

In the Name of God

The Beneficent, The Merciful



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M.Sc. Thesis in Teaching English as Foreign Language

**Exploring EFL Learners' Experience of Foreign Language
Proficiency Maintenance: A Phenomenological Study**

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با تأییدات خداوند متعال و با استعانت از حضرت ولی عصر (عج) ارزیابی جلسه دفاع از پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد خاتم ناهید رحمانیان کوشکی به شماره دانشجویی ۹۳۰۷۹۸۴ رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی تحت عنوان بررسی تکنیک های زبان آموزان برای حفظ دانش زبانی با حضور هیأت داوران در دانشگاه صنعتی شاهرود برگزار گردید به شرح ذیل اعلام می گردد:

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Dedication

A special thanks to my family. Words cannot express how grateful I am to my father, for having instilled in me the value of education and for being my guide and inspiration throughout my life; to my mother, for showing me the real meaning of love and for dedicating her whole life to the care of her children. Your prayer for me was what sustained me thus far. Thank you both for your faith in me. I love you!

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Exploring EFL Learners' Experience of Foreign Language Proficiency Maintenance: A Phenomenological Study

تحت راهنمایی جناب آقای دکتر سید علی استوار نامقی متعهد می شوم.

- تحقیقات در این پایان نامه توسط اینجانب انجام شده است و از صحت و اصالت برخوردار است.
- در استفاده از نتایج پژوهش های محققان دیگر به مرجع مورد استفاده استناد شده است.
- مطالب مندرج در پایان نامه تاکنون توسط خود یا فرد دیگری برای دریافت هیچ نوع مدرک یا امتیازی در هیچ جا ارائه نشده است.
- کلیه حقوق معنوی این اثر متعلق به دانشگاه صنعتی شاهرود می باشد و مقالات مستخرج با نام «دانشگاه صنعتی شاهرود» و یا «Shahrood University of Technology» به چاپ خواهد رسید.
- حقوق معنوی تمام افرادی که در بدست آوردن نتایج اصلی پایان نامه تاثیرگذار بوده اند در مقالات مستخرج از پایان نامه رعایت می گردد.
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- کلیه حقوق معنوی این اثر و محصولات آن (مقالات مستخرج، کتاب، برنامه های رایانه ای، نرم افزارها و تجهیزات ساخته شده) متعلق به دانشگاه صنعتی شاهرود می باشد. این مطلب باید به نحو مقتضی در تولیدات علمی مربوطه ذکر شود.
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Abstract

Having developed foreign language proficiency, some EFL learners experience some degrees of foreign language loss. This study aimed at uncovering techniques applied by EFL learners to maintain their foreign language proficiency. The techniques were extracted from 15 participants' expressions in terms of their success in maintaining their language proficiency. The participants were initially selected through the purposive sampling method followed by snowball sampling to be interviewed by the researcher. Furthermore, one more method, memo writing, was also applied to gather the intended and related data. At last, the expressions of the participants were analyzed based on the data analysis method in phenomenology research design. The findings revealed that the uncovered techniques were highly affected by motivation factor with two dimensions of integrative and instrumental motivation. Each dimension of the motivation factor involved different kinds of techniques through which participants have maintained their English language proficiency. Therefore, the uncovered techniques can be regarded as the key to success in the retention of foreign languages proficiency which can be also applied by anyone who cares about the future of his/her language proficiency.

Key words: language proficiency maintenance, language proficiency loss, language proficiency attrition, phenomenology, techniques

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**Chapter
One:
Introducti
on**

1.1. Overview

Learning a foreign language is one issue and retaining it in the incubation period is another issue. Since, language learning is a life-long process and language learners put much time and effort on acquiring and increasing their knowledge in the foreign language, knowing the rules of maintaining it is of high importance. Some EFL learners may experience some degrees of language loss, also called language attrition, in the disuse period during which they are deprived of foreign language input. " *Language attrition* may refer to loss of language as a result of contact with majority languages, loss of language by communities, or loss of language by individuals in both pathological and non-pathological settings" (Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2010, p. 2). Language attrition can be considered as a phenomenon in which the performance level of a language user undergoes some degrees of weakness and reduction as a result of not using the foreign language over time (Nakuma, 1997). Olshtain (2011) defined language attrition as exhibiting different variation in competence and performance both qualitatively and quantitatively. The main reason for the occurrence of foreign language attrition is taking the first or any other language as the only means of communication. In other words, as the dominant spoken language of the speech community is not the acquired foreign language, the probability of losing the language knowledge is very high. So, the learners need to be very careful about the regression of their foreign language proficiency. According to Bot and Weltens (1995), language attrition is not necessarily forgetting and losing the acquired knowledge in second language completely. Instead, not being able to retrieve the acquired knowledge in time is considered as language attrition; meaning that the foreign language knowledge is not accessible in the disuse period (Bot & Weltens, 1995). This phenomenon is different among EFL learners depending on their different levels of proficiency.

On the other hand, having developed foreign language proficiency, some EFL learners are able to make use of their acquired knowledge in foreign language. Experiencing such situation is called language proficiency maintenance through which the acquired language proficiency is used frequently by whoever achieving some levels of foreign language proficiency. Foreign language maintenance is a kind of competition between the acquired foreign language and the dominant language in the resident society or other factors causing

learners to be deprived from the foreign language use. In addition, the main purpose of learning and acquiring the target language by the language learners can be considered as the main factor directing them to experience attrition or maintenance in their language proficiency. Generally, knowing how to make use of the available opportunities is the main key to success in this process.

Actually no one wants his/her acquired knowledge of foreign language to be attrited and also the spent time on learning the target language to be considered as wasted; therefore, there is a need to look for different techniques contributing to foreign language proficiency maintenance. That is, identifying applicable techniques of foreign language maintenance is essential for anyone who is eager to save his/her foreign language knowledge. One of the best ways of identifying the effective strategies is following those EFL learners who have been successful in keeping their foreign language proficiency. Consequently, following the strategies applied by successful people in terms of their foreign language proficiency maintenance can be regarded as a reasonable method of foreign language maintenance. It worth mentioning that each specific technique of retaining the learned foreign language can be attributed to a specific language skill. Thus, depending on our needs of using the acquired knowledge in our life; our applying techniques may be different from others.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In order to make use of foreign languages effectively, EFL learners need to be able to retain what they have acquired in the target language. Most of the people who have invested on learning any foreign language may suffer from the regret of not making any use of their acquired knowledge in the target language. Ultimately, this regret may result in suffering from some psychological issues like losing self-confidence. One of the most frequent problems with the EFL learners is that they think of their developed language proficiency as a fixed matter in their minds forever; no matter in which level of language proficiency they are at the time of disuse onset. However, it is not the case and it is essential for any language knower with any level of language proficiency to be careful about the future of his/her language proficiency.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that many EFL learners spend most of their times on learning and acquiring foreign languages and also try a lot to achieve the highest level of language proficiency, they lose their foreign language proficiency in the case of not using it for a while.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

To help EFL learners to retain their foreign language proficiency, this study is conducted to identify and uncover the most applied techniques leading to foreign language proficiency maintenance. In other words, focusing on the experiences of the successful people in maintaining their language proficiency is the main concern of this study. To this end, the following question directs the study to get to its main purpose.

1. What kinds of techniques play crucial role in foreign language proficiency maintenance and how they should be applied in order to be effective?

1.4.Limitations of the Study

Although there are many people who have mastered English language through living in English-speaking countries and they have not acquired it through attending English language learning courses, the researcher of this study is not able to get access to such cases. There can be different techniques which are employed by such cases to retain their English language proficiency; however, this study only uncovers the applied techniques by those who have acquired the foreign language in academic contexts through language learning courses. In addition, literacy makes differentiation between these two types of people in their approaches towards applying maintenance techniques. Therefore, this study is not information rich enough to achieve to its main purpose because of involving only the literate people to get the meanings out of their experiences.

1.5.Delimitations of the Study

To narrow down the existed limitation, the researcher attempts to uncover as much as possible techniques by only the people who have acquired their English language proficiency through attending the language learning courses. To this end, experiences

through which the researcher can uncover language maintenance techniques are restricted to the cases who are literate in English language. So, the uncovered techniques are mostly applicable for the people who are also literate in English language as same as the participants. Consequently, the purpose of the study is narrowed down to identify and uncover techniques leading to language proficiency maintenance which are applied by the successful participants who have acquired the target language in academic contexts.

1.6. Ethical Issues

To consider the participants' Ethical issues, the researcher develops a specific informed consent 'agreement', in order to gain the informed consent from participants which is based on the recommended items by Bailey (1996) and Arksey and Knight (1999). The items concern informing the participants about the purpose of the research, the procedures of the research, the risk and benefits of the research, the voluntary nature of research participation, and the subject's right to stop the research at any time. Generally, these procedures are used to protect confidentiality.

Chapter two:

Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Overview

Theoretical perspectives and empirical findings presented in this chapter discuss different aspects of language attrition and maintenance. Through the theoretical perspectives part, the signs and characteristics of language attrition and maintenance, and also advantages of some specific language maintenance techniques are discussed. Proceeding to the empirical findings part, you can get familiar with studies done in terms of language proficiency maintenance, developing and maintaining language proficiency through some specific techniques, and experiencing different degrees of language attrition in specific parts of language skills.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives

2.2.1. Language Attrition

Presenting scholars' definition of foreign language attrition and specifying its characteristics is the main idea of this part. "Language *attrition* may refer to loss of language as a result of contact with majority languages, loss of language by communities, or loss of language by individuals in both pathological and non-pathological settings" (Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2010, p. 2). In addition, language attrition can be considered as a phenomenon in which the performance level of a language user undergoes some degree of weakness and reduction as a result of not using the foreign language over time (Nakuma, 1997). Furthermore, Olshtain (2011) defines language attrition as exhibiting different variation in competence and performance both qualitatively and quantitatively. According to Bot and Weltens (1995), language attrition is not necessarily forgetting and losing the acquired knowledge in foreign language completely but it is rather the result of non-availability of lexical elements through the period of non-use.

