with their answers to the follow-up interview, which provided a summation of their experience learning Hebrew. The online interview differed from the online reflections in that it was more in-depth and included questions relating to the participants’ experience over the whole semester.

This Chapter presents the findings that were generated via the instruments administered to the participants. Tables and charts accompany the description of the findings in order to present the data in a visual fashion. In addition, some participants’ quotes are presented when they support points that are made, since the quotes provide the closest representation of the participants’ reality of the phenomenon that was studied.

Description of the Findings

A total of seven data collection instruments were used, two of which were administered twice. Each instrument provided either a score or information about what the students’ thought and felt at certain times during the first semester while taking an entry-level Hebrew class. Five out of the five students from Skidmore College and fourteen out of the twenty-six students from
SUNYA participated, composing a total of nineteen participants in this study. All participants were first time entry-level Hebrew students. Near the mid-semester point, two students from SUNYA dropped out of the study, resulting in seventeen participants who submitted all of the instruments. It should be noted that no students dropped out of the Hebrew course, including the two participants who withdrew from this study. I have no information about the reason these participants withdrew from this study, since their identity was anonymous. The initial information received from these two participants was utilized, but no other comparisons were made between early and later instruments for these two students since they did not complete the second reflection, FLCAS II, and the follow-up interview.

**The Demographic Survey**

The demographic survey was the first data collection instrument to be administered (appendix I). The survey consisted of twenty-two questions. Information that was collected included: gender, religious background, year at school, and questions about prior knowledge of other languages and of Hebrew in particular. A few questions were asked regarding the students’ feelings about learning Hebrew including their favorite aspects and their most challenging aspects. The two last questions on the survey inquired about how concerned the participants were about the level of their peers’ prior Hebrew knowledge in order to assess their concern regarding the presence of Heritage learners in the classroom. The last question inquired about the participants’ feelings regarding their classmates’ opinion of their performance in Hebrew, in order to assess their level of one of the causes of foreign language-learning anxiety.

Some of the main findings from the demographic survey are presented in table 3.

Table 3
### Demographic Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Prior languages</th>
<th>Knowledge of Hebrew</th>
<th>Plans to continue learning Hebrew</th>
<th>Favorite aspect of Hebrew</th>
<th>Challenging aspect of Hebrew</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Reading, listening</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Spanish, French</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking, Speaking</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Spanish, French, Spanish, German, *ASL, Arabic, Italian, Latin, Portuguese</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Speaking, Reading, Listening Writing</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Speaking, Reading</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Spanish, French</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking, Reading, Speaking, Listening Writing</td>
<td>Reading Reading</td>
<td>Jewish Not Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>French</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking, Listening</td>
<td>Speaking, Reading</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Spanish, ASL</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking, Listening</td>
<td>Speaking, reading, listening writing</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Reading, writing</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacinto</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking, reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Jewish (Jewish mother, non Jewish father) Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spanish, Italian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Spanish, German</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking, listening</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Not Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itai</td>
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<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
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<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Spanish, Italian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Speaking, Speaking</td>
<td>Not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In examining the demographic survey some facts emerged. In this study, the number of female participants exceeded the males by three participants. The majority (84%) of the participants were Jewish. Seventeen out of the nineteen participants (89%) were between the ages of 18-21 with two outliers, one of which was 24 and the other 26. Ten of the participants (53%) had some prior knowledge of Hebrew, while the other nine (47%) indicated they had no prior knowledge of the language. However, fourteen out of the nineteen participants (74%) attended Hebrew school prior to college, while five of the participants (26%) had no Hebrew school background. All participants, except for one, had a prior knowledge and experience of learning another language. The striking majority of the participants had knowledge of Spanish and French, although a few participants knew additional languages such as Italian, Latin, Dutch, German, and American Sign Language (ASL). The majority of the participants listed their reason for taking Hebrew was their connection to the Jewish religion or Israel. The majority of participants (84%) listed their favorite aspect of Hebrew learning as speaking. The challenging aspects of learning Hebrew were divided between reading, speaking, listening, and writing, with reading cited most often and writing the least. The majority of participants (63%) listed excitement as the emotion that most commonly described how they felt about taking a Hebrew course. Eight out of the nineteen participants (42%) listed their goal for taking Hebrew was to be able to speak the language better. Some expressed the desire to be able to hold a conversation.
with native Hebrew speakers, while others said they wanted “to be fluent to get around well in Israel” (Rose). Itai and Maya expressed the desire to be able to speak to parents and family members in Israel with better fluency. Maya wrote, “I always found it embarrassing as a child of Israeli parents that I was not able to converse with Israelis and it felt like a handicap to me.” She believed by learning Hebrew, “I will be more comfortable with speaking Hebrew to Israelis and my family.” The summarized demographic findings are presented by categories in table 4.

Table 4

Demographic Data Summarized by Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Percentage of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Jewish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior knowledge of Hebrew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for learning Hebrew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish religion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew is different and unique</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to fulfill a requirement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite aspect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging aspect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling about learning Hebrew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 19
The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) I and II

The second and fifth instruments to be administered during the semester were the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) (appendix II). The purpose of administering the FLCAS was trifocal: to find out whether the participants experienced foreign language anxiety, to determine what aspects of foreign language learning made them nervous, and to track any changes in the scores during the course of the semester. According to Horwitz (1991) the FLCAS is a self-report measurement that assesses the degree of anxiety, “as evident by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychological symptoms, and avoidance behaviors” (p. 37). The nineteen participants completed the FLCAS I at the beginning of the semester and seventeen of them completed the FLCAS II at the end of the semester. An individual score was calculated for each participant. A great deal of foreign language anxiety is experienced by many students in the classroom in response to at least one or more aspects of foreign language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) identified three main factors of language-learning anxiety relating to performance evaluation in academic and social context: Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. I documented the participants’ scores according to these three main categories.

Initially, I examined each participant’s FLCAS score individually in order to identify their anxiety level and to detect any changes in their anxiety level between their first individual score and the second individual score. This was followed by an examination of how the entire group of participants scored as a whole. And finally, specific questions were analyzed more in depth, since I noticed there were some questions the majority of participants scores showed more anxiety.
A score on the FLCAS of below 3.0 indicates lack of anxiety, where a score of three and above indicates a level of anxiety, which increases up to a maximum score of 5.0. The scoring of the first FLCAS revealed that all of the participants demonstrated low scores of anxiety ranging from 1.7 (neutral) to 3.7 (anxious) with a mean score of 2.7, a mode score of 2.3, a median score of 2.5, and range of 2.0. Thirteen out of the nineteen participants’ (68%) scores indicated neutral anxiety levels, while six participants’ (32%) scores indicated a low level of anxiety. The second FLCAS was administered at the end of the semester to examine for any changes in the anxiety level of the participants. The scoring of the second FLCAS revealed again that all of the participants demonstrated low anxiety scores ranging from 1.5 (neutral) to 3.9 (anxious) with a mean score of 2.7, a mode score of 3.5, a median score of 2.5, and a range score of 2.4. Eleven participants (65%) out of the seventeen who took the FLCAS II scores indicated neutral anxiety, while six participants (35%) out of the seventeen had a score that indicated levels of anxiety. The anxiety score levels rose slightly from the FLCAS I to the FLCAS II by 3%. The calculation took into account the reduction in number of participants.

Table 5 below summarizes the individual FLCASI and FLCASII scores as well as the change between them according to their backgrounds.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Non-Heritage</th>
<th>Low-Level Heritage</th>
<th>FLCAS I Raw Score</th>
<th>FLCAS I Final Score</th>
<th>FLCAS II Raw Score</th>
<th>FLCAS II Final Score</th>
<th>Change in Final FLCAS I, II Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>+.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>+.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>-.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>96</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>+.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>+.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>+1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>+.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>+.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>+.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacinto</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>+.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itai</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* + Indicates rise in score  
* - Indicates a reduction in score

In this chart, I made use of a new category for a certain type of heritage learner, which I termed Low-level Heritage Learner (LLHL). This type of heritage learner has had some experience with the target language but only to a very small degree. What is notable about this group, as shown in table 5, is that all low-level heritage learners experienced an increase in anxiety by the end of the semester. Two (50%) out of the four non-heritage learners experienced an increase of anxiety while the other two experienced a decrease. Four (36%) out of the eleven heritage learners experienced an increase of anxiety while seven (64%) out of the eleven heritage learners experienced a decrease in anxiety.

Only six (32%) out of the nineteen participants demonstrated a low level of anxiety on the FLCAS I. Similarly, only six (32%) of the participants indicated anxiety on the FLCAS II. The individuals who had anxiety at the beginning of the course were the same individuals who had anxiety at the end of the course except for two students. Jonathan’s score indicated anxiety initially, and no anxiety on the second scale, while Danny’s score indicated no anxiety on the first scale but showed anxiety on the second scale. Interestingly, nine students experienced an
increase in their level of anxiety by an average of 0.2 points on the FLCAS and eight students experienced a decrease in anxiety by an average of 0.2 points on the FLCAS. Another interesting factor to note is that most of the increases in anxiety scores occurred for the students who indicated being nervous on the follow-up interview. Phoebe, Charlotte, Michael, Abigail, Rose, and Danny all indicated feeling nervous about the course on the follow-up interview, and all experienced an increase in anxiety scores. The only exception was Arya who indicated feeling nervous on the follow-up interview and had a decrease in FLCAS score by -0.3. All students who demonstrated anxiety had relatively low anxiety on both pre- and post-tests.

In the pilot study, which was conducted prior to this project, I noted similar scores indicating low anxiety on the FLCAS, which was administered only once to those participants. The overall low FLCAS scores did not correlate with my observations and experiences with anxious students in the classroom. This led me to examine individual questions that received a high score on the FLCAS more closely and perform further analysis that provided additional insight into the results. A closer examination of the questions on the FLCAS revealed that specific questions scored higher anxiety marks than others. Responses to those specific questions on the FLCAS seemed to be better indicators of the participants’ anxiety level than most of the other questions and more accurately coincided with the online anonymous interview questions. Other researchers who used the FLCAS in their studies also experienced various issues requiring modification of the scale. In using the FLCAS, Kitano (2001) modified and shortened the FLCAS by omitting some of the questions in order to address only specific areas of interest to his study regarding nervousness during oral practice in class. He kept some of the original questions while other items were eliminated such as inquiring about concerns regarding grades, anxiety related to tests, and concerns about discomfort while speaking the language.
outside of the classroom. Similarly, Aida (1994) and Iscan (2011) changed some of the words used in the questions of the FLCAS to adjust the scale for their participants. Although the entire thirty-three question FLCAS was administered in my pilot study as well as in this study, in the analysis of the results, the focus was mainly on questions that scored high by most participants, and I did not discuss FLCAS questions with a majority of low scores.

Lucas, Miraflores, and Go (2011) classified the items in the FLCAS questionnaire into a chart according to the categories described by Horwitz et al. (1986). The first three categories measured the participants’ foreign language performance anxiety. These categories are divided according to the causes of language-learning anxiety that may be prevalent among foreign language learners and they include: (1) Eight items relating to communication apprehension (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, and 32), which is characterized by fear and anxiety when communicating with people. This includes learners’ anxiety due to a fear of not understanding others and not being understood themselves. (2) Nine items (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, 33) relating to a fear of negative evaluation by others including the learner’s apprehension regarding learning activities in the classroom and peer pressure (3) Five items (2, 8, 10, 19, 21) relating to test anxiety, which is a type of performance anxiety, which is caused by fear of failing a test, and (4) The remaining eleven items were placed in a group relating to foreign language classroom anxiety, which is caused by the learning environment and includes the teacher’s personality and teaching styles. For this study I utilized and modified the Lucas, Miraflores and Go’s chart in order to identify the distribution areas of the participants’ scores across these four categories on the FLCAS I and FLCAS II. FLCAS questions according to categories are presented in table 6.
Table 6

Classification of Questions According to Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Language Anxiety</th>
<th>Question Divided by Categories</th>
<th>Highly Scored Questions FLCAS I</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
<th>Highly Scored Questions FLCAS II</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Anxiety</td>
<td>1,9,14,18,24,27,29, and 32</td>
<td>1,9,14,29,32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14,29,32</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Negative Evaluation</td>
<td>3,7,13,15,20,23,25,31, and 33</td>
<td>7,15,33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20,33</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Anxiety</td>
<td>2,8,10,19, and 21</td>
<td>2,10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety</td>
<td>4,5,6,11,12,16,17,22,26,28, and 30</td>
<td>4,11,12,22,17,22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,12,22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Adopted from Lucas, Miraflores, and Go (2011, p. 104)
* Total number of highly scored questions on the FLCAS I = 14
* Total number of highly scored questions on the FLCAS II = 10
Chart 1

*Number of Highly scored questions on FLCAS I and FLCAS II by type of question*

- Left columns – FLCAS I
- Right columns – FLCAS II

The question most participants were anxious about (12 participants) on the FLCAS I was question 33. This question stated “I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven’t prepared in advance.” Question 2 was the question that had the second largest number of participants who indicated anxiety (11 participants) stating, “I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class.” This question was a “reverse-score item” (Horwitz, 2008, 2013, p. 264) in which the score is reversed. Following closely behind were questions 9, 14, and 22 (10 participants for each of these questions). Question nine stated, “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class,” and question 14 stated “I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers” and was reverse-scored. Question 22 stated, “I don’t feel pressure to prepare very well for language class” and was reverse-scored as well.
These five questions from the FLCAS I, which the largest number of participants indicated anxiety about, represent one question from the Fear of negative evaluation category (Question #33), one question from the test anxiety category (Question #2), two questions from the communication anxiety category (Questions #9, 14), and one from the foreign language classroom anxiety category (Question #22). Each category of the causes of language-learning anxiety is represented, with the communication category represented the most.

The questions that received the highest scores (evoking higher levels of anxiety) on the FLCAS II were questions 14 and 22 (nine participants each) both reversed-scored. Question 14 stated, “I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers and question 22 stated, “I don’t feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.” Questions 32 and 33 scored second highest on the FLCAS II (eight participants each). Question 32 stated, “I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language” (reverse score), and question 33 stated, “I get nervous when the language teacher asks me questions which I haven’t prepared in advance.” Question 10 was the third most highly scored question (scored highly by seven participants). It stated, “I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.” These five questions scored highest on the FLCAS II, with the largest number of participants indicating anxiety from all four categories of language anxiety listed on Table 6. These questions included: One question from the category of Fear of negative evaluation (Question #33), one question from the test anxiety category (Question #10), two questions from the communication anxiety category (Questions #14, 32), and one from the foreign language classroom anxiety category (Question #22). Each category of the causes of language-learning anxiety is represented, with the communication category represented twice, as occurred on the FLCAS I.
Horwitz et al. (1991, as cited by Aida, 1994) considered five specific questions to be most indicative of speech anxiety. These questions include: question 4: “It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language class,” Question 9: “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in foreign language class,” Question 24: “If feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students,” Question 29: “I get nervous when I don’t understand every word the foreign language teacher says,” and question 33: “I get nervous when the foreign language teacher asks questions which I haven’t prepared in advance.” In examining the questions that most of the participants indicated anxiety about on the FLCAS I, four items (questions 4, 9, 29, and 33) out of the five that were identified by Horwitz et al. as indicative of speech anxiety were commonly selected by the participants to
indicate anxiety except for question 24. In fact, twelve out of the nineteen participants indicated anxiety relating to question 33. On the FLCAS II questions 4, and 29 scored high levels of anxiety by five participants each, question 9, and 24 scored highly by 4 participants each, and question 33 was the second most highly scored question (eight participants out of the seventeen).

The most highly scored questions on the FLCAS II were question 14 and 22, which indicated communication anxiety and general foreign language classroom anxiety. When examining the percentage differences between the FLCAS I, and the FLCAS II, it is evident that questions 14, 22, and 32 were scored at the same percentage on both scales. A decrease occurred on the rest of the questions from the FLCAS I to the FLCAS II.

The number of participants indicating anxiety on the most highly scored questions on the FLCAS I and FLCAS II are presented in table 7.

Table 7

**FLCAS I & FLCAS II – Distribution of the Most Highly Scored Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>FLCAS I Number of Participants (out of 19)</th>
<th>FLCAS II Number of Participants (out of 17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2</td>
<td>11 (58%)</td>
<td>Question 2 6 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4</td>
<td>8 (42%)</td>
<td>Question 4 5 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 9</td>
<td>10 (53%)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 10</td>
<td>9 (47%)</td>
<td>Question 10 7 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 11</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 12</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>Question 12 5 (29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Initial Online Interview

The third instrument utilized was the *Initial Online Interview* (appendix III). This interview was administered at the beginning of the semester during the first month of the course. This interview was followed by a second interview, which was the seventh instrument and was titled the *Follow-up Online Interview* (appendix IV). Both interviews were coded manually as well as via the Dedoose program, yielding categories of interest for this study. The interviews were analyzed separately and then compared to each other. The purpose of the analysis was to examine the full experience of the students from their written interviews, which I collected at the beginning and at the end of the semester. In addition to the separate analysis, a comparison was done to observe any changes that have emerged in the students’ reported experience from the beginning to the end of the course.

The categories that emerged from the Initial Interview included:

- Connection to the language: via religion (Judaism), Bar/Bat Mitzvah, or via Israel
- Heritage and Non-heritage learners
- Emotions: positive emotions, or negative emotions towards learning Hebrew
- Awareness of peers: Positive awareness, or negative awareness

*Questions that most participants scored anxiety on the FLCAS I & II*

| Question 14* | 10 (53%) | Question 14 | 9 (53%) |
| Question 15 | 7 (37%) | Question 20 | 5 (29%) |
| Question 22* | 10 (53%) | Question 22 | 9 (53%) |
| Question 29 | 7 (37%) | Question 29 | 5 (29%) |
| Question 32* | 9 (47%) | Question 32 | 8 (47%) |
| Question 33* | 12 (63%) | Question 33 | 8 (47%) |
• Working with peers
• Speaking the language (fluency, communication)
• Learning strategies

The categories that emerged from the second follow-up interview were identical to the categories of the initial interview except that connection to the Hebrew language was not mentioned. In the second interview there was more information related to how the presence of heritage learners affected the experience of the participants with less experience with the language. An additional category that emerged in the follow-up interview was the discoveries and expectations of the participants. The initial online interview differed from the follow-up online interview in that it contained more questions related to the background of the students and their feelings about the upcoming course. The follow-up online interview contained questions related to the overall experience of the participants.

**Categories.** These are the categories that emerged from the initial and follow-up interviews as themes mentioned frequently by the participants as they described their experience of taking an entry-level Hebrew course.

1. **Connection to the Language**

   This category emerged in the initial interview. In this category of connection students explained their background as it related to Hebrew and expressed what their connection was to the Hebrew language and their motivation to learn the language in order to further develop their connection to the Jewish religion and/or Israel. Table 8 demonstrates some of the students’ statements regarding their connection to Hebrew.

Table 8

*Connections to the Hebrew Language*
Phoebe (Heritage)
“...I’ve always wanted to learn Hebrew and wanted to learn the language of my religion...I also learned some Hebrew when I went to Israel”

Maya (Heritage)
“I am Jewish so learning Hebrew only makes sense”

Bill (Heritage)
“I went to Hebrew school during my elementary school years”

Rose (Heritage)
“I went to Hebrew school once a week through high school...I want to be able to go to Israel again and speak the language and get by easily”

Jordan (Heritage)
“I’ve been to Israel several times”

Michael (Low-level heritage)
“I went to Hebrew school before my Bar Mitzvah so I could learn to read the Torah”

Malory (Non-heritage)
“I visited Israel twice this year and have been getting more in touch with my Jewish roots, so I wanted to be able to connect with Hebrew more”

2. Heritage and Non-heritage Learners

The heritage learner and false beginner category emerged from data collected on the demographic survey as well as both the initial and the follow-up interviews. Participants either described themselves as the ones who had prior learning experience in Hebrew, or they discussed their lack of background in comparison to their classmates who had prior Hebrew knowledge.

Participants’ experience in the Hebrew language is described in table 9.

Table 9
Participants’ Hebrew Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Type of background</th>
<th>Heritage or Non-heritage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>No experience in Hebrew</td>
<td>Non-heritage learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>No experience in Hebrew</td>
<td>Non-heritage learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya</td>
<td>No experience in Hebrew</td>
<td>Non-heritage learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>No experience in Hebrew</td>
<td>Non-heritage learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>No experience in Hebrew</td>
<td>Non-heritage learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typically, heritage learners described the extent of their knowledge and skills in Hebrew or where they were initially exposed to Hebrew learning. Phoebe described her knowledge as knowing the alphabet and “coming along with basic vocab and numbers.” Telaviv, too, enjoyed having the opportunity to “dive back into the language [he] was once fluent in…I have learned many of these words previously.” As a non-heritage learner, Abigail noted, “I was one of the few with no experience whatsoever…they’re almost all Jewish and have a background in Hebrew or have a parent(s) who speaks Hebrew in their home.” She further added, “I wish I had half their knowledge!”

Some participants wrote about their classmates’ ability in Hebrew. Malory and Arya noted that some of the students in the classroom had “a lot of experience with Hebrew.” Some participants described the prior knowledge their peers had in Hebrew as a disconcerting factor. Charlotte wrote, “the class seemed to be composed mainly of students who speak at least a little of the language. I wasn’t expecting that and I still find it intimidating.” She further suggested creating two entry-level Hebrew classes, “one for most of my classmates (those who know the language, at least basically), and one for those who have no background in Hebrew.” Michael also felt intimidated by those students who knew Hebrew. He wrote, “it was easier for them to
understand everything than the students that had non [no knowledge].” He suggested, “only students that have no Hebrew speaking or translating knowledge can take [this] course.”

On the other hand, Rose “like[d] how there was a wide spectrum because that means many people are in the same boat and should not feel uncomfortable with their personal level of understanding.” Arya added, “Having some of the classmates with more experience is always helpful because they pick up on some things that I miss or wouldn’t know, like names and places.” It is clear to see that most participants were able to sense how much knowledge of the Hebrew language they had in comparison to their classmates. This fact stressed some of the students to the point that they suggested separate classes for heritage (those students who had relatives from Israel and were exposed to Hebrew) and non-heritage learners, yet other students found it helpful or comforting to have these students in the classroom.

3. Emotions

The category that emerged from both interviews was the emotions participants experienced while learning Hebrew. In both the initial and the follow-up interviews participants expressed positive and negative feelings about the experience of learning Hebrew. These feelings are summarized in table 10.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Non-Heritage</th>
<th>Low-level Heritage</th>
<th>Initial Interview Positive emotions</th>
<th>Initial interview Negative emotions</th>
<th>Follow-up interview Positive emotions</th>
<th>Follow-up interview Negative emotions</th>
<th>FLCAS II *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Easier</td>
<td>Slightly nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacinto</td>
<td></td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Slightly nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itai</td>
<td></td>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Slightly nervous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A score on the FLCAS of 3 or above = anxiety

In the initial interview eleven participants out of the nineteen (58%) mentioned being excited about learning Hebrew. Only five participants (26%) indicated feeling neutral about the experience of learning Hebrew. The negative emotions that were associated with learning Hebrew were dominated by expressions of anxiety, six (60%) out of the ten that responded to this question indicated that they were nervous at the beginning of the semester.

In the follow-up interview at the end of the semester most of the participants expressed feelings that were positive and negative about learning Hebrew. On this second interview, more participants expressed negative feelings than in the initial interview. Seventeen (100%) out of the seventeen participants who completed this study indicated they enjoyed this Hebrew course.

Some of the negative emotions expressed in the follow-up interview reflected students’ realizations that the class was more difficult than expected. Fifteen (88%) out of the seventeen participants indicated a degree of anxiety. A notable finding in this study was that six (35%) out of the seventeen participants’ scores on the second FLCAS did not correlate with their written
responses on the online follow-up interview. The online interview responses indicated some
degree of anxiety, while the FLCAS indicated no anxiety.

4. Peer Awareness

Another category that emerged was the awareness of peers. Two types of comments
about peers were apparent: a positive awareness and a negative awareness of peers. All of the
participants indicated some type of peer awareness. More negative awareness was mentioned
during the initial interview with some positive comments regarding working with peers. Some
of the positive responses were made by participants who regarded their peers as a source of
support, help, and as partners to work with besides the teacher. Positive peer awareness on the
initial interview is presented in table 11.

Table 11

*Positive Awareness of Peers as Expressed by Most Participants on the Initial Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Peer Positive Awareness Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Group projects, it is a lot easier to work together when classmates look to help one another”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Doing group projects together help you learn the material and meet new people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael (Heritage)</td>
<td>“I like working with other students when studying. They explain things to me that maybe I don’t understand very well and I can explain things to them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv (Heritage)</td>
<td>Noted that he prefers smaller class size, adding “usually I am more of a ‘solo’ worker, however, I usually study by teaching others and so without other students, I would have no one to teach”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>“They are important to my learning experience when we are asked to speak to them for practice”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>“Group activities… they bond the students and that is why there’s not as much nervousness and being shy about messing up.” She found it helpful to “work with partners…[and] patience from my peers and group reading time with the group has been helpful”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>“My classmates are important because they create the atmosphere in the classroom, which is very important… classmates are also important because we can all help each other and really improve the learning aspect”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many of the peer awareness comments participants made were what I termed negative awareness because they stemmed from the students in the classroom comparing themselves to other students while viewing themselves unfavorably. Most students in the classroom were aware of the fact they were in an elementary level Hebrew course; however, they were also keenly aware of the fact they were all in a different place in terms of their background and degree of prior knowledge of the Hebrew language. In the initial interview sixteen participants out of the nineteen participants (84%) compared themselves to their peers in the classroom and remarked about feeling less knowledgeable in Hebrew than their classmates. Peer negative awareness as expressed in the initial interview is presented in table 12.

Table 12

*Negative Awareness of Peers as Expressed by Most Participants on the Initial Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Peer Negative awareness; Comparing Self to Others Unfavorably</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob (Heritage)</td>
<td>“I feel like many others in class know what certain words mean.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill (Heritage)</td>
<td>“They seem to know a little more Hebrew than me. I was not able to recite the alphabet but most of them were.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (Heritage)</td>
<td>“A lot of people have backgrounds in Hebrew script or speaking the language at home.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Many of them have Israeli accent, also some know a few expressions that I don’t know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Some of my classmates have more experience with Hebrew.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacinto (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Some people have more knowledge of Hebrew than others, the majority of my peers in possession of a greater Hebrew [knowledge] than me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya (Heritage)</td>
<td>“I see a diverse amount of connection and prior knowledge to the Hebrew language among the class. Some people seem to be almost fluent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>“They seem to know more about the language than me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>“They all know more than me and pick up faster than me My classmates figure the words out before me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny (Low-level)</td>
<td>“They know the same or slightly more than me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Malory (Non-heritage)
“How well they still remember it [Hebrew] from when they started to learn it. It can be a little intimidating especially coming from someone who has no prior knowledge.”
Charlotte (Non-heritage)
“So many of my classmates have some sort of background in Hebrew, they all seem to know it and are able to get help from family members.”
“I felt like I was the only one who didn’t know any Hebrew.”
Abigail (Non-heritage)
“A lot of them knew basics and the alphabet and I did not.”
Aliya (Non-heritage)
“They all have a head start on me. So many people have gone to Hebrew school, have family who speak the language, and have been to Israel, so I’m really the raw kid in the class.”