Some scholars relate language attrition to the degree of similarity between L1 and L2 systems and subsystems. For instance, Anderson (1982) suggests that the high degree of similarity between the first language and the foreign language guarantees the foreign language maintenance and the differences between the systems of the two languages increase the probability of occurring the foreign language attrition. Likewise, if there is

more similarity between the structures of the two languages, the degree and likelihood of interference becomes greater (Neisser, 1984); therefore this theory predicts that the highest probability of forgetting foreign language elements is attributed to those elements sharing more similarity with the corresponding structure of the L1. This hypothesis is advocated by L2 learning studies which considered the similarities between languages and their relatedness as the main reason of transfer between them (Hansen & Reetz - Kurashige, 1999).

In a new approach, some scholars relate attrition to whether the linguistic item is concrete or abstract. Groot and Keijzer (2000) state that language knowers usually lose their knowledge in terms of abstract words faster than concrete words which are learned easily. They explain the reasons of easily remembering the concrete words under two theories. The theories are the “*Context availability theory*” and the “*Dual coding theory*” (De Groot & Keijzer, 2000, p. 18). The first theory suggests that “concrete words may have more contexts associated with them because there is more information in their memory representation and this additional information may help anchor the new foreign language words” (De Groot & Keijzer, 2000, p. 18). Based on the dual coding theory “concrete words would be represented in both the image system and the verbal system of the language to which it belonged, but an abstract word would be represented only in the verbal system of its language” (De Groot & Keijzer, 2000, p.18). Therefore, the high degree of items fixation in memory and their likelihood to be recalled is attributed to the concrete words rather than abstract ones.

Concerning different variables affecting second language attrition, Yoshitomi (1992) states that this theory focuses on broad classifications of linguistic knowledge. For example, a person is able to comprehend language before being able to produce language, and productive skills tend to be more vulnerable to attrition than receptive skills. Furthermore, this author believes that when language learners possess higher levels of proficiency, they experience smaller amount of attrition.

Attrition can also be related to linguistic and extra-linguistic variables which have been distinguished by Lambert (1982) in terms of criterion and predictor variables respectively.

Factors such as lexical influence over the dominant language, loss of morphological complexity, and frequency of input can be attributed to linguistic variables, while extra-linguistic variables include motivation for language maintenance, the age of language learners, and the duration of the period without input. Both type of variables play essential role in both language attrition phenomenon and language maintenance trend.

Besides psychological aspects of language attrition, some variables in second language attrition are identified by Bardovi-Harlig and Stringer (2010). They consider linguistic variable and extra linguistic variable to affect language attrition. They also recommend these variables to be considered if one aims at maintaining his/her second language. On the other hand, De Bot and Weltens (1995) suggest that once we acquire any type of knowledge, it is never lost. Whenever we put aside a foreign language, the only phenomenon happens to our knowledge is a decline in the availability of the foreign language elements (De Bot & Weltens, 1995).

Likewise, Bartley (1968) and Hedgcock (1991) discuss around the students' experiences of learning process as a factor influencing their decision to continue or stop the foreign language in future, especially the elementary students. For example, Bartley (1968) states that those students that decide to continue dealing with foreign language may show more aptitude and attitude scores than those who decide to stop dealing with it (Bartley, 1968). Another report was made by Hedgcock (1991) which aims at studding the regression models of foreign language retention and attrition by challenging "a literal interpretation of the chronological regression hypothesis and to suggest a modification of the processing model" (p.43). He argues that the maintenance probability of the first-learned materials is not absolutely higher than other materials (Hedgcock, 1991). Furthermore, he declares that the well-learned materials are less likely to be lost (Hedgcock, 1991).

According to Neisser (1984) and Szupica-Pyrzanowska (2016), several factors act as being helpful remedies for the attrition phenomenon. The factors are foreign language instructors, embedding language in a cultural context to provoke the learners' motivation, the children's degree of literacy competence which causes them to have more exposure to written materials in the foreign language, the contact with the community in which the

foreign language is spoken natively (Szupica-Pyrzanowska, 2016), and finally schema (Neisser, 1984). The likelihood of language items' retention or attrition is related to their connectedness to the schema in a sense that the isolated information which is not connected well to the schema undergoes attrition; while the related information to the schema is retained over time (Neisser, 1984). Based on the author's claim, the held redundant and systematic knowledge by language learners are the first forgotten and last forgotten knowledge respectively.

2.2.2. Techniques Contributing to Language Proficiency Development

Different kinds of techniques to develop a foreign language proficiency are suggested by experts. For example, some scholars discuss around the advantages of using computers for EFL/ESL learners in terms of their language knowledge development (Alkahtani, 1999; Hoven, 1999; Kenworthy, 2004). Hoven (1999) claims that the use of computers in listening problems provides students with visual and voice inputs which can enhance their information and ideas, and develop their listening skills (Hoven, 1999). Internet voice chatting using the second language may aid the communication capabilities of the student. In addition, computer-based listening tests are very important to reinforce the understanding skills of the listeners through providing them with CD-ROM based learning films. Alkahtani (1999) also emphasizes the role of learning computer programs which can check exercises after they are performed by students, move students gradually from easy to more difficult problems according to their abilities. Computers can also be used to correct answers for the learners, and to simulate tests in an easy to understand manner (AlKahtani, 1999). Internet as another method of developing English language knowledge, provides language learners with useful websites to enhance their reading abilities and build their vocabulary knowledge through getting accessed to a huge number of resources available in the form of newspapers, magazines, journals, electronic libraries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and newsletters (Kenworthy, 2004).

Besides computers, some other devices such as TV, radio, and songs play role in developing EFL/ESL learners' language proficiency (Hoven, 1999; Ross, 2006; Sacedo, 2002). According to Hoven (1999), listening to TV and radio educational language programs is another technical way for developing the understanding ability. However, the listener (student) should be careful in selecting the specific programs that are suitable for his/her needs and level of proficiency. News satellite TV channels, like the BBC, are also useful for practicing with audio and video media (Hoven, 1999). In addition, when designing lessons and teaching materials to further develop listening comprehension skills, students need to be motivated and stay motivated. This is best accomplished by determining the suitability of the listening material such as the use of song as authentic material. The use of song stimulates and motivates students to comprehend the content of materials (Ross, 2006). To this regard, Sacedo (2002) expresses that we can employ a song with enough resilience to stick in mind long enough for students to experience success with certain language structures, learn features of the target culture, or achieve listening enjoyment.

2.3. Empirical Findings

2.3.1. Language Attrition

Language attrition is one of the main concerns of scholars in the field of foreign language learning. For example, Berman and Olshtain (2015) and Hansen-Strain (1990) were interested to find the effect of different factors on foreign language proficiency attrition. To discover the influence of first language on the attrition of second language, Berman and Olshtain (2015) conducted a study to find which features of first language affected second language attrition. They concluded that the interlanguage acquired by learners was hardly happened to be lost whereas the attrition of the second language features was more probable such as lexical items and word-order constraints (Berman & Olshtain, 2015). In addition, Hansen-Strain (1990) investigated the extent to which factors such as age and original level of L2 proficiency would relate to the rate of attrition. The results showed the higher rate of attrition in younger learners. In addition, it was confirmed that the probability of language proficiency loss in the less proficient learners was higher than the more proficient ones. In conclusion, the older learners had more literacy attainment

that caused them to have more exposure opportunities to the foreign language. Thus, they became more proficient and their language knowledge underwent less rate of attrition.

Tomiyama (2000) and Wang (2014) investigated the most probable time during which the attrition phenomenon would be occurred. For example, Tomiyama (2000) found that having difficulty in lexical retrieval the leded to loss of fluency was evident in the first 20 months of non-exposure to second language. From the 20 to 33 months of not using second language, the subjects showed attrition in syntax, morphology, and prepositions. On the other hand no attrition was seen in grammatical morphemes. Despite of these data the subjects were able to produce speech spontaneously (Tomiyama, 2000). Wang (2014) also concluded that the attrition phenomenon appeared from the 9 months of not using the second language and this was more evident in college level students and they showed higher rate of attrition than the middle school students.

Several other scholars concerned the extent to which different types of language vocabulary would be more susceptible to be lost (Abbasian & Khajavi, 2010; Alharthi, 2014; Asgari & Mustapha, 2012; Marefat & Rouhshad, 2007). To this end, Asgari and Mustapha (2012) conducted a study to find the difference between the attrition rates of concrete and abstract vocabularies among EFL learners with different levels of proficiency. Significant difference between the attrition rate of concrete and abstract vocabularies was found in this study in which the attrition took place on the concrete nouns for the non-continuing groups at intermediate and advanced levels (Asgari & Mustapha, 2012). They also found that the abstract nouns were more resistant to attrition. Similarly, Abbasian and Khajavi (2010) did a research to find the differences between the attrition of special English words and general English words and also the differences between the contextualized and de-contextualized English words during the time of not using English as a second language. Based on their findings, the attrition rate of general words was higher than the special words. They also added that the decontextualized English words were more probable to be lost than the contextualized ones (Abbasian & Khajavi, 2010). Similar to the previous studies, another investigation regarding the different attrition frequency of different types of words (concrete and abstract nouns), which was shown by Iranian attriters both in their reception and production skills, was done by Marefat and Rouhshad (2007). As a result,

there was no significant degree of concrete nouns loss in 3 months intervals but attriters showed higher level of concrete nouns loss as the disuse period extended. In addition, the authors concluded that using nouns in context can help preventing them to be lost. Another author also observed the more attrition rate in productive words than receptive ones. One more findings of this author was the more susceptibility of verbs and adjectives to attrition than nouns (Alharthi, 2014).

Overall, the attrition rate in different parts of language skills was discovered by different scholars (Fujio, 2014; Snow, Padilia, & Campbell, 1988; Weltens, Van Els, & Schils, 1989). Based on the findings of Weltens, Van Els, and Schils (1989), global skills of the French did not undergo the attrition. The attrition rate of grammatical skills was much higher than lexical skills. In addition, another report regarding the how of changes occurred in EFL learners' language competence after their return to ordinary life in Japan was presented by Fujio (2014). The number of words spoken and the sentence structure in terms of productive skills had been maintained by the participants. On the other hand, a sharp decline in fluency or speech rate and the way of using communication strategies was observed by the researcher. A turn-taking change had also been indicated by one of the participants in such a way that the learner became passive interlocutor and just answered the other interlocutor's questions. Generally, Snow, Padilia, and Campbell (1988) found that the productive skills of the participants were lost sooner and the receptive skills were retained for longer time.