In the follow-up interview, participants also spoke about their awareness of peers. This time, the majority of the participants viewed their peers in the classroom positively, while only a few commented negatively about their peers and commented about learning with peers in the classroom community. In the follow-up interview negative awareness of peers declined in comparison to the initial interview. Positive comments about peers are presented in table 13.

Table 13

Positive Awareness of Peers as Expressed by Some Participants on the Follow-up Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Peer Positive awareness comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>“It was helpful to have classmates quiz me. Quizzing them was like studying too because I got to practice reading Hebrew”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Heritage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>“Making conversation with people was helpful because I met new people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Heritage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>“A time when my classmates helped me with my learning experience is when I work on homework with a fellow classmate”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Low-level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heritage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>“Whoever I partner up with, they always help me out with pronunciation and they’re really a great learning tool”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-heritage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya</td>
<td>“It is also helpful how interactive the class is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-heritage)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The negative comments made in the follow-up interview did not include much comparison of self to others. Rather, there was some criticism about students who were not fully invested in the classroom, or some comments that criticize the diversity of the classroom. Some of the negative comments made in the follow-up interview are presented in Table 14.

**Table 14**

*Negative Awareness of Peers as Expressed by Some Participants on the Follow-up Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Peer Negative awareness comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv (Heritage)</td>
<td>“I didn’t have a whole lot of academic regard for the majority of the students in the room.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya (Heritage)</td>
<td>“People are distracting me by talking or making noise.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Some of them are only taking the class for an easy credit, which brings the rest of the class down because their attitude isn’t fully checked at the door.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob (Heritage)</td>
<td>“It is hard to adjust to the pace of each individual in the class, because we’re all different. Sometimes I feel I could be learning more if I was in the class alone without interference coming from my peers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>“[I] struggled to keep up knowing that select students and myself were not on the same level as some of the others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>“Some have a lot more experience with Hebrew.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>“The class seems to be composed mainly of students who at least speak a little of the language. I wasn’t expecting that and I still find it intimidating.” “Some of them, because they know the language, don’t care about others who don’t know the language.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Along with the category of awareness of peers, the participants were asked specifically to compare the importance of peer versus parents’ opinion of them. This question was asked in order to assess their answer as it pertains to their developmental stage of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2008) suggests that emerging adults are connected to their family of origin; however, at this stage they are “no longer embedded within” (p. 29) their family. The shift during the stage of emerging adulthood that Tanner terms “recentering” (Arnett, & Tanner, 2008, p. 27) indicates
that individuals move from placing the power of influence from the family and parents’ regulation to self-agency, responsibility, and self-regulation. As this shift occurs, the individual forms a new adult way of thinking that is less influenced by familial and cultural supports, which are not readily available while being away at school. During this process, which research suggests marks the emergence of mature adult structures but not the culmination of the process, individuals display dependence on norms and social acceptance, thus peers become crucial to emerging adults as they undergo the metamorphosis of becoming adults. This is marked by an established and mature structure of thinking and a sense of their own value system. Baxter-Magolda, Creamer and Meszaros (2010) described this process of progressing towards “self-authorship” (p. 14) as a shift from external influence depending on others’ advice and opinions, to trusting their own internal voice. The purpose of this question in this demographic survey was to assess where the participants were in terms of this process of shifting towards adulthood. Half of the participants indicated peer opinion was more important than parental opinion. The other half of the participants noted their parents’ opinion was more important to them than that of their peers.

5. Working with Peers

Another category to emerge was working with peers. This category was mentioned by most of the participants as they discussed what they found to be most helpful to their learning. The participants’ comments ranged from the type of environment they consider to be conducive for learning (small size classes, casual and not formal environment), to the preference they had to work in small groups and in pairs (sometimes working with partners who know more than they do). Examples for typical responses and suggestions regarding the classroom environment are presented in table 15.
Table 15

Participants’ Thoughts Regarding the Learning Environment and Group Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bob (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Casual environment where things are most easily absorbed and understood”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Aviv, Joey, Bill (Heritage)</td>
<td>Mentioned enjoying the comfort of a small class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan, Rose (Heritage)</td>
<td>Suggested group projects where students work together and help each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe (Heritage)</td>
<td>Suggested “collaboration” as very useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan (Heritage)</td>
<td>“It’s great to be surrounded by people who know the language; it aids in the learning process.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel Aviv (Heritage), Mallory (Non-Heritage)</td>
<td>Mallory wrote, “when classmates explain something more clearly than the way the professor says it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>Discussed the importance of the professor being patient with the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Working in groups or with partners as well as presenting class instructions at a relaxed pace. She also recommended that the teacher “not single anyone out unless they know they can do it” thus only calling on students when they are ready to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Discussed the importance of the teacher’s role in the classroom in teaching the material in a “systematic way that helped make sense of the vocabulary and retain it” she also noted that it is important for the teacher to be intelligent and know the language. She added that respect to the teacher and respect between classmates is “important to improve the learning aspect” (environment).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants expressed a preference for working in small groups or pairs and in an informal respectful setting.

6. Speaking Hebrew
An additional category that emerged was the importance of speaking the target language. In examining the demographic survey prior to reading the answers of the participants on the initial interview, it was clear that the participants’ favorite aspect of learning Hebrew was speaking, which scored sixteen out of nineteen (84%). When asked about the most challenging aspect of learning Hebrew on the demographic survey, the majority of students indicated reading to be the most challenging and speaking as the second most challenging aspect. Speaking and reading are activities that are often performed in front of the class and evaluated by teacher and peers. Chart 3 illustrates the ratio of favorite aspects Hebrew learning among the participants.
Chart 3

**Favorite Aspect of Learning Hebrew**

Chart 4 illustrates the ratio of Hebrew learning categories participants found most challenging.

Chart 4

**Challenging Aspects of Learning Hebrew**
On the initial-interview, speaking was the activity that was mentioned most by students, primarily the desire to be able to hold a conversation, speak and gain fluency. Table 16 provides some of the statements participants made regarding their desire to learn how to speak Hebrew.

Table 16

Participants’ Statements About Speaking Hebrew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Participants’ Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Learn enough Hebrew to hold at least a five minute conversation with a native speaker”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Significantly improve my knowledge of the Hebrew language, from reading to having conversation in Hebrew”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan (Heritage)</td>
<td>Wrote that he would like to be able to speak the language confidently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Want to be able to go to Israel again and speak the language and get by easily”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya (Heritage)</td>
<td>“Be able to use [it] next time when I visit Israel or decide to speak with my Israeli relatives or parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>He would like to “be able to communicate with others that speak Hebrew on a general level…to speak the correct way”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>“To be able to hold a basic conversation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>“I also expect to be able to hold simple, proper conversation”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the follow-up interview several students considered speaking Hebrew to be challenging for them, although some students considered reading, learning, memorizing vocabulary and grammar to be challenging as well. Some students noted that more speaking exercises would be helpful, while others noted that dialogues with peers and small groups were very helpful.

7. Learning Strategies
The sixth category to emerge from the initial-interview was learning strategies. All of the participants described methods they planned to use in order accomplish the task of learning during the semester. Most students agreed that practicing is necessary in order to do well in a language class. Learning strategies brought up by the participants are presented in table 17.

Table 17

Learning Strategies – Initial Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Memorization</th>
<th>Flash Cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe (Heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill (Heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan (Heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (Heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya (Heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv (Heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan (Heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte (Non-heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail (Non-heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Joey and Arya noted that the learning would require “hard work,” memorization, and a great deal of practice. Bill, Yael, and Abigail, who also spoke of memorization, suggested making note-cards for practice. When discussing practice, Danny mentioned that repetition in the classroom could be helpful, and Yael offered the idea that daily homework would help her feel successful and “understand what is going on.” Yael also advised asking for help before one becomes “too overwhelmed” as well as “devoting more time to studying effectively.”

In the follow-up interview learning strategies was a category, which was mentioned by many participants. The responses resembled the initial interview in terms of the type of learning strategies the participants preferred. After completing a semester of entry-level Hebrew class, most of the participants strongly believed practice was an essential strategy for doing well in the course. Table 18 presents the different learning strategies suggested by the participants.

Table 18

*Learning Strategies – Follow-up Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Flash Cards</th>
<th>Mnemonic Devices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telaviv (Heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael (Heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe (Heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny (Low-level heritage)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phoebe and Telaviv wrote, “Practice, practice, and more practice…and extra practice.” Joey also wrote about practice and he added that doing the exercises, as a group in class was very helpful. Jonathan spoke of “dedicating more time to study” and using the new words learned in practice. Michael and Bill indicated that weekly quizzes are helpful and Abigail noted that changing activities helped to make the material more interesting. Abigail too noted the importance and helpfulness of practicing, as did Jordan. Jordan and Rose spoke about working in small groups and reviewing the new material. Arya shared that she “came up with mnemonic devices that helped” her remember the new words. She and Yael also used flash cards to help learn her vocabulary. Maya spoke about the helpfulness of doing the homework and studying “beforehand” coming to class prepared.

8. Discoveries and Expectations

This category emerged from the follow-up interview, at the end of the semester when students were able to reflect on the totality of their experience. From the responses it seems that many of the participants made positive discoveries about themselves with regard to learning Hebrew. Five students out of the seventeen indicated they expected this experience to be very challenging, very difficult and not engaging. They indicated feeling surprised by the end of the semester about being able to complete the course, and about how much they learned and retained. Jordan and Danny indicated they did not expect to learn so much and the course exceeded their expectations. Two participants were surprised by how much they liked the class
and how it became a favorite class. Only two responses indicated learning was harder than expected since learning a new alphabet was challenging. It was evident that the participants felt surprised at the amount of Hebrew material they learned during the entry-level course. The participants realized that although the course was challenging, it ended up being less difficult than they expected, and thus they felt successful at learning a new language.

The First and Second Reflection Questions

The fourth and fifth instruments in this study were the online First Reflection Questions and the online Second reflection Questions (Appendix V). These two sets of five reflection questions were emailed to the participants twice during the semester; once on the second month of class and again during the third month of class. The five questions asked were identical in both reflections and requested that the participants reflect upon their experiences of the past week in writing. Participants were asked to describe when they felt most engaged as well as when they felt distanced or uncomfortable. They were also asked to describe what they found helpful and what was puzzling for them in the class, as well as what surprised them most about the class during this week. The purpose of the reflection questions was to collect information in between the administration of the other instruments in order to remain in close touch with the students as they reported about their learning experiences throughout the semester.

The information that was collected from these online reflection questions was coded in the same manner the interviews were coded. It was first coded manually and then it was coded via the Dedoose coding application. Each reflection question set was coded individually followed by a comparison between the two sets of reflections for any changes that may have occurred in the perception of the participants as the semester progressed. The process of coding the two sets of reflection questions also yielded categories similar to those of the interviews with
the exception of one category. The category called connection was not present in the reflection questions. However, a new category termed surprising factors emerged that described what surprised the students most about the learning.

The categories from the first reflection include:

- Emotions toward the learning: positive and negative emotions
- Awareness of peers: positive and negative awareness
- Speaking (fluency, communication)
- Learning strategies and working with peers
- Surprising factor about yourself/the class

1. Emotions

A comparison of the first and second reflections shows the dominant emotions in the first reflection to be negative ones. Students noted discomfort with vocabulary as well as grammatical confusion. Some of the comments indicated feeling unsure, confused, and overwhelmed with the material, struggling to keep up with the class, as well as struggling to pronounce the words correctly in front of the class. The non-heritage learners expressed many negative emotions; however, these comments were not exclusive to the non-heritage learners. Some of the negative emotion comments made during the first reflection are listed in table 19.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Non-heritage</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m uncomfortable when we’re reading out of the book and you [the teacher] call on people.” “First day of verbs scared the crap out of me... it was hard to understand the first day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling “really lost”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Felt “confused” and “flustered” because of not understanding the readings from the textbook.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yael (Heritage) X  Expressed discomfort and confusion with conjugation.
Jacinto, Maya (Heritage) X  Noted that verbs are “confusing” and “puzzling”.
Bill, Joey (Heritage) X  Noted feeling uncomfortable answering questions in class, as well as reading and translating vocabulary.

In the second reflection expression of negative emotions by the participants was less frequent.
Most of the comments discussed the technical aspects of language learning and dealing with grammar. Some comments regarding negative emotions on the second reflection are listed in table 20.
Table 20
Negative Emotions Comments on the Second Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tel aviv (Heritage)</td>
<td>Noted that he was slightly confused by the material and realized that he found himself “actually needing to study,” adding that he “hate[s] conjugating verbs” and thus may not continue with Hebrew to the next level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael (Heritage)</td>
<td>Yael found the book to be a bit confusing at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill (Heritage)</td>
<td>Mentioned feeling uncomfortable and worried when he did not know the vocabulary or when he was asked to participate in an exercise that he did not understand. He indicated a reaction that he described as, “I kind of froze.” This feeling subsided once he understood the directions and “it turned out alright.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya (Heritage)</td>
<td>Maya indicated negative feelings in regard to peers using words unfamiliar to her during an oral exercise. Feeling sensitive to other heritage learners in the classroom with previous knowledge of Hebrew caused her to feel “confused and like I’m not learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan (Heritage)</td>
<td>Indicated, “extended struggling with pronunciation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Noted that new verbs were harder to conjugate, as some things became easier, other still were “very difficult”. She added, “I HATED unscrambling the sentences” but admitted that it is getting easier with practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Noted the speed of learning the new verbs was difficult for her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The positive feelings reported on the first reflection were mostly expressed by the heritage learner participants. Some of these comments are described on table 21.