2.3.2. Language Maintenance

Different purposes are involved in leading EFL learners to keep their foreign language proficiency. Yashiro (1992) and Ducharme, Wesche, and Bourdages (1999) did their study to find EFL learners' aims of retaining their language proficiency. For example, Yashiro (1992) found that the Japanese returnees were interested in maintaining foreign language in order to keep their relationships and friendship with their friends in abroad. Furthermore, the returnees' parents considered maintaining foreign language as an important issue as it formed their "personality, value orientation, world view, and human understanding" (p.62). Regarding maintenance classes in private institutes, Yashiro (1992)

found that these classes helped returnees to maintain their foreign language; however, the returnees felt free in building communication with foreign students. In addition, Ducharme, Wesche, and Bourdages (1999) showed that taking courses in French during the university study motivated the learners to maintain both their receptive skills and production skills. Actually, their main purpose was being able to read non-textbook works in French during the interval period that consequently resulted in their better performance. However, it was surprising for the authors that there was not any kind of improvement in any L2 area of the learners by engaging in activities such as watching television and movies in French and practicing other activities in French.

One more research based on foreign language maintenance was finding the effect of different variables and factors on language proficiency maintenance which was done by Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, and Evers (1987), Snow, Padilia, and Campbell (1988), and Weltens, Van Els, and Schils (1989). The increase in proficiency surprised Weltens, Van Els, and Schils (1989) because the subjects were in a very low contact with French in the intervening years. So, they found “General cognitive maturation, further academic training, and continued learning of other foreign languages” (p. 214) as the most important factors which had considerable role in the proficiency development. Furthermore, Snow, Padilia, and Campbell (1988) were interested in finding the influences of language use, attitudes and motivation, and self-assessment of Spanish proficiency on foreign language skills attrition or maintenance. The language use variable was observed in the shape of speaking Spanish away from home, mainly in restaurants, on the street, or with Spanish-speaking neighbors, watching Spanish television programs, listening to Spanish radio programs, reading books in Spanish, and traveling to some Spanish-speaking country. Furthermore, retention of the productive skills was more influenced by the attitudinal disposition than the receptive skills. The participants’ most attitudinal dimension was also highly observed in using Spanish outside of the formal school learning environment. Likewise, Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, and Evers (1987) found that the extent of language loss, maintenance, and improvement was largely affected by the extent of language use after non-exposure to the language. On the other hand, the language use factor in the non-exposure period was

largely dependent on the attitudinal and motivational factors of the learners during the acquisition process.

In addition, Murtagh and Van Der Slik (2004) set out a study to measure the amount of retention and attrition of Irish skills after 18 months of not using them which was before acquired by school students as second language. Subjects showed their interests and motivations in using Irish in social situations and they were also encouraged by their parents to learn and follow Irish that led to their high retention rate of Irish skills (Murtagh & Van Der Slik, 2004). However, some participants demonstrated their retention of Irish skills by involving passively to some activities such as Irish TV programs or Radio News (Murtagh & Van Der Slik, 2004).

2.3.2.1. Techniques Contributing to Language Proficiency Maintenance

Besides exploring the essential role of motivation and language use variables, finding maintenance techniques is also of high concern. Schneider, Healy, and Bourne (2002), and Scollon and Scollon (1981) hypothesized that applying difficult methods during learning process would increase the probability of retaining the learned materials. To this end, Schneider, Healy, and Bourne (2002) conducted two way translation method: English to French and vice versa. They found that the experimental group taught French vocabularies through difficult methods revealed larger improvements across using unfamiliar French words as responses rather than using familiar English words as responses. This group also showed superior performance during learning. Furthermore, concerning language development techniques, book reading might, of course, increase children's interest in reading books, provide language learners with factual information about the world, and make them aware of letter-sound relations. However, the interest in parents' book reading appeared to be particularly inspired by the assumption that reading stimulates a literate orientation (Scollon & Scollon, 1981).

Likewise, Rott (1999) and Bahrack (1984) considered the techniques that increased the frequency exposure to language materials as an effective way of retaining language proficiency. Rott (1999) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of reading on retention of word knowledge by examining the effect of the text exposure frequency on

such process. The participants of this study showed significant rate of retention four weeks after reading the text. Retention of receptive words was higher than the productive words. The more frequency exposure was to specific unknown words, the higher rate of acquiring them, and hence the more ability to retain the words after a while. The number of frequency exposure that found to be effective in this study was six times. Generally, reading was identified as a valuable resource of acquiring and retaining words due to the high probability of several exposures to the specific vocabularies. Highlighting the role of review in language proficiency maintenance, another research showed that when learners saw the materials frequently at first, and then at increasingly long intervals of time, the materials were solidly retained in long-term memory. In research conducted with learners who studied Spanish for three years, those learners whose study involved spaced review remembered 72% of the vocabulary they had studied 50 years earlier (Bahrick, 1984). Those learners whose study did not involve spaced review remembered less than 10%. Learning which involved spaced review allowed learners for better recall and also decreased the amount of time it took to master the materials. This study confirmed that materials reviewed over time were more likely to be retained over time (Bahrick, 1984).

Considering the importance of vocabulary retention, some specific techniques of vocabulary learning were suggested and tested by Laufer and Osimo (1991), Cohen and Apeh (1980), and Bloom and Shuell (1981) to explore their effects on the L2 learners' long-term retention of vocabulary. One of the techniques was called second-hand cloze exercise in which the learners had to be engaged in a deep mental processing of the newly learnt set of words. The newly learnt words had to be filled into an altered collocative text not the original text. The findings indicated that the consistent use of the second-hand cloze exercise resulted in the long-term retention of vocabulary by the learners since the mean score of the learners made use of this specific technique was higher than those not applying this technique to learn new words (Laufer & Osimo, 1991). Similarly, an investigation was done by Cohen and Apeh (1980) to explore to what extent using associational patterns in learning vocabulary helped learners to keep the words over time. They found that learners made use of associational patterns to maintain the words even though they encountered those particular words only in experimental context. Bloom and Shuell (1981) used massed

and distributed practice to see their effects on learning and retention of second-language vocabularies. Based on their findings students remembered large amounts of materials by involving in distribution practice. They suggested that it might be due to the fact that students recalled words from their long-term memory while in the massed practice students remembered words by involving their short-memory.

Another identified method in retention of language proficiency was found by Wesche and Paribakht (1996) and De Bot, Jagt, Janssen, Kessels, and Schils (1986). They revealed that the participants made significant progress in their vocabulary knowledge after viewing the movie clip while focusing on the meaningful flow of conversations. The observed development supported the idea that vocabulary acquisition is a process that occurs along a lengthy exposure (Wesche & Paribakht, 1996). Furthermore, De Bot, Jagt, Janssen, Kessels, and Schils (1986) indicated that all television viewers of all sorts benefited from the spoken language but in different rates. They argued that subtitled TV programs played essential role in learning, retrieving, and retention of foreign language.

In terms of watching TV programs in English language, Garza (1991) found that captions had a significant effect on reading/listening comprehension. In another study on the effects of captions, Markham (1999) investigated the effects of captioned videotapes on second language listening word recognitions skills. He reported that the presence of captions significantly improved the adult ESL learners' listening word recognition of English language regardless of the level of pictorial support of the video. On the other hand, Huang and Eskey's (2000) study investigated the effects of closed-captioned TV on the listening comprehension of intermediate ESL students. Their study revealed that captions improved not only listening comprehension skills of college-level ESL students, but also their general comprehension and vocabulary development (Huang & Eskey, 2000).

Another line of studies investigated the effects of captioned and subtitled TV programs on the acquisition of vocabulary (Goldman & Goldman, 1988; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999; Koskinen et al., 1985; Markham & Peter, 2003; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992). Koolstra and Beentjes's (1999) study focused on elementary-level Dutch-speaking students, and investigated the level of improvement in reading vocabulary knowledge by

watching Dutch-subtitled English language television programs at home. In another study, Neuman and Koskinen's (1992) middle school-level ESL students increased their English language reading vocabulary knowledge significantly after lengthy exposure to the target language captions. Both of these studies involved the use of extended exposure to the target language videos with captions or subtitles, and yielded favorable implications about the effects of captions. In another study, Koskinen et al. (1985) found that captioned videos substantially improved the incidental reading vocabulary knowledge of adult non-native English speakers. Similar results on the favor of captions were reported in Goldman and Goldman's (1988) and Markham and Peter's (2003) studies.

As a new introduced technique, Arevalo (2010) and Zhang, Wu, Wei, and Wang (2011) found that the use of songs in the classroom motivated the students to attend lessons and pay attention in class. Arevalo (2010) concluded that songs offered a lot of practice for students to link the sounds of phrases or sentences naturally as they listened and sang, followed the tape, so that they improved their pronunciation and the use of natural reductions of English without noticing it. In a same line, Zhang, Wu, Wei, and Wang (2011) indicated that the learners were more focused on the lyrics in order to catch the new vocabulary and they were more interested to the lesson. Some learners mentioned that they realized they could learn new words through songs too and not just through movies and books and suggested to work on more songs even after the experiment.

In contrast to the foreign language maintenance by the students, the way of retaining foreign language proficiency by teachers was explored by Valmori (2014). The author interviewed nine Italian foreign language high school teachers to address the issues of maintaining their foreign language proficiency in their own words. The teachers claimed that they developed and kept their foreign language knowledge through activities such as "the Internet, TV and movies in the FL, newsletters by teachers' associations, books, summer trips and a nationwide foreign language teachers' organization (LEND) which organized activities for professional development for the different languages" (Valmori, 2014, 18). The collaborations between the teachers to share their knowledge were found as another useful technique of foreign language maintenance.

2.4. Summary of the Empirical Findings

Regarding the empirical findings in the field of foreign language attrition, some scholars explored the evidence of attrition phenomenon in different parts of language knowledge (Abbasian & Khajavi, 2010; Alharthi, 2014; Asgari & Mustapha, 2012; Berman & Olshtain, 2015; Fujio, 2014; Marefat & Rouhshad, 2007; Tomiyama, 2000; Wang, 2014;).

On the other hand, some variables were considered as playing essential role in foreign language maintenance and attrition (Ducharme, Wesche, & Bourdages, 1999; Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1987; Snow, Padilia, & Campbell, 1988; Weltens, Van Els, & Schils, 1989; Yashiro, 1992). In a similar approach to foreign language maintenance, several techniques contributing to language proficiency development and maintenance were found by some other researchers (Bahrick, 1984; Bloom & Shuell, 1981; Cohen & Aphek, 1980; Garza, 1991; Goldman & Goldman, 1988; Huang & Eskey, 2000; Koolstra & Beentjes, 1999; Koskinen et al., 1985; Laufer & Osimo, 1991; Markham, 1999; Markham & Peter, 2003; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992; Schneider, Healy, & Bourne, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Valmori, 2014).

Having reviewed different studies provided the researcher with different aspects and characteristics of the attrition phenomenon. In addition, the author got an in-depth understanding of which parts of language proficiency are more susceptible to be lost. The studies done in terms of language proficiency attrition and its dimensions (the factors leading to language attrition and the degree of attrition on different skills and sub-skills) were rich enough; however, they did not provide and introduce any applicable technique as a remedy to prevent this phenomenon. Only, some of the studies introduced a small scale of techniques resulting in language proficiency development and maintenance. The shortcomings of that studies were lack of elaboration on the appropriate ways of applying the techniques. One more shortcoming was that the introduced techniques were so few and only targeted the development of a specific area of language (vocabulary). In addition, the reasons of employing the techniques by language proficiency maintainers were not clarified.

Chapter Three:

Methodology

3.1. Overview

In this study the researcher followed the phenomenology research design which is a branch of philosophy, owing its origin to the work of Husserl (1990). Through the phenomenology research method, the meanings underlying the participants' experiences were uncovered. The processes of sampling procedure, data collection, and data analysis were applied based on the suggested rules in the phenomenology research method.

3.2. Phenomenology Research Method

Studying human phenomena ignoring their causes, their objective reality, or even their appearances and studying the way in which human phenomena are experienced in consciousness, in cognitive and perceptual acts, as well as how they may be valued or appreciated are considered as the main aims of phenomenology method (Husserl, 1990). In addition, phenomenology seeks to understand how persons construct meaning (Wilson, 2002). Phillipson (1972) saw phenomenology as an attempt to understand and describe phenomena exactly as they appear in an individual's consciousness, building relationship between life and the world, and to find the interaction among phenomena and the way humans actually live in the world. According to Welman and Kruger (1999), "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved" (p.189). The goal of this method is to uncover these essences or underlying themes of meaning of shared experience (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology is the descriptive methodology of human science, seeking to explore and describe phenomena as they present themselves in the lived world. Phenomenology is a discovery-oriented method where the observer needs to have an attitude of openness to let the unexpected meanings emerge (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenology deals with persons as opposed to subjects. A person is a whole being, complete with past experiences, attitudes, beliefs and values. Persons live in a world of experience, replete with both cultural and social influence (Willis, 2001).

The phenomenological inquiry is particularly appropriate to address meanings and perspectives of research participants. The basic philosophical assumption underlying this inquiry has most often been illustrated by Husserl's (1990) statement indicating that we can

only know what we experience. Thus, any inquiry cannot engage in sciences of facts because there are not absolutely facts; we can only establish 'knowledge of essences'. The essence is the central underlying meaning of the experience shared within the different lived experiences.

The researcher should first look into the individual point of view, i.e. the realization of subject consciousness perceived in the objects, to get to understand human phenomena as lived and experienced, which Giorgi (1985) pointed out as the major characteristics of a phenomenological psychological method.

Phenomenology suggests that we not reduce subjects to isolated variables or to mere members of a culture but allow researchers to study people as they define and first experience abstract concepts (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). As a result, instead of focusing on culture, phenomenology focuses on people living experiences. Phenomenology has been variedly defined by different scholars. For example, Patton (1990) states: "...a phenomenological study...is one that focused on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience." (p.71); moreover, according to another scholar, "Researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning." (Creswell, 1998, p.52); in a same line, Rossman and Rallis (1998) define it as "Phenomenology is a tradition in German philosophy with a focus on the essence of lived experience. Those engaged in phenomenological research focus in-depth on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection the quintessential meaning of the experience will be reviewed. The purposes of phenomenological inquiry are description, interpretation, and critical self-reflection into the "world as world" Central is the notions of intentionality and caring: the researcher inquires about the essence of lived experience." (p. 72)

3.2.1. The Procedures of Phenomenological Inquiry

Creswell (1998) proposed several processes contributing to the phenomenology research design. He argues that the researcher, at the initial stage, needs to understand the philosophical perspectives behind the approach, especially the concept of studying how people experience a phenomenon. Then, the investigator should write research questions that explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their everyday lived experience. In the third stage, the investigator collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Typically, this information is collected through long interviews. After that, it is the time for the phenomenological data analysis. In this stage the protocols are divided into statements or units of meaning. The units are transformed into clusters of meaning, tie the transformation together to make a general description of the experience, including textural description, what is experienced and structural description, i.e. how it is experienced. Finally, the phenomenological report ends with the reader underlying better the essential, invariant structure of the experience.

3.3.Sampling Procedure and Participants

Purposeful sampling is a research term associated with qualitative methods (Creswell, 1998). Purposeful sampling is a sampling procedure which “focuses on selecting information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). In purposeful sampling, the investigators select certain individuals and/or sites on purpose to understand and learn more about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Through such kind of sampling procedure, researchers look for those who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988, 150). Purposeful sampling is used in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study (Berg, 2004). One of the broad category of purposive sampling techniques is to achieve representativeness or comparability. An example of this broad category of purposive sampling is extreme or deviant case sampling, which is also known as ‘outlier sampling’ because it involves selecting cases near the ‘ends’ of the distribution of cases of interest. It involves selecting those cases that are the most outstanding successes or failures related to some topic of interest. Such extreme

successes or failures are expected to yield especially valuable information about the topic of interest (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A subset of a purposive sample is a snowball sample. A snowball sample is achieved by asking a participant to suggest someone else who might be willing or appropriate for the study. Snowball sampling may simply be defined as a technique for finding research subjects. One subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on. In addition, snowballing is a method of expanding the sample by asking one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing (Babbie, 1995).

3.4. Data Collection

The major data source for phenomenological perspective is interviewing. Patton (1990) stated the purpose of interviewing specifically as a way to find out what is in and on someone else's mind and that is exactly what the target of the phenomenological study focuses on, i.e. the perception of lived experience. The purpose behind these interviews is to reveal a common shared experience or phenomenon of a group of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Unstructured in-depth phenomenological interviews are the main type of data collection in this type of research design. Phenomenological interviews are in-depth interviews and serve as a central focus and primary source for data collection in a Phenomenology study (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). According to Bailey (1996), the “informal interview is a conscious attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the setting of the person” (p.72). The interview is reciprocal: both researcher and research subject are engaged in the dialogue. Phenomenological interviews are in-depth interviews and serve as a central focus and primary source for data collection in a Phenomenology study (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Moustakas (1994) explains, “The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114).

‘Memoing’ is another important data source in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Memoing refers to the researcher’s field notes recording what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on

the process. Memoing is a logical recording of that which the researcher learns from the data. Lack of memoing in qualitative researches is a major problem which has a negative effect on the final outcome of a project (Miles & Huberman, 1984). These authors emphasize that memos (or field notes) must be dated so that the researcher can later correlate them with the data.

3.5. Data Analysis

Hycner (1999) argued that ‘analysis’ has dangerous connotations for phenomenology. The “term [analysis] usually means a ‘breaking into parts’ and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon, whereas ‘explication’ implies an investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (p. 161). This explication process has five ‘steps’ or phases: Bracketing and phenomenological reduction, delineating units of meaning, clustering of units of meaning to form themes, summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it, and extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

In a same line, Creswell (1998) stated that phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. The researcher needs to set aside all prejudgments, ignoring his or her experiences.

Patton (1990) and Moustakas (1994) propose four steps in phenomenological data analysis. The steps are started from Epoche in which the researcher has to recognize personal bias, and take a fresh look at the stated experience. In other words, Researchers need to be aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Moustakas (1994) also asserts that “although the Epoche is rarely perfectly achieved, the energy, attention, and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue, the intention that underlies the process, and the attitude and frame of reference, significantly reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases” (p. 90). The second step of data analysis is phenomenological reduction through which the researcher brackets out the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form that

is without any extraneous intrusions. For the authors, a description of an experience is the third step and the final step concerns developing the true meanings of the experience for the individual.

Miller and Crabtree (1992) have argued that bracketing involves five steps including locating key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question within the personal experience or self-story, interpreting the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader, obtaining the subject's interpretations of these phrases, if possible, inspecting these meanings for what they reveal about the essential recurring features of the phenomenon being studied, offering a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified.

The entire analysis process aims to examine the lived experience from the ones who produce the experience of foreign language proficiency maintenance through applying effective techniques (Eagleton, 1983).

3.6. Design of the Study

Understanding the philosophical perspectives behind the phenomenology research design was the first step of this study. Based on the mentioned arguments regarding phenomenological research design the researcher identified participants' experiences in terms of keeping and maintaining their knowledge of English language as a valuable phenomenon. The experience of language proficiency maintenance and its meaning could better be captured through a phenomenological approach, where meaning was interpreted through language. A phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998) was used to gather and analyze data on the types of maintenance techniques applied by participants.

Participants of the current study were selected through purposive sampling and based on the researcher's judgment and the purpose of the research. Looking for those people who had related experiences to the foreign language proficiency maintenance was the main and initial part of selecting participants. Through this sampling procedure, the researcher recognized those cases who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation (maintaining their acquired foreign language proficiency after several years of having developed the target language). Extreme case sampling was also adapted to choose

the cases representing success in the process of maintaining their foreign language proficiency. In this regard, the most appropriate extreme cases were those who have been successful in making use of their foreign language knowledge even after some years of completing their learning process. The purposive sampling was followed by snowball sampling to trace additional participants. Through such sampling procedure, most of the participants introduced their friends who already had been able to save their language knowledge after several years by applying useful techniques. This trend was followed until the researcher felt that the gathered data were going to be repeated and saturated. Participants provided descriptions as they talked about their specific experiences with the phenomenon under study (Giorgi, 1997). These descriptions included feelings, beliefs and convictions about their applied techniques in foreign language proficiency maintenance.