Table 21

*Positive Emotions – First reflection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yael (Heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Commented about the relaxing environment and how she liked reviewing the material learned earlier and stated that she found it to be useful and helpful. “I’m surprised that I still love the class as much as I do. It’s my favorite class and it makes me excited about learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bill (Heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Wrote that successful conjugation of the verbs made him feel very engaged and comfortable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bill</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maya (Heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Noted that preparing the answers in advance helped during conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maya (Heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Noted that it was a nice surprise to see that Hebrew is similar to math and that the way it is organized “makes a lot of sense.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Danny (Low-level heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Noted feeling engaged when speaking in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michael (Low-level heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Noted feeling comfortable with the routine of learning new vocabulary words each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Charlotte (Non-heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Feeling engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arya (Non-heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Noted that she found the language rules to be interesting and understandable. She found the “in-depth analysis of the verbs” in class to be very pleasant and helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aliya (Non-heritage)</strong></td>
<td>Felt that working with a partner was a source of comfort and the reason for her feeling engaged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In examining the second reflection a noticeable increase in references to positive feelings was evident among all of the participants, including the non-heritage students. Some of the positive feelings expressed by the participants are recorded in table 22.

Table 22

*Positive Emotions – Second Reflection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mallory (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Mentioned feeling “very comfortable as a learner in the class in the past weeks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Enjoyed learning new verbs, building upon those she already knew and discovering similarities between the old and the new ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Abigail wrote, “It was a good week. I started to feel comfortable with our week’s work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte (Non-heritage)</td>
<td>Felt that speaking and asking partners questions in the class helped her a great deal and made the learning more interesting for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yael (Heritage)</td>
<td>Noted she thought the material was relatively easy and she enjoyed the pace of the class. “Hebrew makes sense to me and I feel comfortable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacinto (Heritage)</td>
<td>Attributed his feeling of being more at ease to learning more verbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill (Heritage)</td>
<td>Felt good and more confident as he became more comfortable answering questions orally. He noted that learning the verbs felt very clear to him and understandable and he wrote, “I was understanding what was being taught and it was presented in such a way that it was enlightening to learn about.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arya, Abigail, Telaviv, Maya, Jordan, and Yael</td>
<td>Noted they enjoyed the verbal practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. *Peer awareness*

Although some of the participants mentioned their peers in the first reflection responses, in the second reflection, the mention of peers increased. In the first reflection peers were mostly mentioned in a positive light as five participants noted they enjoyed making dialogues with their
peers and working together with their partners. Two participants noted that creating dialogues with partners helped them feel engaged and comfortable. A few negative peer comments were made as well. Two participants noted that they prefer to work by themselves as oppose to partnering with peers.

In the second reflection responses the theme of peer awareness was dominant and repeated quite frequently. Almost every participant referred to peers and almost every reference made about peers was positive. When asked at what moment the participants felt engaged and comfortable in the classroom, the overwhelming number of responses referred to participation in the activities that took place with peer partners. Three participants described negative responses related to peers including feeling distant, disengaged and confused.

3. *Speaking*

In both reflection responses a small category emerged regarding speaking the Hebrew language. This category includes the aspects of conversation, fluency and any oral expression of the new language. In the first reflection the activity of speaking seemed to be a desirable one mentioned by five participants. Rose mentioned that she found conversation at the beginning of each class to be helpful to her learning. Eight participants talked about feeling engaged in class while making dialogues and working on speaking with peers.

On the second reflection, ten participants made reference to speaking activities. Participants indicated their enjoyment in their new ability to carry on a conversation in Hebrew. Among the positive references to speech, Abigail noted the importance of creating dialogues and practicing conversations with peers. Telaviv wrote, “I most enjoy verbal practice” and Yael noted that talking to peers gives the students a chance to get to know new people and “show off what we’ve learned.” Among the few negative comments related to speaking, Michael noted
that he wanted his answers to be perfect in order to not be ridiculed by his peers. He wrote, “I feel like when we are being asked questions in class I have to make it perfect so I will not be made fun of in class.” Maya noted that during conversation some students used vocabulary that is not familiar to other students, which made her feel confused.

4. Learning strategies and working with peers

In examining the two sets of reflection responses, two dominant themes that overlapped emerged in both the first and second reflections. These themes were learning strategies and working with peers. In the first reflection most participants wrote about what would be helpful to them in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom. Three participants stated reviewing the material at the beginning of class would be helpful. Two participants stated visual aids would help their learning. Five participants noted that a slow pace for learning grammar is helpful. The mention of learning strategies decreased in the second reflection responses. Participants wrote that engaging in practicing, reviewing pronunciation, and memorizing the material was helpful to their learning. In the initial interview five participants wrote about the benefits of working with peers. In the follow up interview eleven participants commented about working with peers as a helpful activity.

5. Surprising factor about self/class

When participants were asked to share something that surprised them about the process of learning one theme was very pronounced in the first reflection and even more pronounced in the second reflection. Most participants expressed surprise at how much they learned, and how much their knowledge increased in the course of a short period of time during the semester. For example, in the first reflection Rose wrote that she was surprised about “how much I can say to a fluent speaker and have it make sense.” In the second reflection the responses to this question
were very similar; however, this sentiment increased among the participants. In the first
reflection the aspects of their learning experience that surprised the students mostly involved
vocabulary and conjugation of verbs. In the second reflection the students were surprised more
about their ability to construct sentences and develop conversational skills.

Summary of the Findings

This Chapter presented the findings that emerged from the analysis of data collected from
nineteen participants (two of whom withdrew from the study half way through). This study
investigated the experience of students who participated in an entry-level Hebrew course at
Skidmore College and SUNYA. Both groups of participants were merged into one total
anonymous group for the purpose of this study. This study utilized seven data gathering
instruments. These instruments were administered to the participants throughout the entire fall
semester at regular intervals with the intent to investigate the Hebrew learning experience in its
entirety. The students initially completed a demographic survey, followed by a foreign language
scale (FLCAS) and an initial online interview. One month into the semester the students
completed a first reflection describing how they felt and what they thought at that particular time
during the semester. A second set of reflection questions was submitted a month later when the
students were done with two thirds of the semester, and finally at the completion of the semester
the students completed a second foreign language scale (FLCAS) along with a follow-up
interview. These instruments were scored, coded, and analyzed while the data was organized
into tables and verbal descriptions.

Four findings regarding language-learning anxiety emerged from analysis of the data.
Anxiety levels were investigated both at the beginning of the semester and then again at the end.
The first finding showed that despite the fact that only one third of the participants scored some
level of language-learning anxiety on the FLCAS, there were additional students who did not score anxious overall on the FLCAS, but yet still scored highly anxious on certain key FLCAS questions related to performance anxiety. These three key questions relate to feeling nervous about conversing with native speakers. The second finding regarding anxiety was that those students who were anxious at that beginning of the course remained anxious throughout the course. The third finding related to anxiety was that five participants, who did not score as anxious on the FLCAS, indicated feeling anxious on the online interviews. The last finding related to anxiety was that although only four participants indicated feeling anxious at the beginning of the course, this number increased to eleven by the end of the semester. These findings demonstrate that the interviews validated the accuracy of the FLCAS. However, the interview questions seemed to be a more sensitive method than the anxiety scale in detecting low-level anxiety among these participants.

The interviews and reflection questions yielded information about the participants’ individual learning experiences. The findings were organized into themes and these themes and categories overlapped between the interviews and the reflections. The seven major categories that emerged from the online interviews and reflections included:

- Connection to the language/Israel
- Emotions (positive/negative)
- Peer awareness (positive/negative)
- Speaking the language
- Heritage, non-heritage learners and false vs. true beginners
- Learning strategies and working with peers
- Surprising factors about the course/self
This study sought to examine the experience of elementary Hebrew students at an
ingstitution of higher learning. It was clear to see that most of the participants shared a prior
connection to the language, the Jewish religion or Israel, which is where this language is spoken.
In learning Hebrew as emerging adults all participants expressed a variety of emotions towards
the process of learning. Some participants expressed positive emotions, experiencing fun and
joy during the learning process. Others experienced nervousness and frustration about different
aspects of the learning experience. As college students, the participants were aware of their
peers and acknowledged that the classroom is a social community requiring interaction not only
between students and teacher but also between classmates. Learning a language requires
communication and collaborative work with others. Some students viewed their peers in a
positive way perceiving them as helpful and knowledgeable. Some students viewed their peers
in a negative way perceiving them as immature and distracting as well as a source of
competition, while some students viewed them in both a positive and negative manner. Very
few participants indicated that their peers were of no importance to them at all during this
experience. There were many references to speaking the target language in the participants’
responses. Some students indicated that the ability to speak the language was a positive
outcome. However, speaking Hebrew was also among the most dreaded activities, especially
when some students had to speak in front of the whole class. Although some students referred to
reading, grammar, and vocabulary as challenging, even more references were made to speaking
the language as both challenging and desirable. The themes of Heritage and non-heritage
learners as well as false and true beginners were major themes for the participants in the entry-
level Hebrew classroom. Although this level of Hebrew did not require any prior knowledge of
the language, students possessed a variety of different backgrounds in the language. Some
students perceived this fact as an opportunity to learn from others who were more knowledgeable than them. Other students viewed this as a real negative and a hindrance to their learning experience. For these students, keeping up with their more knowledgeable peers was a source of anxiety and fear. This anxiety presents a challenge for the teacher and the students who experience it since the anxious students are reluctant to participate in some activities.

In discussing the learning environment most students spoke of preferences for smaller size beginner classes, and the benefits of working in small groups or pairs. Regarding learning strategies, a large majority of the students noted how essential it was to practice the language outside of class. This also contributed to the comfort level they felt in the classroom. A final finding that emerged from the participants’ responses was what they discovered about themselves as learners and about the course. Ten participants noted they were surprised by the course’s level of difficult, indicating the course was harder than they expected. Eight participants indicated quite the opposite. These participants expected a harder course and were surprised by how much easier the experience was than they anticipated. Ten out of the seventeen participants were surprised to note they were actually good at learning languages. Sixteen out of the seventeen participants indicated being delighted by the fact they were very successful and confident throughout the semester. The experience provided them with an increased sense of confidence, comfort and accomplishment due to their success in the task of learning a new language. Despite any experiences of difficulty and any feelings of anxiety during the course, the overall experience for the students seemed to be a positive one.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview of Chapter

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to better understand the experience of college students participating in an entry-level college Hebrew course. I also examined participants’ language-learning anxiety and their developmental stage as emerging adults, as well as accompanying implications on learning Hebrew in college. It is my hope that the findings of this study provide a better understanding of how emerging adult students in my classes acquired a new language. I hope this knowledge will assist educators in offering appropriate support for beginner students in elementary language courses. This information may also help students to successfully complete coursework and possibly further their interest in continued language studies. The key findings that emerged, and which were described in the previous Chapter, provide a deeper understanding from which to view the language-learning experience as well as new insights into possible causes for language-learning anxiety. These findings also offer additional insight regarding the effect of emerging adulthood on the entry-level Hebrew students’ learning experience.

The intent of this Chapter is to synthesize my findings as contributions to existing literature on the subject of language learning. It provides a discussion and an analysis of the findings and relates them to previous work in the field. In addition, I provide conclusions drawn directly from the results of my research. Additionally, I revisit my initial assumptions from Chapter 1, and provide recommendations for college language programs, Hebrew teachers, and for future research.
Discussion of the Findings

This study sought to investigate the general experience of students, including how peer group awareness affects the experience of learning elementary Hebrew for emerging adults. Previous studies about language learning and language-learning anxiety in college, including my own pilot study, used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and other questionnaires, but administered them only once during the course of any given study. One of the important and unique aspects of the current study is the repeated administration of most data-collection instruments. Collecting data twice provided an important picture of the students’ experience from a “before-and-after” perspective regarding anxiety levels at the beginning and end of the semester. Data was collected throughout the entire fall semester of over a period of three months. All data-collection instruments were online and anonymous. Interviews were used to collect data about the thoughts and feelings of the participants regarding their experience at the beginning of the course as well as at the completion of the course. Data was also collected one-third of the way and again two-thirds of the way into the semester via two sets of online reflection questions, which provided additional information about the students’ thoughts and feelings. Thus, it was possible to dynamically evaluate participants’ feelings and attitudes toward change. This enabled me to evaluate such changes as well as the role of anxiety in my students’ language learning.

The research question for this study was comprised of the following three components:

1. How do participants describe their experience of participating in an entry-level college Hebrew course?

2. How does the participants’ awareness of their peers affect their experience?
3. Is language-learning anxiety evident among the participants, and, if so, does anxiety level change from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester?

In this Chapter, I provide an analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of findings generated from students’ anonymous online interviews about their thoughts and feelings regarding learning elementary Hebrew throughout the course of one semester. Four categories of findings emerge. This Chapter is organized by the following analytical categories as they relate to my central questions:

1. Participants’ connections with the Hebrew language.
2. The effects of heritage vs. non-heritage status in the Hebrew classroom.
3. Positive and negative factors affecting the students’ learning experiences.
4. Emotions experienced by all student participants toward learning the Hebrew language.

The elements that frame this synthesis include: (a) common aspects of the experience shared by the participants, (b) ways in which the participants explain these common experiences, (c) anticipated as well as unexpected relationships and connections, (d) similarities and differences between this study and the existing literature, (e) areas in which these findings add to the existing literature. The Chapter closes with conclusions and recommendations for further studies.

**Question 1: The Experience of Students Participating in an Entry-level College Hebrew Course.**

*Connection to Hebrew*

My research shows a prior connection with the Hebrew language to be a reason behind the majority of student enrollment in Hebrew coursework. Two factors that 16 of the 19 participants had in common were a prior connection to Hebrew and their Jewish identity. This
was not a surprise; as Rudavsky (1972) found most Hebrew students to be Jewish and to have backgrounds in the language. In this study, 11 out of 19 participants underwent a form of prior Hebrew learning by attending formal studies ranging from “Jewish day school” (private schools that devote a significant portion of the curriculum to Hebrew language and Jewish studies), to after school religious lessons and bar/bat mitzvah training. I found that most heritage learners, who choose to take a course in the language of their heritage, do so in order to connect with their cultural identity. This finding agrees with research by Weger-Guntharp (2006). The establishment of the state of Israel, and the fact that the Hebrew language became the official language of Israel, led to an increase in the number of students interested in learning the language (Rudavsky, 1972). Some students expressed future plans to travel to Israel, supporting Thomas’ (2010) observation that the majority of students who took a Hebrew language course in college reported traveling to Israel as a reason for learning Hebrew.

Students with a background in Hebrew present a range of skills and abilities, including various levels of competency in reading, comprehension, conversational Hebrew, and basic grammar. Existing literature supports the idea that students with prior Hebrew language background, who choose to take an entry-level Hebrew class, might do so out of an expectation for an easy class and a higher grade. Studies of heritage learners of other languages claim that such students choose elementary-level language classes in the language of their heritage due to the desire to earn an easy “A,” utilizing their language skills as a shortcut to fulfill a language requirement (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). Although none of the participants in this study admitted to taking the entry-level Hebrew course for these reasons, Telaviv, who had a prior Hebrew education, explained that he chose this course “because I like the language, and knew I
could do well.” This participant’s response is not anomalous. Over the years, many heritage learners in elementary Hebrew have expressed similar sentiments.

On the other hand, three participants, who represent a minority in the Hebrew classroom, had no connection to the Jewish faith, to Israel, or to any type of Hebrew learning background. An increase in interest on the part of Jewish and non-Jewish students in the Hebrew language in recent years is due to the acceptance of the Jewish faith as a major American religion, as well as to sustained interest in Middle East politics and culture (Rudavsky, 1972). In addition to those three students, two others were Jewish by birth and had no knowledge of Hebrew, and simply wanted to fulfill a language requirement or learn a new language. These students indicated that they chose to learn the Hebrew language because it was so different (Weger-Guntharp, 2006). Charlotte, for example, had no prior Hebrew background but had studied many languages in high school and college and expressed a general love of languages.

Diversity in student background poses a challenge both for the students and the educator in the entry-level classroom; a bridge is required between those who lack all knowledge and those who have various degrees of experience with Hebrew. This predicament is also described by Peyton, Ranard and McGinnis (2001, as cited by Lee, 2005), who note that a similar situation in other language classes. Beginning with oral communication in the first class of the semester, the participants of my study were clearly aware of a palpable diversity among their own Hebrew backgrounds. Thus, students were able to compare their own abilities to that of their peers, which, research shows, is the first thing learners do in a language classroom (Kitano, 2001). My findings agree with the literature regarding the ability to speak (Price, 1991), as speaking was the first means by which students compared themselves to their peers. The students’ knowledge and awareness that they did not all begin the course on equal ground evoked various emotions, which
the participants described in the findings as factors affecting their experience of learning Hebrew.

Peer Awareness

Another aspect the participants shared was a heightened awareness of the differences between themselves and their peers. At the beginning of the semester, 14 out of the 19 participants believed they were less proficient in Hebrew than their peers. This potentially contributed to the degree of language-learning anxiety experienced by the participants in this study. As noted previously, language learning is a distinct type of anxiety-provoking activity (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Furthermore, students were required to communicate in the classroom, so they may have experienced anxiety because of their perception of being criticized and evaluated by their peers and teacher. This study showed that the participants were aware of their peers throughout the entire semester. However, peer awareness, which was an initial negative factor, gradually changed to become a positive factor as the semester progressed to its conclusion. Working in small groups fostered relationships between peers and may have been a factor in keeping language-learning anxiety at facilitative levels.

Range of Emotions

Despite the anxiety experienced by 6 of the participants at the beginning of the course, 12 out of the 19 participants felt excited about the prospect of taking a Hebrew course in college. Interestingly, the same 6 students who experienced anxiety were part of the group of 12 who were excited. Thus, the feeling of excitement toward learning Hebrew was the dominant emotion shared by most of the participants. Four participants described feeling excitement, intrigue, determination, happiness, calm, challenged, and interested. The emotion of excitement toward the course was not congruent with the anxiety experienced while actually participating
in the course. These mixed emotions may reflect an accurate view of how students experience entry-level Hebrew learning; students were excited to learn a language to which they had an emotional connection, but anxious because they were not proficient in this language and were required to speak in front of peers. Thus, positive and negative emotions coexisted throughout the language-learning process. One might understand this coexistence in part through Pizzolato (2003), whose study explains that when students experience higher levels of discomfort they feel more compelled to alleviate this feeling by committing to doing better. All 17 remaining participants mentioned that their experience was great, enjoyable, and conducive to learning. Therefore, since low levels of language-learning anxiety did not disrupt the participants’ ability to learn and enjoy the course, some degree of language-learning anxiety may have been facilitative to the learning process, and may have even added to the students’ enjoyment of the course (Oxford, 1991). Abigail illustrated this when she summarized her class experience by writing, “Hebrew just happens to be one of the most exciting and nerve wracking class[es] this semester. I am so glad I took it though.” Chart 5 depicts the balance between the support and challenge provided in the classroom in order to facilitate learning. Learning occurs in the overlapped area between support and challenge, requiring both simultaneously.

Chart 5
*The Balance between Support and Challenge Needed to Facilitate Learning*
Eleven of my 17 participants described feeling anxious throughout the semester, yet none of the participants withdrew from the course and all participants received passing grades and had positive feelings about the course. These findings demonstrate that learning was achieved in the presence of low-level anxiety. This is consistent with literature written by Crookall and Oxford (1991) and Oxford and Ehrman (1995) who concluded that a mild degree of anxiety is not detrimental to learning; rather it can be stimulating and helpful. The participants seemed to harness their anxiety as a means to help them learn. Mezirow (1991) spoke of a disorienting dilemma that students experience in order for transformative learning to occur. In this study, the disorienting dilemma possibly occurred when the students came to any of the following realizations: they knew less than their peers; they had to perform in front of their peers; they knew less than they thought they did; they needed to assume a different language identity; or the acquisition of language skills became increasingly difficult. These uncomfortable realizations experienced by the participants support Foster’s (1997) claim that the language-learning process can be painful and profoundly psychologically unsettling, resulting in a disorienting dilemma. One participant in this study reported an occasion of debilitative anxiety (Brown, 1987, as cited by Oxford & Ehrman, 1995) in which she chose to skip a class because she knew a competitive game was going to be played. This underscores the importance for educators to recognize the difference between facilitative and debilitative anxiety in language learning, and to structure the curriculum to decrease debilitative anxiety and emphasize facilitative anxiety. Group work with peers would likely reduce debilitative anxiety as would not calling on students who do not raise their hands. Providing appropriate challenges would likely lead to facilitative anxiety.
Question 2: Participants’ Awareness of Peers and Their Perception of How This Affected Their Hebrew Learning Experience.

One of the goals of this study was to examine participants’ awareness of their peers in the entry-level Hebrew classroom, as well as the effects of this awareness on their learning experience. Four main components of peer awareness became apparent:

- Awareness of classmates’ Hebrew background
- Awareness of peers during classroom activities
- Awareness of peers relating to their developmental stage
- Awareness of peers as study partners

The first component focused on student awareness of their classmates’ diverse backgrounds and prior knowledge of the language. This either led to a feeling of anxiety or confidence, depending on how the students viewed themselves by comparison. The entry-level Hebrew class typically consists of a combination of heritage learners with a background in the language, as well as non-heritage learners, who are true beginners and have no previous exposure to the Hebrew language or culture. Having heritage learners in the classroom causes some true beginners and low-level heritage learners to feel less knowledgeable than and intimidated by their peers (Lacorte & Canabal 2003; Kitano 2001).

The second component of peer awareness is related to the type of activities that take place in the language classroom. These activities require much communication and interaction between students as well as between students and instructor. Some students are uncomfortable with this learning style while others thrive in it. Students may sometimes feel trapped in speaking-related dilemmas during language class. If they speak, they risk humiliation before their teacher and peers in the event of public blundering. On the other hand, if they choose not to
speak when asked a question, they risk embarrassment, get no practice, and earn the disapproval of teacher and peers (Cohen & Norst, 1989). A language classroom is a social environment shared by students and teachers. Entering into this social setting requires students to overcome anxious feelings in order to present themselves well in front of their peers. Students who prefer not to communicate and perform in front of the classroom may find this experience quite stressful (Weger-Guntharp, 2006). This is not necessarily limited to shy and otherwise anxious students who generally defer from communicating. This type of language-learning anxiety may be the reason why many who would otherwise communicate remain quiet in the foreign language classroom. This anxiety can also affect people who typically do not like to speak in front of large groups because of a fear of being evaluated and criticized (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The present study featured participants that were not opposed to communicating with peers in the language classroom. However, sixteen out of the nineteen participants expressed a preference for communicating and working in small groups rather than in front of the entire classroom. Michael wrote, “I found that being able to talk to my classmates for practice was the easiest…I felt like I could make a mistake and not be made fun of.” He further commented about answering questions in front of the entire class, “I have to make it perfect so I will not be made fun of.” My research thus supports the idea that emerging adults prefer the intimacy of working with small peer groups to avoid risking the criticism of the entire class.

The third component of peer awareness analyzed in this study related to the particular developmental stage of the college student participants, which was termed emerging adulthood. Students in this developmental stage are highly influenced by their peers’ opinions and this may increase their awareness of their peers in an interactive language classroom such as Hebrew (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2007; Arnett & Tanner, 2008; Tanner, 2010). My study supports the notion
that the language learner’s self-esteem is vulnerable due to the difficulty of communicating authentically while experiencing language limitations (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Language-learning is fundamentally distinct from other kinds of study; in addition to learning a new skill or new information, learning a language directly involves and challenges one’s sense of self, because language and self are closely bound, if not inseparable (Cohen & Norst, 1989). Participants perceived critiques of their language ability as potential attacks on themselves. I observed students in the classroom struggle to present their real selves to their peers due to limited language ability. These students blushed when called upon, stammered, chose seats in the back row, and avoided eye contact and oral participation. Participants reported feeling uncomfortable when corrected in front of the class, demonstrating the stress emerging adult students experience when performing in front of their peers. We can understand this stress as rooted in emerging adults’ dependence on the support and friendship of peers during the daunting developmental stage of exploring one’s identity (Arnett, 2000).

Finally, the fourth component of peer awareness in this study relates to the positive emotions felt by most participants toward their peers as the semester progressed. At the beginning of the semester, most participants had neutral feelings toward their classmates. Fourteen participants took note of peers’ abilities and compared themselves unfavorably to their peers. Joey, for example, commented, “They all know more than me and pick up faster than me.” Only four participants expressed a preference to work individually instead of in small peer groups. However, as the semester progressed fourteen of the nineteen participants reported feeling the most engaged when working with peers and viewed peers as a great source of help and support. Malory wrote, “When I work with partners I feel it is more helpful and makes me
feel more comfortable.” When the participants were asked about their peers at the end of the course, they used positive adjectives to describe their classmates.

It is apparent that the overall attitude toward peers changed over the course of the semester from one of fear and competitiveness to one of acceptance, camaraderie, and support. The students formed a supportive community in the classroom. All participants used some or all of the following adjectives to describe how they experienced working with peers: “rewarding,” “engaging,” and “helpful.” Based on the anonymous online follow-up interview and both reflection responses, as well as my own direct observations, it appears that the interactive environment of the language classroom supports community and friendships between classmates. The existing literature supports the notion that working in small groups facilitates students’ familiarity with each other and helps to reduce their anxiety (Price, 1991). From the perspective of the developmental stage of the participants, this study confirms that, as emerging adults, they sought a connection to peers and enjoyed getting to know each other in the classroom. Providing emerging adult language students with opportunities to get to know each other through small group work may help to reduce language-learning anxiety to facilitative levels and may help students take more risks in the language classroom.

**Question 3: Changes in Anxiety Levels Throughout the Semester**

Various questionnaires were administered throughout the semester to assess students’ emotional state, and a foreign language-learning anxiety scale administered twice during the semester in order to measure anxiety levels. Online anonymous interviews, as well as the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) were administered at the beginning end of the semester (Horwitz et al., 1986). One of the interview questions in the online interview asked participants to name the dominant emotion that they felt in relation to the class. The FLCAS
results showed that 6 participants exhibited anxiety both at the beginning and end of the semester. The interview results offered a different picture, revealing anxiety for only 4 participants at the start of the semester, but for 11 of the participants at the follow-up interview. All cases of anxiety in this study were considered mild and facilitative. This was evident by the fact that all students in this study successfully completed the course. It appears that there was a discrepancy between the FLCAS results and the interview results. The FLCAS was not able to detect the low levels of anxiety for all of the participants who reported experiencing it. The FLCAS inquires about some situations that do not pertain to the elementary Hebrew classroom or to students. This could possibly explain why it did not detect the anxiety that participants described in their interviews. Since it is important for the educator to be aware of student anxiety levels and to distinguish between the facilitative and debilitative types of anxiety, development of a new scale that is capable of this distinction is recommended.

The apparent increase in anxiety reported in this study may indicate that students encountered issues and difficulties they did not anticipate. There were several possible factors contributing to the participants’ anxiety about studying Hebrew. The difference in knowledge levels between heritage learners and non-heritage learners may have contributed to some students’ nervousness. Participants noted from the beginning of the course that they were aware of others in the classroom that knew the language better than they did. However, regardless of how extensive the individual’s knowledge was, almost all students assumed that they each knew less than their peers. These conclusions may have been based upon observations of peer communication or simply on the participant’s own insecurities and lack of confidence. This initial comparison to peers may have contributed to the initial level of anxiety and nervousness the participants experienced at the beginning of the semester. This comparison of self to peers
may have also continued throughout the semester, resulting in a longer-term anxiety that lasted until the course’s culmination.