In line with the guidelines of purposive sampling and snowball sampling, fifteen participants were selected to share their experience of proficiency maintenance with the researcher. Table 1, presents the participants' pertinent characteristics.

| Student Participants | Age | Gender | Education | Occupation | Years of completing the learning process in institutions |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| S.P. 1 | 22 | Female | Some College | University Student | 3 |
| S.P. 2 | 34 | Male | B.A | Computer Engineering | 10 |
| S.P. 3 | 23 | Female | Some college | University Student | 3 |
| S.P. 4 | 27 | Female | B.A | Householder | 4 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|
| S.P. 5 | 40 | Male | M.A | Cellphones Shop keepers | 7 |
| S.P. 6 | 30 | Male | B.A | Software Company | 5 |
| S.P. 7 | 25 | Female | B.A | University Student | 4 |
| S.P. 8 | 28 | Female | M.A | Physics teacher | 4 |
| S.P. 9 | 22 | Female | High school | Householder | 2 |
| S.P. 10 | 23 | Female | Some College | University Student | 3 |
| S.P. 11 | 25 | Female | Some College | University Student | 4 |
| S.P. 12 | 27 | Female | B.A | University Student | 7 |
| S.P. 13 | 22 | Female | Some College | University Student | 2 |
| S.P. 14 | 26 | Male | B.A | Cellphones Shop keepers | 4 |
| S.P. 15 | 29 | Male | B.A | Cellphones shop keepers | 4 |

Table 1. Participants' Demographics

The next step was data collection in which the researcher made use of two methods: unstructured, in-depth, and open-ended interviewing, and memo writing. In the interview

section the participants were asked some questions related to their experiences of keeping their proficiency in the acquired foreign language. The questions of interviews focused on extracting the information related to strategies involved in foreign language maintenance. The questions were directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question (Welman & Kruger, 1999). All of the participants' responses were recorded to be used for further analysis. In addition, memos prepared by the researcher during the course of the data collection and analysis process were served as future data to be considered and analyzed and provided key insights into the phenomenon of foreign language maintenance. The purpose of this method was to validate the gathered data. Memo writing was written during the interview section containing whatever the researcher heard, saw, experienced, and thought during the process. In fulfilling the current study, data-collection interviews continued until the topic of foreign language proficiency maintenance was exhausted or saturated, that was when interviewees (subjects or informants) introduced no new perspectives on the topic.

By making use of the principles of data analysis in phenomenological approach, the data analysis of the current study involved the interpretations of the participants in the phenomenon under study that defined the commonalties of their experience of applying useful techniques to maintain their foreign language proficiency. At last the data were analyzed through discovering patterns, themes, and categories in the participants' data. This part ignored the researcher's own thinking of the phenomenon, the other researchers' experience of the phenomenon, or the theoretical descriptions of the phenomenon that were under analysis. The verbatim transcript of the participant's experience was read and relevant statements were underlined. Then a list of topic was created from the statements. Similar topics were clustered and organized into meaning units. The meaning units went through the coding procedure in which the definition and description of the meaning units were presented. After coding all the transcripts, the researcher reviewed her memo writings from each interview and revised codes to reflect additional information. The related codes were put in a same theme. Ultimately, all of the codes and themes were explained in detail by interpreting the participants' expressions during the interview section. In other words, the deeper meanings of the participants' expressions and experiences were presented.

Chapter Four:

Results

4.1. Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to get an in-depth understanding of the experiences of those adult Iranian EFL learners who were able to maintain their learned second language (here English language) after several years of having developed their proficiency in the target language. The meanings these learners made of their own experiences have been also investigated. The main aim of this chapter is to present a description of the factors contributing to language maintenance and the applied techniques that emerged from the inductive analysis based on the gathered data through interviews and memo writings.

Analyzing the data was done through the thematic analysis process. All of the emerged and uncovered techniques were influenced by motivation factor with two dimensions; integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The techniques that have been put under the 'self-study' and 'sharing knowledge' categories are those techniques which were followed by participants due to their inner desire in mastering foreign languages (integrative motivation). On the other hand, some of the explored techniques were employed by the participants because of accomplishing their educational or vocational requirements. These kinds of techniques were affected by instrumental motivation.

4.2. Motivation as a Factor Contributing to Language Proficiency Maintenance

Language learners can achieve success by setting their own goals and by directing their studies towards their own expectations. Students can help themselves achieve their goals by determining their own language needs and by defining why they want to learn the target language. Having goals and expectations leads to increased motivation, which in turn leads to a higher level of language competence. Motivation has been identified as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a foreign language. Most successful participants are those who like the people that speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used. On the other hand, some participants tried to keep their language proficiency with the purpose of meeting the requirements for school or university graduation, applying for a job, requesting higher pay, and so on.

Generally, using phrases like “by my own interest, I really love English language, since I was eager, and my high fondness” by the participants are strong evidences of the important role of integrative motivation in the foreign language maintenance.

The uncovered technique under the influence of integrative motivation factor is self-study with different subcategories such as re-studying the previously studied English textbooks, watching foreign movies, listening to foreign music, reading novels and stories, attending tour leader courses, making use of English learning soft wares and internet, and reading newsletters.

4.2.1. Integrative Motivation

4.2.1.1. Self-Study

Self-study is obviously important in language learning. As little as one hour a week of self-study can boost a student's progress immensely. It means learning a different language on your own. There are lots of self-study language methods to be practiced individually and it can be hard and confusing to choose the method that suits your needs. Self-study programs allow learning without having a teacher present and the courses can supplement or replace classroom instruction. Self-study programs are available on paper, audio files, video files, computers, or any combination. As one of the participants stated:

I did many self-study works to preserve my language knowledge. I tried to build my own learning environment. I spent most of my time on focusing on material meant for native English speakers. I started by reading the kids' story books, progressed into novels for teens, and onto general novels. I also watched movies with the corresponding subtitles in the target language at the initial stage and proceeded to watch non-subtitled movies gradually. (S.P. 4)

A study area was also mentioned by the participants as crucial for effective self-studying. That is a centrally managed room or area used by individuals and groups to study at their own convenience, which is not restricted to a particular subject or discipline. S.P. 3 expressed her idea as follows:

By a study area, I mean a study room, or a desk in the bedroom. No matter where it is, it should include a tidy work space, free of clutter and distractions, with good lighting. Note-taking tools such as highlighters, colored pens and sticky notes are useful tools for a person practicing at home. Keeping notes while learning will enable you to retain the information longer, and help to build valuable organizational skills.

Self-study technique consists plenty of available methods to students wishing to maintain their language proficiency, and in this part some of the most applied techniques by the participants have been pinpointed.

4.2.1.1.1. Re-studding the Previously Acquired Materials

Re-studding or reviewing the previously acquired materials helps EFL/ESL learners achieve and maintain language proficiency more effectively. Re-studding method helps the learners move the material into their long-term memory. When the material is in the learners' long-term memory, they become masters of the material. The learners can then use the material in communication quickly and easily. The experience of one of the participants concerning such technique is as follows:

I followed various activities to acquire and retain more vocabulary words. For example, I made use of the G5 and G7 vocabulary books through which large amounts of words were reviewed and repeated to me. The books show you some words to review the next day, but then will not show these words for a couple of days. The words will later reappear in another review activity. If you remember the words after this short period of time, the words will disappear again and reappear after several days through another review activity. However, if you cannot remember the words, they are put back into the review cycle until they are mastered. (S.P. 9)

Besides using English language books containing review sections within themselves through which the learners are made to review each studied material unconsciously, the participants also tried to review and re-study the English textbooks they had studied before in English language institutes. As one of the participants said:

I studied one of the major course books again, which was taught before in the language institute. This course book contains 100 chapters. Each chapter includes a short dialogue, written in the target language (L2), together with a translation after each dialogue, as well as short exercises to test your comprehension. I spent at least one day on each chapter and reviewed each chapter every ten days. As I followed through the dialogues, I listened to the audio and read through. Since, the materials were practiced so long ago, I could easily go through and remember them. (S.P. 10)

Thus, the value of re-studying and reviewing the already known materials should be emphasized as it can result in effective retention of foreign language proficiency.

4.2.1.1.2. Watching Foreign Movies

Films have been considered a great source of entertainment, but they can also act as a language learning medium if you change your perception about it. The biggest benefit of language learning through movies is that you can learn the target language, even though you don't live in the country where people speak your target language.

Movie-based learning makes you an incredible listener. You develop an ear for pronunciations, dictions, dialects, etc. You also can pick up cool phrases and slangs by watching movies which wouldn't be possible if you went to a formal tutor to learn a language.

You need to tune your mind to understand that you're watching these films to learn a new language and not for enjoyment. Listening to the dialogues, making notes of words and repeating them loudly will help you a great deal with mastering the pronunciation.

Look up meanings for each word you pronounce to build your vocabulary. Keep time aside from your daily routine to practice this exercise regularly. Watch, listen and learn from movies every single day so that it is part of your daily routine. Results might take time since it is an extremely slow process.

Watching cartoons or children's shows in the target language can be a good starting point to benefit from such technique to maintain foreign language proficiency. One of its major advantages is its simple language and also the high rate of accompanying illustrations through which the audience can guess the unknown words easily. In addition, since many types of general topics are the main subjects of such shows, audiences can pick up many general words and structures to be applied in other contexts which consequently results in their language proficiency maintenance. To this regard, one of the participants talked about her experience as follows:

I Started by watching children's shows. Think about it, most children's programs are educational and serve to teach children language and values. They provide a simple language along with corresponding images, so it's easy to understand. I was never panic towards such technique. In a sense that whenever I heard the words I did not know, I did not go into panic mode since I believed that it would only block my brain's ability to absorb anything. Instead, I let my brain relax and let the words flow naturally into my ears. Slowly, I found myself recognizing words. Focusing on the images and what's happening on screen helped me gain context. During watching, I kept a notebook next to myself and jotted down words and phrases that caught my attention.
(S.P. 12)

Concerning watching the foreign movies and shows, subtitles can play essential role in the effectiveness of such technique. Some audiences may lose their motivation towards such technique if they find themselves fully upset about understanding and following the

movie's topic. One of the effective ways of not missing the topic is benefiting from its corresponding subtitle. Watching the movies with the corresponding subtitles in the first language can help learners to get the topics at the initial stage and then watching the movies for the second time without any subtitle, or even with subtitle in the spoken language, make the learners to concentrate highly on the applied words and structures.

It was extremely helpful to watch an episode or film dubbed or subtitled in my own language at the first stage. Then a few days later, I watched it again in the original language. That way I knew the story and could be relax better. (S.P. 14)

In contrast to the previous experience of one of the participants, some others may take advantage of watching foreign movies with the corresponding subtitles in the target language. Through such technique, the learners try to understand the topic and context of the movies by adjusting the spoken language with its written form. This method of watching foreign movies helps learners to save their time in a sense that they pick up only some interesting dialogues containing more applicable expressions to be practiced further. One of the participants shared his experience as follows:

I watched an episode or film with the subtitles in the original language switched on. As I watched, I jotted down four or five short 1-2 minute sections that I liked or that had some interesting dialogue. Once I had finished, I went back and focused on those sections. I turned off the subtitles and let myself relax into it the first time. Since I knew the context of the film, I might catch 40-50% of what's going on, and increasingly more as I practiced. I watched it again, this time aiming to recognize more words or phrases. (S.P. 14)

Watching foreign movies with the purpose of developing language proficiency is really a time consuming technique. To prevent getting tired of following such technique, learners split a movie into small segments. They believe that mastering a small segment completely is much better than wasting time on watching a whole movie without picking

anything out of it. Thus, breaking a movie into parts and watching it with its corresponding subtitles in both first and foreign languages can be considered as an effective way of developing foreign language proficiency.

I split an episode or film into small segments that is the best way to focus on vocabulary and specific word sounds. Then I watched it without any subtitle. Next, I turned on the subtitles in the original language and watched it again. I listened to what I missed the first time. I wrote down any words or phrases I did not know already. I looked them up and put them in my vocabulary notebook. Finally, I turned off the subtitle and watched the segment again. (S.P. 7)

This technique is useful because you get to hear lots of slang and cool expressions, it is how people really talk, you can get used to the sounds and rhythms of the language, and certain cultural idiosyncrasies as well, you might notice certain words and phrases that occur often, it helps to consolidate language that you have been learning elsewhere; for example, if you've learnt a word in a textbook and hear it later in a movie, that might help it to stick, getting used to watch movies will increase your exposure to the language, and ultimately repetition will help you notice language and sink in words and phrases. As one of the participants stated:

I am really passionate about the English language and want to become fluent. Watching English language movies provides me with lots of slang and cool expressions, getting used to the sounds and rhythms of the language, helping me to consolidate materials I have learnt elsewhere, and most importantly increasing my exposure to the language. (S.P. 4)

4.2.1.1.3. Listening to Foreign Music

Music is a motivating and mood-enhancing technique for learning and practicing a foreign language. There are so many benefits to music. Music improves listening and oral language skills, attention and memory, increases complex thinking, and provides pleasant

and positive learning environment. It is well known that music can be a very effective tool for learning a foreign language. As with films in original version, the lyrics of foreign music are a good source of words and phrases to be memorized while having fun. You may now know that repetition is one of the most important factors in learning and remembering a foreign language.

Using the songs of your target language presents you with the vocabulary used in a specific context. Songs present a particular environment, a particular theme and a platform for learning the language. A love song, for example, will often contain words that express longing, admiration, fondness, love, forbidden love, stars, eternity, etc. It's a whole vocabulary subset that deals with a certain field, a certain slice of life. This part offers some ideas to help you learn and practice a foreign language with music.

If you want to improve your pronunciation, it is important to sing without reading the lyrics. Indeed, when one tries to sing and reading the lyrics simultaneously, his/her bad pronunciation habits will resume. It does not matter if you do not understand the meaning of what you sing, most in this step is to properly pronounce. An additional step would be to try to write the lyrics by listening. Then you can find the lyrics on the internet. It's time to listen to music with lyrics, you'll be surprised to find words and phrases you already know without being aware of it. In fact, it is not always easy to understand by yourself the words of a song in a foreign language. One of the participants' statement concerning this technique is as follows:

I select one song which I already heard many times, I put it in my headphones and I try to write the lyrics that I understand. Then I check the real lyrics and I check my errors. When I do it completely, I listen to the song again and finally try to write the whole lyrics by myself. (S.P. 2)

Songs, in general, use simple conversational language with a lot of repetition. They can strongly activate the repetition mechanism of the language acquisition, which is just what many teachers look for in sample texts. This type of repetition presented in songs will

activate the students to get a lot of pattern drills automatically without realizing it. One of the participants expressed her feeling as follows:

I listen to some catchy tune and I find myself involuntarily trying to sing it myself. The good feeling I gain from listening to foreign music caused me to pursue such activity. Getting used to utter and mimic the foreign music inspired my soul and ultimately persuaded me to looking for more foreign music. I never listened to any foreign music with a busy mind. I did it with high concentration on every lyric. Without having focus on every lyric, you will not understand the song for ever. (S.P. 13)

Generally speaking, songs are the product of a culture and share values, commitment, responsibility, love, history, traditions, customs, and specific characteristics of spoken language. The language and culture which are understood by students through songs are much more attractive for them. Songs are also easily available; songs present new vocabulary and expressions in context. Through songs students become familiar with the pronunciation of native speakers, and they also provide topics for discussion.

4.2.1.1.4. Attending Free Discussion Courses

If you want to maintain foreign language proficiency, one of its ways is to keep using it. It isn't about just memorizing vocabulary, but rather it is about using it to get around a place. It is about standing in front of native speakers and interacting with them. One of the biggest problems of learning a language just by watching films, listening to music, or reading different texts is that you never get to use it in real life. Unless you talk to someone in that language and practice using it in public, you would never understand the true meaning of words coming out of your mouth. Feedback from others play key role in language learning.

A discussion can bring out your interests and motivation; it's a chance for you to talk about the things you really care about. Giving and justifying opinions in English can also bring you a sense of accomplishment, as you are using the language to express complex ideas.

Group discussions occur in many different formats, from very informal ones between friends to highly structured and challenging discussions. In both cases, there are a number of specific skills that you can develop to become better able to contribute effectively to group discussions. Developing group discussion skills is useful for everyday life as we regularly find ourselves having discussions amongst friends, family and colleagues. These may vary from very informal chats about day-to-day things, to more serious topics, for example a discussion about a recent news story or a problem that needs to be solved.

Generally, group discussions offer an opportunity for extended speaking and listening practice by all of the contributors. Group discussion practice and skill development are therefore useful for all students.

Learning from the peers and note taking are the keys to success in this technique. One of the participants expressed her experience in free discussion classes as follows:

At first, I was unable to participate in the discussion regarding the pre-determined topic. I just played a role as a listener. After a while, I was able to talk with them and share my ideas by the peers' collaboration. During the discussion, I wrote down every important or unknown structures and vocabulary. Then I practiced them at home and put all my effort to learn them. In the next session I tried to make use of the new learned points in the discussions to stick them in my mind. (S.P. 2)

Some of the participants discussed about a sort of free discussion not holding in a class and not having a form of formal class. Talking with the friends already knowing English around different topics can be categorized as one type of free discussion. The daily routine conversations were done in English among them. They tried to make their audiences understood and whenever they could not find a suitable word to complete their sentences, then they used the Persian equivalent and their friends corrected them. Since most of the sentences had to be repeated among the friends in their daily routine conversations, the participants tried to use the newly learned structures and vocabularies in such sentences to bear them in their minds. As one of them said:

I have three close friends with almost high English language proficiency. Challenging our language knowledge is very common among us. We have gotten used to follow our daily conversations in English. Having more than five mistakes, makes us to buy something for others. So, all of us have had to practice more in order not to making any mistake during the conversations. In addition, when we are in public place and want to discuss around a specific topic, we prefer to speak in English so that the others do not understand us.
(S.P. 3)

4.2.1.1.5. Reading Novels and Story Books

Reading in a foreign language helps us become more comfortable with the words and grammatical rules that enable us to express our own thoughts. Seeing the text of new words and concepts visually helps to reinforce our memory of them, while having the ability to stop, think, or look up words in a dictionary allows for more individualized pace of mental absorption.

The brain is able to remember more when it sees things. Learning is facilitated by visual cues, and reading helps the brain remember by showing it the words and the pictures that the word represents. On the other hand, if the reading is too difficult, it can create an

excessive cognitive load, inhibit any real learning, and discourage you from reading further. To this regard, the S.P. 15 said:

I was never worried too much if I was not fully absorbing the actual meaning of the material I was reading. I just read on. I was not tempted to grab the dictionary on the first unfamiliar word I met. I just barreled through the text and read on anyway. The purpose of this kind of reading was that I exposed myself to as much material as possible. I was not worried about comprehension. I was just practicing my contextualizing abilities here. I simply guessed what I was reading about. The only time that I looked up a word was if it kept appearing over and over again, and it was leading to frustration or a breakdown in comprehension.

When we are interested in what we're reading, our brains have a way of digesting new words more efficiently. Instead of directing your attention towards words, focus on exploring ideas. Reading allows the mind to travel anywhere in the world and explore novel ideas in the comfort of your own home. Start with books that have shorter content, basic vocabulary and use simple sentence structures. In this regard, one of the participants' experience is as follows:

I started by reading things I had already read in my native language. The fact was that I, at least, knew the gist of it and would help me tremendously to pick up context clues and implicitly learn new vocabulary and grammatical constructions. Otherwise, if I got lost in a new story in a foreign language, it was difficult to recover. By having progressed, I started reading story books through which I could find words that were about the weather, animals, family, friends, fruits, colors, kites, shapes and creatures of the imagination—all very basic, and yet very interesting.