A second possible contributor to language-learning anxiety in a college foreign language course relates to performance anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Language learning itself is a task, which may be profoundly unsettling and anxiety provoking (Oxford, 2013). Language classes require students to perform and communicate, and this might contribute to the anxiety experienced by students, especially the requirement to speak in front of peers. Participants who indicate that they were nervous about being ridiculed by their peers when making mistakes help confirm this idea, which has been suggested by previous studies (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986 and Kitano, 2001). Abigail, for example, stated that she was always afraid of making mistakes in front of the class, because she was corrected frequently.

A third possible reason for participants’ anxiety is the fact that emerging adult participants’ identities are in flux and, thus, especially dependent upon peer opinion and approval. Participants wanted to appear favorably before their peers and shied away from risks that might publicly embarrass them. Michael wrote that one of his reasons for gaining proficiency in the language was to “show people that I know the language.” Abigail noted that group activities were beneficial because “they bond the students and there’s not as much nervousness about messing up.”

The formation of self-identity takes place during the stage of emerging adulthood. Emerging adults rely on external voices for their sense of identity until they reach their thirties (Baxter Magolda, 2010). Any perceived risks to the self at this age would be very hard to assume, and such risks would become a source of stress and anxiety (Arnett, 2004). Accordingly, only 1 of my participants indicated that neither parental nor peer opinion was
important (6 indicated that peer opinion was more important to them than parental opinion, and 12 participants indicated the opposite). Emerging adults oscillate between parents’ support and the desire for a shift to peer support with the goal of self-direction, or as Baxter Magolda (2010) terms it, “self-authorship” (p. 7). Students experience an internal ambivalence when simultaneously forming a social identity and asserting independence without completely abandoning emotional or economic dependence on their families (Weger-Guntharp, 2006).

Kitano’s (2001) research identifies the requirement of speaking a foreign language in the classroom as highly anxiety-provoking. Participants not yet comfortable with a new language are afraid of being corrected often and of sounding incapable in front of their classmates. All participants in the current study discussed obstacles to speaking. Sixteen out of the 19 participants hoped that the course would enable them to speak Hebrew. However, seven of the participants exhibited negative emotions associated with speaking Hebrew, which they described as very challenging for them. Fourteen participants indicated feeling less capable than their peers when they heard their peers speaking. As a public activity, speaking the target language is likely to provoke anxiety, as students may be uncomfortable demonstrating their ability level to others, including the teacher. In his study, Kitano (2001) concludes that students who perceived their speaking ability as lower than that of others experienced more anxiety. Price (1991) also shows most student anxiety to be provoked by the speaking component. She speculates that this is due to the students’ belief that their language skills are weaker than those of the other students. Nervousness about peer perception heightens for students in the stage of emerging adulthood resulting in increased anxiety when speaking publicly in class.

When students are anxious, focusing on the task of learning becomes difficult as they are occupied with trying to calm their anxiety (Eysenck, 1979). This can affect students’ speaking
ability (performance) as well as impair working memory. Many participants in this study reported being overwhelmed by the task of speaking and memorizing. Although most of them realized that memorization of new vocabulary is part of learning and requires significant practice, most of the participants indicated that memorization is a very challenging task. However, it is also possible that anxiety helps students remain more alert and attentive during lessons and even commit to new goals. As emerging adults, participants might have been motivated by their anxiety to work harder not to appear foolish in front of their teacher and peers. In agreement with this view, Taylor (2008) adds that a lack of difficulty or challenge may stall the learning process; when challenge is lacking, students do not feel the need to progress.

Revisiting Assumptions from Chapter 1

Based on my background and professional experience as a college Hebrew instructor, I came to this study with five key assumptions related to language-learning anxiety, as presented in Chapter 1. I now return to these assumptions in light of my concluding analysis.

My assumption that students in the entry-level college Hebrew classroom would present varying degrees of foreign language anxiety may have been partially due to my own background as an Israeli immigrant taking college courses in English. One of the possible causes for anxiety in the Hebrew classroom could be the comparison students make between themselves and their peers, which may occur when students become aware of each other’s different backgrounds and prior experiences with Hebrew. This assumption held true for 11 of the study’s 19 participants. Although participants were keenly aware of the differences among themselves in levels of prior Hebrew knowledge, this awareness did not always lead to anxiety. About a third of the participants exhibited no evidence of anxiety on the FLCAS or in their online anonymous interviews. These participants were all heritage learners. It is possible that they had a higher
level of confidence because of their prior exposure to Hebrew. All of them considered their parents’ opinion to be more important to them than that of their peers. Thus, impressing their peers may not have been a priority for them and this may have decreased their anxiety levels.

My assumption that students who enroll in an entry-level Hebrew course would have minimal to no knowledge of Hebrew, did not hold true for most of the participants in this study, 14 out of the 19 participants being heritage learners who encountered Hebrew in their past. Although the levels of prior Hebrew knowledge varied, 11 participants reported a history of formal education in Hebrew school, and 3 others had informal exposure to Hebrew prior to the course. It is possible that students with prior Hebrew knowledge choose to take an elementary Hebrew course because they wish to earn an easy “A” grade. Another reason may be that these students wish to improve their knowledge of Hebrew and strengthen their connection to their heritage.

The assumption that students who were anxious would tend to drop out of the course or do poorly in the course due to anxiety did not hold true. No student dropped out of the course, even though 11 of the participants indicated language-learning anxiety. All participants completed the course with passing grades. It is possible that some participants, particularly those who were anxious, harnessed their nervousness as a motivator to work harder. Eysenck (1979) and Pizzolato (2003) note that when the level of anxiety is not debilitating but, rather, mild, it can be utilized as a motivator to do better in class. Group work with peer may have reduced anxiety levels to the facilitative type thereby avoiding the effects of debilitative anxiety.

My fourth assumption, that non-heritage students would feel inferior to and threatened by the heritage students, held true for 14 of the participants but did not persist throughout the semester. All 5 non-heritage learners, 3 of them standing at a low-level, as well as 6 of the
heritage learners, expressed negative feelings toward peers who knew more Hebrew than they did. However, these feelings did not remain negative throughout the semester. In the follow-up interview, all of the participants indicated positive emotions toward their peers, deeming them nice and helpful, acknowledging their contributions as partners in small group activities, despite their prior knowledge of Hebrew. This factor demonstrates the importance of small group activities. Emerging adults crave closeness with peers but, at the same time, fear being ridiculed or criticized by them. Opportunities to socialize and work in small groups can alleviate fear by fostering relationship building and acceptance of one another.

The fifth assumption that I had prior to this study was that the heritage learners would not experience language-learning anxiety since they had a prior knowledge of Hebrew. This assumption held to be partially incorrect. Although 7 out of the 11 heritage learners showed no anxiety in this study, 4 heritage learners began the course with anxiety as reported by the FLCAS and the online anonymous interview. At the end of the course, the number of heritage learners that reported anxiety rose from 4 to 7 out of the eleven heritage learners. This study demonstrated that having a heritage background in Hebrew does not prevent language-learning anxiety. Although these heritage learners had a prior knowledge of Hebrew, as the semester progressed they were faced with the challenge of mastering new language skills. Their inability to portray themselves as intelligent in front of their classmates may have contributed to the low-level of anxiety they experienced.

Summary of Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study are mostly congruent with the literature related to language learning. Students in a college foreign language course are faced with entry-level classrooms that are very diverse in terms of student backgrounds and knowledge. I investigated whether or
not the Hebrew classroom is different from other foreign languages studies presented in the literature and ultimately found similarities in terms of heritage and non-heritage learners. However, Hebrew study differs from other foreign language study because in addition to its connection to a country (Israel), it is also connected to the Jewish religion and to a culture with which most heritage learners are familiar.

My study also investigated language-learning anxiety levels, which is considered in the literature to be a distinct type of anxiety experienced by many language learners. Contrary to the suggestion in the literature that all foreign language learners experience this form of anxiety, my FLCAS results reveal only about a third of the participants to have experienced anxiety, while my interviews show about two thirds of the participants exhibited anxiety. The anxiety experienced in this study was low-level anxiety. These results included mostly the non-heritage students who did not have a background in Hebrew and low-level heritage learners, who had only minor exposure to Hebrew. Therefore, the data in this study does not support the idea that all language learners experience anxiety. This may be due to the fact that Hebrew classes are unique in that the majority of the students are usually heritage learners, often having had prior experience with Hebrew in religious settings and, therefore, more familiarity with the language.

It is interesting to note that across the initial and second sets of the FLCAS scores, students who exhibited anxiety initially continue to demonstrate anxiety at increased levels. Additionally, in their interviews, only four participants reported anxiety at the beginning of the semester, while eleven reported a degree of nervousness by the end of the semester. This finding was surprising given my assumption that the anxiety levels would decrease as the semester progressed. The lack of anxiety reduction might be due to the emerging adult developmental stage of the participants in this study. Although the literature describes many characteristics of
this stage, it does not provide much information about the classroom behavior and learning needs of this group. It is possible that some participants felt anxious due to the fact that they perceived their sense of self to be repeatedly threatened in the classroom because of the constant performing and interactive activities that took place. Another possible reason for this increase in anxiety might be that as participants got to know their peers and form relationships with them, they began to care more about how their peers perceived them. Emerging adults are in a state of flux and do not have a strongly solidified sense of self, so it is very important to them that their peers perceive them in a positive light. The combination of the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and the interactive nature of foreign language classes make it even more likely that students would experience language-learning anxiety.

Interestingly, participants were equally divided between those who felt most influenced by peers or by parents. These findings demonstrated a keen awareness by participants of their peers. This awareness was multifaceted and included a comparison of self to peers from the very beginning of the course, and it often led participants to view themselves as less capable than their classmates. However, the majority of the participants saw the benefits of working with their peers. Overall, participants viewed peers positively and admitted to enjoying working with them. The positive shift in perception of peers by most of the emerging adult participants might have been due to the classroom environment, which was sociable, interactive, and conducive for relationships to develop, as expressed by the participants’ comments. The negative thoughts the participants had about themselves in comparison to their peers may have been due to the fact that they all experienced the desire to be liked, accepted, respected, and appreciated by their peers, and they initially worried that their peers would not perceive them as intelligent. Students
remarked that it was helpful to get to know their peers and interact with them in a positive, respectful, and productive manner through small group activities.

In essence, the classroom has become a social micro-community in the school. In this close, socially interactive environment, participants were able to take risks, communicate, assist, respect and encourage each other. Research supports the benefits of this type of environment (Ely, 1986). It is possible that this interactive, respectful, and informal environment of the classroom facilitates closer relationships between the students themselves as well as between the students and the teacher (Rogers, 1983). These closer relationships may have kept language-learning anxiety to facilitative levels and allowed students to take risks in expressing themselves in front of their peers. The findings of this study agree with Arnett (2004) who stated that emerging adult students learn much better and enjoy the class more when the class is small and requires active involvement. This may be true for language classes as well and deserves further study.

**Study Conclusions**

As a college Hebrew teacher, I often contemplate elementary Hebrew students’ experiences. In studying those experiences, I brought my own set of assumptions about students’ anxiety as well as my own bias regarding the need for a placement exam. I believed such an exam was needed to “weed out” students who do not belong in a beginner classroom to ensure a more homogeneous learning experience for the true beginner students and lessen their anxiety, because I perceived anxiety to be a negative factor in the language classroom. The findings of this study confirmed the existence of diverse backgrounds and abilities in the elementary Hebrew classroom. Elementary language course instructors commonly face this issue of diversity in other elementary language classrooms. This diversity is not only manifested by differences in
learning styles that students possess, it also includes the diversity of students’ background connections to the language and of previous language knowledge. In this study, I examined the effects of this diversity as well as the overall experience of elementary Hebrew learners.

My conclusions, discussed below, address six noteworthy areas: (a) language-learning anxiety, (b) participants’ positive emotions throughout the semester, (c) participants’ awareness of peers throughout the semester, (d) effects of anxiety on heritage, low-level heritage, and non-heritage learners, (e) emerging adulthood and language-learning anxiety, and (f) the language-learning anxiety scale.

**Language-learning anxiety.** As indicated in existing literature, most students of foreign language experience a distinct type of anxiety related to foreign language learning. My entry-level students’ FLCAS results, as well as their verbal reporting, evince various degrees of anxiety. Personal challenges related to performing before peers and taking risks in a new language during the developmental stage of emerging adulthood might have caused some students to feel uneasy. Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) emphasize the loss and gain of identity as a cause for anxiety in the foreign language-learning process. They explain that beginner students tend to feel infantilized because of their limited language skills and are thus unable to project their actual personalities. This may be a very distressing situation for emerging adults because their identity is still forming and is often dependent largely on the opinion of peers during this developmental stage.

While FLCAS results showed only mild, non-debilitating forms of anxiety in close to a third of the participants, remaining the same throughout the semester, interviews indicated that the number of students experiencing a non-debilitative anxiety increased over twofold by the semester’s end. In this study, both the number of students that experienced language-learning
anxiety as well as their levels of anxiety increased, albeit within the non-debilitative range, as the semester progressed. Further research might illuminate reasons why anxiety levels, as well as the percentage of anxious students, may increase over the course of a semester. One possible reason for the increase in anxiety might relate to the gradual increase in difficulty and complexity of the material as the course progressed. Undesirable grades might also have led to worries regarding final course grades, and those students who were not graded by me may have worried about passing the final exam.

Lastly, it is possible that the informal environment of my classroom benefited some students more than others preferring a more formal style. Students accustomed to formal or authoritarian educational systems may not have felt comfortable in a classroom that required them to actively interact with each other through teacher facilitation, rather than to listen passively to a lecturer. The literature suggests that when teachers make the classroom a nonthreatening environment, students tend to respond by becoming less anxious (Crookall & Oxford, 1991). In my study, this finding was found to be inaccurate, as the number of students experiencing low levels of anxiety during the semester increased, despite the informal nature of the classroom environment. However, it is possible that a stricter and more formal environment will have increased anxiety beyond facilitative levels to become debilitative for some participants. This hypothesis deserves further study.

Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) note that even if students seem to do well in the class, teachers should not assume that all is well, because students might experience anxiety and not complain about it or share it with others. At the beginning of this research, 6 students showed low-level anxiety scores on the first FLCAS, while 4 reported feeling nervous on the online anonymous interview. At the culmination of the course, 6 students scored as anxious on the
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second FLCAS, while 11 reported feeling nervous on the follow-up online anonymous interview. None of the participants withdrew from the course, and all of them completed the course with passing grades. This finding is important to understanding the role of language-learning anxiety. As shown previously, low levels of anxiety are not detrimental or debilitating to students and can instead be facilitative to learning and motivation (Crookall & Oxford, 1991).

Many studies show a negative correlation between anxiety and learning performance, some stressing the need for reducing or eradicating anxiety from the language-learning classroom in order to facilitate learning. However, this study supports the idea that some measure of anxiety is useful and should be regarded as a positive factor for learning. Eysenck (1979) proposes that anxiety is accompanied by distracting cognition and disturbs the learning process; however, he also notes that mild levels of anxiety may cause students to increase their effort. Other studies adhere to this understanding, showing students to be motivated and stimulated by the tension experienced in language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). The present study similarly also shows that students who experienced anxiety throughout the semester utilized learning strategies that helped them cope with and succeed in the course. Therefore, the goal of educators should not be to eradicate anxiety completely from the learning experience, but should instead be to maintain an appropriate level of challenge, which may lead to low-level anxiety that can be facilitative to learning.

Positive emotions experienced by the participants. Despite the fact that students reported language-learning anxiety throughout the course, all students also expressed positive emotions from beginning to end. Initially, most students reported feeling excited about the course, only two reporting neutral feelings. At the end of the semester, all participants reported
enjoyment and satisfaction from the course. This finding offers support for the idea that low levels of language-learning anxiety may add to the students’ enjoyment of the learning experience. When students are challenged and slightly anxious, they are less likely to be bored and more likely to derive enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment from mastering these challenges. This study shows that low-level facilitative anxiety can exist alongside positive emotions in the language-learning process; it may actually enhance learning and decrease attrition rates. Spielmann and Radnofsky (2001) note that teachers do not need to make classes easy in order for students to have a positive experience; rather, teachers need to challenge students to a level of positive tension that facilitates learning. In this study, students felt challenged and slightly stressed, but they also felt positive about the learning experience as a whole. The positive feelings expressed were due to an appropriate balance between support and challenge. Therefore, facilitative language-learning anxiety may actually enhance the overall positive experience of language learning. Moreover, the positive feelings shared by my participants likely contributed to keeping language-learning anxiety at low manageable levels which facilitated learning and reduced the attrition rate.

**Peer awareness in the entry-level Hebrew course.** Emerging adult students are at an age when they are solidifying a sense of independent selfhood. For emerging adults, friendships sometimes exceed family relationships in importance. As students develop a more adult sense of self, they rely heavily on external influences like peers, as shown by Arnett (2008, 2011). Thus, I expected peer awareness to be very important to my participants. Surprisingly, at least half of them considered their parents’ opinion to be more important than that of their peers. This finding supports Baxter Magolda’s (2012) view that becoming an adult is a gradual process during which meaning-making evolves from relying on external sources such as parents and
peers for forming beliefs, values, and identity, and which eventually shifts to an internal orientation for “self-authoring.”

All participants demonstrated a high level of peer awareness and described this awareness as negative at times. The participants misjudged how capable and knowledgeable they actually were in comparison to their peers, and this misjudgment was a source of anxiety for them. The participants demonstrated awareness of the fact that the Hebrew classroom was a social environment. Most of them responded by approaching the environment cautiously, assessing the situation before interacting with peers. Students were able to progressively become less guarded and more engaged as they developed relationships through working in small groups and pairs. The composition of the groups was changed often to encourage students to become more familiar with all of their peers and thus less intimidated by them.

As the semester progressed, all participants reported feeling most engaged, comfortable, and happy when working with their peers. This was a welcome outcome to most of the participants, even those who initially indicated that they preferred to work individually. Abigail, for example, stated, “I wish I had half of their knowledge!! But I respect them and each have [has] helped me learn!” My research showed that the emerging adult participants sought the approval, friendship, and support of their peers, which agrees with Arnett’s (2011) view. Although the number of anxious students increased as the study progressed, small group activities that were relationship-building in nature helped participants feel less anxious about each other’s abilities. Therefore, it is a conclusion of this study that small group relationship-building activities are an important tool in keeping language-learning anxiety to facilitative levels.

*Effects of Anxiety on Heritage, Low-level Heritage, and Non-Heritage Students*
The diversity of students who participated in the entry-level college Hebrew classroom was an important issue in this study. Eleven participants were heritage learners, 3 were low-level heritage learners, and 5 were non-heritage learners. The literature distinguishes only between heritage and non-heritage learners, where non-heritage learners have no background in the target language. I found the need to add another category to the established categories of heritage and non-heritage learners. In this research, I noted that a number of the heritage learners, who had minimal prior experience with the target language, reacted in similar ways to the non-heritage learners. I refer to this group of heritage learners as low-level heritage learners.

When I began this research, I thought that only non-heritage students would experience language-learning anxiety. However, I found that non-heritage learners were not the only ones to experience this. Five out of 11 heritage learners, all 3 low-level heritage learners, and 4 out of 5 non-heritage learners experienced language-learning anxiety. Since heritage, low-level heritage, and non-heritage learners experienced language-learning anxiety in this study, the amount of prior experience with the target language is not the only factor related to this anxiety. Educators should not assume that heritage learners would be free of this anxiety. A conclusion of this study is that language-learning anxiety is experienced regardless of the students’ prior experience with the target language, since all participants underestimated their own capabilities compared to that of their peers.

**Emerging adulthood and language learning anxiety.** Another conclusion of this study, heretofore absent from the literature, is that language-learning anxiety may be related to the emerging adulthood developmental stage of college students. Since participants were all emerging adults, it is possible that their developmental stage, contributed to language-learning anxiety. This may be due to incomplete identity formation and resultant reliance upon peer
approval. Initial language learning anxiety could be related to students comparing backgrounds and abilities with that of their peers; however, as they work with each other, the differences in backgrounds becomes secondary and less threatening to students. Nonetheless, anxiety did not diminish as the semester progressed and increased instead. Sustained low-level language learning anxiety could be due to the participants’ developmental stage of emerging adulthood in which they were anxious about how their peers would perceive them.

**Language-learning anxiety scale.** This study used two instruments to measure anxiety among the participants: the foreign language anxiety scale (FLCAS) and the online anonymous interviews. The FLCAS showed 6 participants to have low-level language learning anxiety at the beginning of the semester and again showed 6 anxious participants at the end of the semester. The interviews, on the other hand, showed 4 participants with anxiety at the beginning of the semester and 11 participants with anxiety at the end of the semester. Although, this anxiety was low-level, the FLCAS did not detect the additional 5 students that indicated anxiety in the online anonymous interview at the end of the study. The last conclusion of this study is that this discrepancy between the results of the FLCAS and the interviews showed that the FLCAS is not able to detect all low-level language-learning anxiety. Therefore, in order to evaluate for the presence of language-learning anxiety, the FLCAS should be used in conjunction with interviews or additional scales should be created or modified.

**Recommendations**

Recommendations offered below are for (a) college foreign language programs and teachers, (b) entry-level college Hebrew classes, and (c) further research.

*Recommendations for College Foreign Language Programs*
Some of the following recommended protocols may already exist in some institutions. Most instructors of entry-level college language courses experience the same issues with regard to the challenging diversity of backgrounds and knowledge of students in the entry-level classroom. Some programs institute a placement exam to avoid admitting heritage learners or non-beginner students into the elementary classroom, while other programs leave this issue to the individual teacher for resolution. The literature points out that it is usually not a good solution if only a few language courses at a given school institute a placement test, as students would then likely avoid those courses. Students might also score intentionally low on placement tests in order to gain entry into easier levels (Klee & Rogers, 1989). I offer the following recommendations:

- Create a two-track language classroom for every language in the program, placing heritage learners in one class and non-heritage learners in another. Low-level heritage learners would be placed with the non-heritage learners since their knowledge of the target language is minimal. This would allow instruction to be tailored more accurately to students’ actual levels.

- Train teachers in methods of teaching a class with students who have a diverse level of prior knowledge of the language. These methods can include how to best utilize the diversity of student backgrounds when working in small groups and pairs. Teachers should be trained to encourage heritage learners to draw upon their prior knowledge and utilize it to aid the non-heritage learners.

- Develop a placement test for every language that carefully assesses the background knowledge and current proficiency of each student. If all language courses utilize a similar standardized test, students will not be able to avoid taking it, no matter what
language a student chooses to study. In addition, language teachers may contribute to the development and modification of such a test as needed.

• Create an ongoing anxiety assessment system for students in beginner level classes to monitor student anxiety levels and to uncover problems in a timely basis. This assessment might take the form of periodic questionnaires containing open-ended questions that would encourage students to express their feelings and contribute suggestions for improvements.

• Educate teachers to distinguish between facilitative and debilitative language-learning anxiety. Teachers need to learn how to make use of facilitative anxiety for learning to take place and reduce the debilitative type, which might hinder learning.

• Develop an anxiety scale capable of distinguishing between low and higher levels of anxiety in order for teachers to assess the level of anxiety in the classroom. The scale should be sensitive enough to consistently detect low-level facilitative anxiety. This is important, because educators should not strive to have an anxiety-free classroom. Instead, they should strive to create a classroom with low-level anxiety, which would challenge students and be conducive to learning.

• Train teachers to be facilitators, rather than traditional authority figures, thereby creating a safe environment in the classroom (Price, 1991). This environment should provide students with opportunities to work in small groups and pairs, helping them get to know each other and feel more relaxed.

• Train teachers to provide students with more positive reinforcement, encourage students to make mistakes, make use of mistakes as learning tools, and treat the students in a respectful, friendly manner.
• Train teachers in facilitating small group relationship-building activities.

Since students enjoy this approach and it may help to reduce language-learning anxiety to manageable levels.

**Recommendations for Entry-level Hebrew Classes**

• Develop a placement test that includes an interview to determine student’s knowledge, background, and connection to the language.

• Create an online network of support between Hebrew college instructors. Often the Hebrew instructor at a given college is the only Hebrew teacher, without any support or other faculty with whom to share ideas. A support network can help Hebrew educators brainstorm and deal with different challenges that present themselves in the diverse Hebrew classroom.

• Develop an orientation program that would introduce non-heritage, full-fledged beginners, to some basic cultural elements that are connected with Hebrew (i.e. Judaism and Israel) and to linguistic basics, such as the alphabet. This can be accomplished outside of the classroom before the semester begins in a few meetings with the students. Alternatively, it can be woven into the first few weeks of the semester as an enrichment program offered outside of the classroom. The goal of this orientation would be to bring non-heritage students to a similar starting point with heritage learners by the start of the semester.

• Develop a program for teaching assistants among students who successfully completed higher levels of Hebrew classes. Utilizing at least one or more teaching assistants (TAs) in the elementary Hebrew classroom provides support for students
who lack prior background in Hebrew, as well as for those students who experience anxiety while learning Hebrew.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies might provide further insights as to what else can be done in a foreign language classroom to improve the experience, increase enrollment and reduce attrition, from elementary Hebrew to more advanced levels.

Additional research might address the following:

- Future research might explore the question of whether a lack of peer relationships in the classroom might lead to increased or even debilitating levels of anxiety.

- A similar study with a larger sample group of Hebrew learners might address the limitations of the present study. Including several institutions would make data more generalizable and conclusive.

- A future study evaluating the experience of older language learners of a different developmental group might provide insight regarding similarities and differences between older age groups and the group of emerging adult students investigated in this study. The experience of language learning may be similar or different because emerging adults may experience language learning differently. Foreign language learning anxiety should be measured for the older group and compared to the anxiety levels experienced by emerging adults in this study. This would potentially shed more light on whether the social dynamics of emerging adulthood classrooms could be considered a cause for language anxiety.

- Similarly, another study could compare children to emerging adults in the Hebrew classroom. This study would potentially shed light on the differences between the
learning done by children and emerging adults. This type of study may help in providing proper teaching and support to children as well as the emerging adult age group.

- A similar study may be conducted in the future to further investigate a similar group of emerging adults learning a language, utilizing different methods such as more in-depth interviews, observations, as well as examining final grades as a measure of success in the course. Focus might be placed on the issue of anxiety in foreign language learning, which might be isolated and studied as it relates to the developmental stage of emerging adults. This could potentially provide more insight into the developmental stage of emerging adulthood regarding foreign language learning in college.

- Another possible related study could investigate student attrition rates in Hebrew language classes. This study might include those students who do not complete the first semester of a foreign language, and those who do not continue past the first semester. This would provide insight as to why some students continue to the next level of foreign language learning while others choose not to do so. Such a study might focus on any correlations between anxiety level and attrition rate.

- An additional study might investigate the two-track language class model (dividing heritage and non-heritage learners) in order to examine any similarities and differences between these two learning experiences and compare these to a mixed-level, one-track Hebrew class. Such a study could shed light on the benefits and disadvantages of having a two-track language program.

- A study might be conducted to compare emerging adult students learning Hebrew in an online setting with the same age group in a physical classroom environment. This study
might shed light on issues of performance anxiety, and peer influence on one’s ability to learn.

- A study can be conducted that compares language-learning issues at public versus private institutions of higher learning.

- Lastly, the language classroom environment could be investigated further. A comparison study could take place utilizing two or more elementary Hebrew classrooms in which teachers purposefully employ different methods of teaching in different environments. Areas of investigation could be similar, providing insight into the benefits and drawbacks of various teaching and learning environments with a goal of determining which environment might best serve emerging adult learners in a college language course.