Also, I faced concrete verbs that pertained to running, jumping, swimming, playing, crawling, and anything that could easily be drawn by a book illustrator and imagined by myself. (S.P. 12)

In addition to reading the easy passages at first, trying reading books that are written in dual language, where the translations are written immediately below the sentence you're reading, is identified as another form of following such technique. One of the participants stated that:

This one-to-one sentence correspondence saved my time from reaching for the nearest dictionary to locate the meaning of a word. As a result, I had a smoother reading experience. I was also able to notice how the grammar rules of the target language were compared with my own language thanks to this layout. I was able to take advantage of the similarities and be aware of the differences. (S.P. 10)

Reading stories with their complementary audios is an effective way of improving listening skill as well as reading skill. Adjusting the heard words with their written form helps learners to get familiar with the correct native-like pronunciations of the words. As one of the participants said:

I read books with their complementary audiobooks. I started by reading just a single book while listening to the complementary audio; even if I did not understand everything completely. It dramatically improved my "ear training" and habituated myself to the general speed and intonation of a native speaker. Then, I had a dictionary close by and tried to write notes on the margins of the page. I also underlined, highlighted and encircled unfamiliar words. (S.P. 3)

4.2.1.1.6. Attending Tour Leader Courses

Another type of course which connects us to English language is the courses preparing us to become a tour leader. There are different types of courses that help us to get engaged in English language, but the participants of this study introduced only tour leader courses which were followed by their own desire. In these classes, their communication skills were improved and most of the pre-acquired materials were reviewed for them. Since they participated in those courses on their own willingness, they took it for granted and did their best to make use of its advantages. One way of benefiting from such techniques so that the students have improvement in their English language proficiency was practicing with their classmates out of the class context; that is one sort of free discussion method.

Benefiting from collaborative approach in the tour leader courses is the hitting part of participating in such courses. The learners can develop their communication skill by sharing their knowledge with each other and discussing around different topics. Since the variety of topics in such courses is high and the learners are presented with different types of cultural, historical, and social information, their language knowledge can be extended. One of them expressed her feeling as follows:

Participating in the tour leader course caused my knowledge of English to be kept after three years of having developed my language proficiency. The main advantage of this course was enabling the members to have free discussion and share their knowledge. We could learn many things from each other. I, myself have collected all the notes made of the important points presented during the course. I tried to apply them in my speaking. In addition, whenever I was asked to present some information about a specific issue, I used my notes to utter the most appropriate and accurate sentences. Whenever I faced a problem during the presentation, I was corrected by other members and it caused me to keep them in

my mind in order not to make similar mistakes anymore.
(S.P. 9)

Therefore, making notes from the points mentioned in the tour leader course can be helpful to keep the English language proficiency. In addition, since English language is presented in different contexts in such course, large amounts of words and structures are learned and reviewed by applying them in the real life. Moreover, the degree of interaction between the participants and native speakers is increased through taking the advantage of such course.

4.2.1.1.7. Making Use of English Learning Soft Wares and Internet

The easy access to computers and internet for everyone and the increasing number of web-based English courses has encouraged and helped lots of people to study English. Chat rooms can also be carried out through internet. In this situation, two or more individuals can "talk" on-line about various topics or issues; that is some sort of free discussion method through which language learners can be paired up and can be given a debatable topic to discuss. Such experiences can stimulate authentic communication and assist students in developing specific communication skills such as arguing, persuading, or defending a particular point. Through social media websites, however, people are connecting with others and using online communication tools to practice their foreign language skills. In addition to the communication benefits of the Internet, the Internet can also be used to retrieve and access information. The Internet can also be used to acquire information from language-related resources for a variety of purposes such as building the schemata.

Internet can be helpful in providing learners with different kinds of audios and texts through which learners can develop their language proficiency. In addition, internet can present the most updated materials which can build learners' schema. Lots of reliable websites are accessible through which learners can build their vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation sub-skill by listening to the available corresponding audios in the websites. As one of the participants expressed that:

You can learn languages better if you hear the correct pronunciation and try to use the word in a certain phrase or sentence. To do that, I browsed the internet for free language audio books online. There are a lot of websites where I can enhance my vocabulary range for free. I listen to how the word is being pronounced and used in a sentence so that I can effectively apply it to my everyday conversation or other sorts of practice with language. I have developed my vocabulary knowledge by learning new words and their meaning. (S.P. 6)

Chatting is the process of voice communication between the speaker and the listener through the internet. This process may be very beneficial to the learner if the other side speaker is a native language talker. Online forums and social media platforms provide students with a place to ask questions and receive complete answers. Such advantages lead the participants to make use of this method; one of the participants said as follows:

I have done online communication exercises and listened to audio files found on the net relating to their topics. By getting involved in the online discussion in the chat rooms, I had to equip myself with updated information by accessing articles related to their topic of discussion from various websites. Undoubtedly, these practices have enhanced my communication skills and promoted the positive quality of sharing ideas with others. (S.P. 11)

Therefore, opportunities for interaction, developing communication skills, and getting involved with foreign language outside formal contexts have greatly improved because of technology.

The vocabulary of the Internet is overwhelmingly English, and most of the texts that are accessed through it are in English. Moreover, one other advantage of making use of internet as an effective technique of foreign language maintenance is helping participants to look

for their problems and mistakes in English language. One other type of using internet was expressed by S.P. 10:

I have looked for different kinds of essays to read; no matter they are scientific, entertainment, or related to my lessons of university. I have tried a lot to comprehend them. Whenever I faced any unknown point I referred to the dictionary or searched it in the internet. Through searching in the internet I could also learn similar structures to what I had searched. So, my knowledge of grammar have been increased by searching my problems in the internet.

4.2.1.1.8. Reading Newsletters

Regular newsletters keep you informed about important deadlines and events. It comes to you with the latest news and information. The newspaper can be used to enhance skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, social studies and science. News programs are written clearly and directly and such characteristics makes them perfect for language learning. So, the news can be your own personal English classroom. In addition, critical thinking is the natural outgrowth of using a newspaper to learn. Unlike textbooks, which are several years outdated by the time they get into your hands, the newspaper comes alive with information. The newspaper expands the curriculum with an unlimited amount of information to use as background to fulfill more activities in English. News programs focus on issues that you care about and on how you live your life. It makes sense to learn English in the context (situation) you can actually use.

In addition, learning English isn't just about improving your vocabulary. It's also about being able to connect with English speakers. When you know what's going on in their world, then you'll be able to speak their language better. If you are a beginner, no problem: you can watch and read the news online at a level that works for you, then go to more difficult stories at your own speed. What's more, Taking advantage of listening to podcasts along with their corresponding subtitles in the target language is common among language learners. Concerning this technique, one of the participants stated that:

I listen to English podcasts or videos and read along with the text. The VOA Learning English Channel includes subtitles and the commentators speak slowly and clearly. It gives me a chance to keep up. In addition, through the listening online facility I can hit the pause button and read the subtitles at my own rate. If I do not know a word, I highlight it or write it down and come back for a definition if the meaning does not become clear later in the paragraph. Reading news is a great way to learn English because the articles tend to be short and the vocabulary tends to stay the same on each topic. (S.P. 15)

Following news channels and videos along with their corresponding subtitles in the first language is another type of benefiting from such technique by some other participants. The news reports are recorded to be practiced more in further times. In addition to listening to the news reports, following the news in the related websites is targeted by the participants as they aim at increasing their exposure to English language by elaborating on a specific issue. The S.P. 7 said:

I initially started by watching news channels with Persian subtitles to learn the special expressions used in reporting the news. I recorded most of the news and watched them several times to master the expressions. I had to review them many times at first. Alongside the news channels, I followed the foreign news in the related websites since I believe that the reported news via these two sources is without any censorship. At first, I had to check some sentences for getting their rules. I scheduled about an hour to read the newsletters on the websites but it lasted 2 hours because of checking some expressions. By passing time, I became fluent in comprehending the total news without checking any expression.

Most of the foreign language learners are interested in reading such kinds of passages and follow the foreign news in its original language. Getting familiar with the specific sentences and headlines used in newsletters is of high interest among most of the participants. They believe that they can learn and extract many new rules and structures out of such texts.

4.2.1.2. Sharing Knowledge

Another factor contributing to foreign language maintenance is sharing your knowledge with others that may be one of the greatest gifts you can give. Sharing your knowledge improves your personal performance, effectiveness, and skills, which should increase your personal profit. It helps you grow. Sharing your knowledge with others will give your talents more exposure, thus giving the people you interact with, the opportunity to identify you as a valuable expert. Helping others with lower level of language proficiency can help you build your reputation and ultimately be motivated to increase your language proficiency and share it with others.

Most of the participants described their experiences of helping others with English language which was recognized as a kind of sharing their knowledge that ultimately led to their own reminding and preserving the acquired foreign language. This emerged technique was resulted from the participants' awareness of the fruitful consequences of helping others through sharing their knowledge which consequently ended with their own review of the foreign language and also learning extra points. This technique was recognized in two forms; teaching and doing translation.

4.2.1.2.1. Teaching for Free

One way of making our knowledge worthful is sharing it with others. All the participants appreciated this method as an effective way of reviewing their pre-acquired materials while sharing them with others. The participants made use of helping other language learners having problem with their lessons in English.

By engaging in such method, the participants could not add any extra and new point to their existed knowledge storage. The main reason of this fact is only getting involved with the materials that have been studied before in the learning period. Some college participants tried to help their classmates with the English courses hold in university or even the technical English courses. Following this manner caused them to retain more vocabularies and grammar rules due to their high exposure to the language. As one of them said:

Since I am really interested in English I have tried a lot to be engaged in it. It is a kind of challenge for me to work on English with my friends together when I have a little knowledge of that matter. I really enjoy having such experience. By getting involved in this process I have learned many new materials and also I could review most of the pre-acquired points. (S.P. 7)

Teaching English to others or helping them with their English-related lessons can be considered as a useful way of preserving the pre-acquired materials in your minds. No matter what reason is behind getting involved in this process, it causes the maintenance of the foreign language to be occurred automatically. In addition, some of the participants appreciated this technique in such a way that they involved themselves in helping others who were in lower level of language proficiency; for instance, the children in their relatives or their siblings.

4.2.1.2.2. Doing Translation

Translation is a necessary and useful part of language learning because it can also reveal important details about how two compared languages operate. One of the advantages of going from your native language to your target language is the bag full of synonyms you will pick up along the way. Moreover, you will be more sensitive to the nuances between synonyms. Over time, you will be more skilled in picking the right word for the specific context at hand. Since, the best way of maintaining a foreign language proficiency is being able to use it in different context, translation can be contributed to language proficiency

maintenance as it is almost like talking to a native speaker. He tells you something, and then you look down to your dictionary to make out what he was saying. After figuring that out, you are searching for words in your dictionary that will help you in composing an appropriate response.