**Researcher Reflections**

Based on my professional experience, I began this study with some presumptions about my entry-level college Hebrew students. I noticed that most students exhibited nervousness at the start of the course, despite my insistence that the course required no prior knowledge of Hebrew. Some who were nervous initially seemed to become more comfortable as the semester progressed while others remained nervous throughout the entire semester. I sought to investigate the total experience of college Hebrew language-learners with a focus on anxiety levels experienced throughout the semester. I noticed that a very limited amount of information was available related to learning Hebrew in college. For the purpose of this study, I worked with information that I collected related to foreign languages in general. I found that collecting the data twice throughout the semester provided me with a rare opportunity to learn more about my participants’ experience and to evaluate changes that occurred over time, an aspect lacking in other studies.
A large variation in prior levels of Hebrew background exists among college Hebrew students. This diversity in Hebrew backgrounds has always been a source of stress for me as a teacher. It is a challenge for me to bridge the gaps in knowledge between students while making the class worthwhile for all of them. During the course of my study, I often considered whether a placement test would help to ensure that only true beginners would be permitted to participate in the entry-level Hebrew course. I thought that having a class composed of only full-fledged beginners would help to reduce the levels of language-learning anxiety. However, as I researched heritage and non-heritage language-learning issues, I was surprised to see how prevalent this issue is in other foreign language classes, even in classes that use a placement test. My research helped me realize that, although students in my entry-level Hebrew class were mostly heritage learners, a large variation in levels of Hebrew proficiency exists even among those heritage learners themselves.

This study challenged me to review my assumptions regarding the diversity of students in my entry-level Hebrew classroom as well as the role of anxiety in the learning experience. As a teacher of entry-level Hebrew students, I learned to view the diversity of students in my classroom as a positive factor and not as a burden. I realized that this diversity contributes to the tension and anxiety in the classroom, which, when kept to a low-level, is a positive element. Low-level anxiety contributes to productive challenge and student motivation. Diversity also contributes to camaraderie between students as they teach and learn from each other and benefit from working in pairs and groups. This study taught me to modify my initial goal of eradicating language-learning anxiety into the goal of maintaining language-learning anxiety at low facilitative levels by challenging my students in order for them to be engaged and motivated to learn.
It is my hope that this study will lead to a better understanding of the experience of students studying elementary Hebrew in college. I hope that it adds to the body of literature related to foreign language-learning, heritage and non-heritage language learners, language-learning anxiety, emerging adulthood, and learning elementary Hebrew in college.

Summary of Chapter

This Chapter began by presenting the research question and breaking it down into three subcategories. I related the four major findings of this study to the three subcategories of the research question. Some quotations from participants’ writings illustrated points made earlier in this study. Following this discussion, I revisited and reevaluated the five initial assumptions stated in Chapter 1. I presented six conclusions drawn from my findings and offered three categories of recommendations for language programs in general, Hebrew programs specifically, and for future studies. Finally, I reflected on the study as a whole and expressed my hopes for how it might be received and utilized.
References


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*Foreign Language Annals, 23*(6), 539-553.

Appendices

Appendix I. Consent Form
Appendix II. Demographic Survey
Appendix III. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
Appendix IV. Initial Interview
Appendix V. Follow-Up Interview
Appendix VI. Reflection Questions
APPENDIX I

Informed Consent Form

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this academic study. This study is being conducted in partial completion for a doctoral degree at Lesley University in order to help the researcher better understand the experiences of students in a beginning Hebrew language course. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete a short demographic survey. This should take between five to ten minutes.
- Answer a Foreign Language Scale, which consists of 33 questions answered on a scale from 1-5 (strongly agree – strongly disagree). This should take about 15 minutes.
- Respond to an online initial interview, regarding questions about your entry-level Hebrew classroom experience. Answering these questions should take around 20-30 minutes.
- Complete two online reflections during the semester. These five questions should take about 15 minutes to complete each time.
- Complete a follow up interview online toward the end of the semester. This should take about 20 minutes.
- Answer a second foreign language scale online toward the end of the semester. This should take around 15 minutes.

There are no identified risks associated with this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no penalties if you should withdraw from this study at any time. While completing the survey and the interview you have the right to skip any question(s) that you feel uncomfortable answering. Your identity will remain anonymous and any identifying details will be changed. Your answers will not influence any past, current, or future grades. You will be asked to select a pseudonym, which you will use throughout the entire study in all instruments.

If you have any questions or concerns in reference to this study, feel free to contact the researcher.

Researchers
Sarit Moskowitz
(518) 584-7437
saritfm1@gmail.com

Adviser
Nancy Wolf
(541) 733-4003
nwolf@lesley.edu

By your completion of this demographic survey and pressing SUBMIT you are indicating that you are consenting to participate in this study.

Thank you,
Sarit Moskowitz
APPENDIX II

Demographic Survey

Please fill out each question, choose 'other' for questions that do not apply to you. Thank you.

1. What is your gender? *
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other: □

2. What is your age? *
   - 18
   - 19
   - 20
   - 21
   - Other: □

3. What year are you in college? *
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior

4. How would you classify yourself? *
   - Arab
   - Asian
   - Black
   - Caucasian/White
   - Hispanic
   - Other: □

5. What is your primary language? *If you answer “other” please specify the language
   - English
   - Other: □

6. Number of languages in which you are fluent (able to speak, read, write, and understand) other than English *
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2 or more

7. Number of languages studied formally at school (before taking this Hebrew course) *
   - 0
   - 1
8. What are the languages that you studied prior to Hebrew? *Check all options that apply.
   - [ ] Spanish
   - [ ] French
   - [ ] German
   - [ ] Other:

9. Why are you interested in learning Hebrew? *Check all options that apply.
   - [ ] The Jewish Religion
   - [ ] Religion (other than Jewish)
   - [ ] Israel
   - [ ] Hebrew is different and unique
   - [ ] Need to fulfill a language requirement
   - [ ] Other:

10. Are you planning on taking the next higher level Hebrew course? *
    - [ ] Yes
    - [ ] No

11. Please explain why or why not *
    

12. Did you have knowledge of Hebrew prior to taking this Hebrew class? *
    - [ ] Yes
    - [ ] No

13. If yes, where did you learn Hebrew prior to this class?
    - [ ] Formal (learned Hebrew at Hebrew/Sunday school)
    - [ ] Informal (learned Hebrew outside of school)
    - [ ] Learned from Israeli relatives
    - [ ] Other:

14. How many years did you study Hebrew prior to this class? *
    - [ ] None
    - [ ] 1 year
    - [ ] 2 or more years
    - [ ] Other:

15. Does anyone in your immediate family (parents, brothers, sisters) know Hebrew? *
    - [ ] Yes
    - [ ] No

16. Do you speak Hebrew at home? *
17. What is your favorite aspect of learning a foreign language? *
   - Speaking (conversation)
   - Reading
   - Listening (comprehension)
   - Writing
   - Other: [ ]

18. What is the most challenging aspect for you when learning a foreign language? *
   - Speaking (conversation)
   - Reading
   - Listening (comprehension)
   - Writing
   - Other: [ ]

19. What one feeling best describes you when thinking about taking this Hebrew class?
   - Excited
   - Nervous
   - Neutral
   - Other: [ ]

20. How concerned are you about how much Hebrew your classmates already may know? *
    - Not concerned at all
    - Slightly concerned
    - Moderately concerned
    - Very concerned

21. How important are your classmates' opinion of you as you learn to read and speak Hebrew in front of the class? *
    - 0 = their opinion of me is not important at all
    - 1 = their opinion of me is slightly important
    - 2 = their opinion of me is moderately important
    - 3 = their opinion of me is very important

22. What is your religious background? *

23. Your pseudonym
   *Please use the SAME pseudonym you used in the other documents*
The link for the Demographic Survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1mAU6A5A3Dyanb5ZRO2I1nImq7rK_DTaJxew5-3NLuyw/edit#
APPENDIX III

Foreign Language Scale

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class. *
   • Strongly agree
   • Agree
   • Neither agree nor disagree
   • Disagree
   • Strongly disagree

2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class. *
   • Strongly agree
   • Agree
   • Neither agree nor disagree
   • Disagree
   • Strongly disagree

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class. *
   • Strongly agree
   • Agree
   • Neither agree nor disagree
   • Disagree
   • Strongly disagree

4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language. *
   • Strongly agree
   • Agree
   • Neither agree nor disagree
   • Disagree
   • Strongly Disagree

5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes. *
   • Strongly agree
   • Agree
   • Neither agree nor disagree
   • Disagree
   • Strongly disagree

6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course. *
   • Strongly agree
   • Agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am. *
strongly agree
agree
neither agree nor disagree
disagree
strongly disagree

8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class. *
strongly agree
agree
neither agree nor disagree
disagree
strongly disagree

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class. *
strongly agree
agree
neither agree nor disagree
disagree
strongly disagree

10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class. *
strongly agree
agree
neither agree nor disagree
disagree
strongly disagree

11. I don’t understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes. *
strongly agree
agree
neither agree nor disagree
disagree
strongly disagree

12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know. *
strongly agree
agree
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class. *
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers. *
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting. *
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it. *
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

17. I often feel like not going to my language class. *
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Neither agree nor disagree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Strongly disagree

18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class. *
   - [ ] Strongly agree
   - [ ] Agree
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make. *
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class. *
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get. *
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class. *
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do. *
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students. *
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind. *
• Strongly agree
• Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes. *
• Strongly agree
• Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class. *
• Strongly agree
• Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed. *
• Strongly agree
• Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says. *
• Strongly agree
• Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language. *
• Strongly agree
• Agree
• Neither agree nor disagree
• Disagree
• Strongly disagree
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language. *
  • Strongly agree
  • Agree
  • Neither agree nor disagree
  • Disagree
  • Strongly disagree
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language. *
  • Strongly agree
  • Agree
  • Neither agree nor disagree
  • Disagree
  • Strongly disagree
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. *
  • Strongly agree
  • Agree
  • Neither agree nor disagree
  • Disagree
  • Strongly disagree
34. Your pseudonym
*Please use the same pseudonym you used with the other documents

The link for the Foreign Language Scale:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1TTVl90OnauQ4NTbkrZrXG2-UESMKbfSp1uO7Y0GJe4o/edit#
APPENDIX IV

Initial Interview

Please answer all the questions. For any questions that you may not have an answer type in the box NA. Thank you.

1. Why did you decide to take a Hebrew course?

2. Describe your prior connection (if any) to the Hebrew language?

3. Tell me about your past experiences in learning a foreign language (other than Hebrew)?

4. What are your expectations of this Hebrew class?

5. What was the first Hebrew class like for you?
6. What stands out for you about your classmates' connection, experience, and prior knowledge of Hebrew?

7. Does it matter to you how much your peers already know in Hebrew? Why or why not?

8. Name your three strongest feelings associated with taking this class.

9. What helps you to feel the most successful in the Hebrew classroom?

10. Tell me about a time in any course your classmates were important to your learning. Explain the ways in which they are important?
11. What do you predict will be the most challenging aspects for you about learning Hebrew?
   • Speaking
   • Reading
   • Comprehension
   • Grammar
   • Learning vocabulary
   • Working with others in the classroom
   • Other: [ ]

12. Please explain why you predict this area will be the most challenging for you. Refer to question 11

13. What could help you to overcome the challenges named above? Please be specific.

14. What could change in the classroom to help you learn Hebrew more easily?
15. Please choose which is more important to you at this point in your life
   - ○ Parents' opinion of me
   - ○ Peers' opinion of me

16. Please tell me about any additional experiences in the Hebrew class that you would like to share.

17. Your pseudonym
   Please use the SAME pseudonym you used in the other documents

The link to this interview:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1LhlK_Po8HRrU--yho4Jlc-nLe4dawcluKKlqJ-586uA/edit#
APPENDIX V

Follow-Up Interview
Please try to answer each question and be as specific as possible. Thank you.

1. How would you describe your Hebrew learning experience this semester?

2. How did your Hebrew learning experience compare to what you had expected.

3. What new discoveries did you make about yourself this semester?

4. Tell me about a time this semester when working with classmates was helpful.

5. Name one prominent feeling felt this semester about the Hebrew class.
   • Extremely nervous
   • Nervous
   • Only Slightly nervous
   • I am not nervous at all
6. When you think about your peers in this or other classes, what comes to mind?

7. Tell me about a time in class you felt confident and successful with learning in general.

8. Tell me about a challenging time during the Hebrew class.

9. Tell me about a time when your classmates helped your learning experience.

10. What do you consider now as the most challenging aspects of your learning Hebrew?
    - Speaking
    - Reading
    - Comprehension
    - Grammar
    - Learning vocabulary
    - Working with your peers
    - Other: □
11. If your answer changed from the first interview please explain the change, if it did not change, please explain why this area is still challenging for you?


12. What would help you to overcome these challenges?


13. When thinking about the course organization and teaching, what was most helpful for you during the semester? *Please be specific.


14. If you were the Hebrew teacher, what would you do differently to improve the classroom environment?


15. What additional information would you like to share about your entry-level Hebrew class?


16. Your pseudonym
Please use the SAME pseudonym you used in the other documents you completed.
The link to this interview:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/196zJ91tNvcOR_5odkj2fLaQStnTaqOkprUobeb66wg0/
APPENDIX VI

Reflection Questions

Please reflect back on these questions and answer in depth. (Adapted from Brookfield)

1. At what moment in the class were you most engaged and comfortable as a learner this week?

2. At what moment in the class were you most distanced and uncomfortable as a learner this week?

3. What did you find most helpful in class this week?

4. What did you find most puzzling or confusing in class this week?

5. What surprised you most about the class this week?

6. Your pseudonym
Please use the SAME pseudonym that you have used in the other documents

The link to the reflection questions:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1L_Qv-ja3oK3bj-zD89lGWv6lZySmp8DZBJXkOFuGH/edit#