Two-way translation method can be effective for language learners through which they convert a text into their first language and later they translate it back into the original language. Having followed such method, the participants can identify the gap exist between their own language knowledge and the writer's language proficiency who is a native speaker. The S.P. 12 expressed her experience of doing translation as follows:

At the first stage, I try to translate an original text into Persian. Then, I retranslate it back into English. This helps me correct my own mistakes, see gaps in my comprehension, and to think the target language. Repeated practice of translating and translating a single text back and forth between two languages help me to learn to think in terms of the overall message that I am trying to convey, without getting hung up on the individual words or structures.

Translating texts in first language into English language makes learners to look for different words and structures to fulfill such task. In addition, trying to translate more difficult and complex texts into the target language requires applying also difficult structures and words which consequently leads to development of language learners' proficiency. Furthermore, increasing the exposure frequency to different types of texts with different topics also causes learners to bear many different sorts of structures and words in their minds which can be later applied in other contexts such as free discussion courses.

Some of my friends ask me to translate Persian texts into English which are mostly related to their occupation or university courses. I welcome it because of being aware of its high positive effect on my own knowledge of English. Since, different structures and words are needed to be applied in

different contexts, I deal with large amounts of English language structures and words. In addition, due to the translation of many passages with similar topics, most of the structures and words have been repeated to me which result in their sticking in my mind. Through such activity, I have developed my vocabulary knowledge in high degree. This activity also helps me to show myself in the free discussion classes in such a way that I can easily convert my intended sentences into English in my mind and get lots of new ideas and topics to discuss. (S.P. 1)

Such practice is of particular benefit to the participants, as they get familiar with the most common structures of the target language more quickly and easily.

4.2.2. Instrumental Motivation

4.2.2.1. Making use of Casual Opportunities

Finishing all the levels of English language learning courses is not the end part English-related courses. Any educational and learning courses related to English language can have a crucial role in language proficiency maintenance. Depending on your purpose of participating in such courses, the English language style is varied. For instance, the participants had to accomplish technical English courses related to their fields of study in the university in order to meet the educational requirements. Taking such courses seriously and engaging actively in them contribute directly to the foreign language maintenance. Here, university courses are introduced by the participants as useful techniques of foreign language maintenance affected by such factor.

In addition, if your job is somehow related to the English language, you should do your effort to make use of such opportunity to improve your English language proficiency. It is obvious that in such occasion, you face different passages with different levels of difficulty. So, extracting important rules and points out of such passages can help you to promote in your English language proficiency in the case of practicing them out of the job context. Since repetition is the most effective way of bearing anything in your mind, the

English materials which are repeated for you because of your job situation are stuck in your mind. Only two types of vocational opportunities were extracted through the participants' expressions. Ignoring the type of learning contexts or vocational opportunities you are engaged in, you should be aware of such chance and do your best to make use of such casual opportunities to improve your language knowledge.

4.2.2.1.1. Interactions with University Courses

Most of the participants talked of their experiences of studying English in the university. Since they had studied English before in English language institutes, they all had great feelings towards it in the university. Their feelings were so great that they volunteered to present lectures relating to their English courses to show their superiority over other classmates in terms of English language proficiency. What's more they benefited from helping their friends in their home works relating to English language. They used their language proficiency to show off themselves as one of them said:

I really enjoyed the moment that others asked me to do them a favor in terms of English language. In the university I was the first person who other classmates came to me for their English problems and I was proud of myself at that time. I was also so eager to present English-related lectures even if I found it difficult. I learned much new materials from the English language courses in the university. I noted all the new learned materials and practiced them out of the class context. Since the topics of our English course were related to my main major in the university, whenever I studied my lessons from other books in Persian, I tried to convert some important sentences into English in my mind. Most of the time, I had to return to the technical English language course book related to my field of study in university to find the most appropriate equivalents. (S.P. 3)

Some other participants made use of their English language courses in university in such a way that they translated passages related to their fields of study to improve both their knowledge of English and their technical lessons. For instance, look at the following expression by one of the participants:

I searched all the needed information about my major in English. I tried a lot to follow English passages related to my major. I had a technical dictionary related to my major to find the unknown words in it. I also checked their pronunciations in order to have no problem when I had a presentation in class. In addition, I practiced all the grammar rules I had extracted from the passages. In the case of having to prepare writings for the teacher or answering the questions in the exams, I was able to apply the learned materials extracted from the passages easily. (S.P. 13)

Thus, taking the English language courses serious and making use of the exercises applied in such classes can have an effective role in improving the English language proficiency because of acquainting with various necessary words related to the favorite fields. Consequently, it can be resulted in getting familiar with various models of making sentences in a technical and formal manner.

4.2.2.1.2. Job-Related Interactions

Those participants who had job related to English language believed that they owe most of their maintained English language knowledge to their job situation. Their English knowledge has been updated by the technology development. For example, considering cellphones shopkeepers, as the language of all the cell phones is in English so they had never been far from the English language. The following is one of the participants' claims of the importance of his job opportunity in keeping his English language knowledge:

I have to be updated with the information about cell phones. I have always searched the information in English language since it is more comprehensive. I have never made any notes

due to the lack of time but the repetition of sentences and rules over releasing new version of any device caused me to maintain my English language proficiency. To cope with the foreign companies' demands, I have had to be proficient enough in English. I think the most effective factor of my success was my own willingness in looking for the only English information regarding my job. (S.P. 5)

Above all, paying attention to the structures and specific words of brochures and instruction of any device caused the participants to deal with English language. Another participant described his experience in this field as follows:

To stay in the competition market of cellphones, I have had to update my information according to the market demands. To this end, I have followed all original instructions which are mostly in English. The frequency of exposure to some technical words has caused me to be fluent in such kinds of vocabularies and be able to get the points out of the instructions. In the case of not knowing any word, I use dictionary or search it in the Internet. Applying the technical words during the conversations with other coworkers has been also helpful technique of keeping the words in mind. Most of the structures and grammar points have been reviewed through reading the brochures and instructions several times. (S.P. 15)

Having accessed to the available instruction booklets and also the websites can be considered as a beneficial opportunity to enlarge the English language knowledge. In order to be success in such kind of job, the workers need to be able enough in communicating with larger and original companies. Thus, the brochures, instruction booklets, and the related websites are the valuable sources of developing English language knowledge to

communicate with the original companies. The following expression by one of the participants can reveal its crucial role:

I paid attention to each technical word provided in the brochures or the companies' websites and tried to recognize the contexts in which they were applied. I also, tried to utilize the same structures and words through communicating with the related companies to discuss around specific devices. The condition of being success in my job occasion was to know the rules of communicating with larger companies in a technical way. So, the most reliable source of accessing technical terms was making use of the brochures and websites created by the companies and treating them as a reading task. (S.P. 14)

Dealing continuously with brochures, instruction booklets, and also websites in English language with the related topics to the participants' jobs caused their English language proficiency to be preserved because of the repetition of this process in their job contexts.

In addition, computers are in any case English-oriented. People having jobs relating to computer need to have good knowledge about the hardware and software. In order to be knowledgeable enough in terms of computer, the participants had to identify and practice different grammatical rules and enhance their vocabulary range.

One of the computer engineers explained his experience of improving his language proficiency to be successful in his job as follows:

Not being proficient in English language might impede me to stay in my current job position. Before finding this job I was almost fluent in English language but I had to preserve this level of proficiency due to my job position. So, I never gave up practicing English language. Besides, I have become

more fluent because of dealing more and more with English information about different parts of computer by passing time. In addition, my job situation necessitates me to read large scale of passages related to computers' characteristics since all the provided information are in English. The lengthy exposure to such kinds of passages caused me to master large amounts of structures and words. (S.P. 6)

Again here in this technique, similar to the cell phones, repetition has been recognized as the main factor of keeping English language in the mind. The participants' knowledge of English language was preserved automatically because of fulfilling their vocational requirements. It worth mentioning that the participants did not rely only on their job requirements to deal with English language. Instead, they followed some other kinds of techniques on their own. The main reason was that they were eager to develop their knowledge in all the areas of English language regarding the use of different types of rules and words in different contexts and not just applying specific types of English utterances they faced in their job contexts.

Chapter Five:

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Overview

The objectives of the present study are to uncover techniques helping people to maintain their foreign language proficiency after having developed their language proficiency as well as investigate the effective ways through which applying such techniques is accomplished. To this end, some English language users who have been successful in maintaining their English language proficiency, are chosen to be asked to introduce their applied techniques and also explain the ‘how’ of employing such techniques.

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, a discussion of these findings in relation to the previous studies in the field, the pedagogical implications of the study, and the recommendations for further research.

5.2. Discussion

To prevent the acquired foreign language to be lost or attrited, EFL learners need to follow several maintenance techniques. The intended techniques are those have been applied by successful people in the field of language proficiency maintenance. So, this study investigated the successful learners’ recommendations in terms of different aspects of techniques they have employed since the time of developing their language proficiency.

At first, only one type of factor contributing to language proficiency maintenance was found that was motivation with two dimensions of integrative and instrumental kinds. All of the applied techniques were affected by this factor. The first dimension of motivation factor concerned those techniques applied by the participants based on their inner desire in using English language. On the other hand, the second dimension involved the techniques helped participants to meet their educational and vocational requirements. Therefore, motivation was considered as the most important factor playing role in keeping foreign language as Yashiro (1992) stated that “Age of the returnees and their proficiency of the foreign language are not considered to be more important than the returnees’ motivation and attitudes” (60); or, students with very favorable attitudes showed a slight drop in their speaking skills during the non-use period (Gardner, Lalonde, and Macpherson, 1985). Their

positive attitudes towards their second language caused them not to be far from it which was exactly evident in the participants of current study. Motivation was the first and main factor to determine the EFL learners' future regarding their foreign language proficiency. Generally, it is a vital factor without which high majority of students would lose a large amount of their foreign language knowledge and also following the maintenance techniques were preconditioned by the motivation factor. In contrary, the motivation factor and the rate of language use were not in accordance with each other among the participants of Gardner, Lalonde, and Macpherson's (1985) study. Their mean score in the motivation test was very high which was not comparable with the rate of their language use and applying the maintenance techniques. The participants of these authors' study believed that they were enough proficient in the foreign language that they did not feel themselves in need of spending much time on retaining their foreign language. The claims of the participants who resisted in applying the maintenance techniques due to their high confidence in their foreign language proficiency were against the arguments of many scholars such as Hedgcock (1991) who believed that the more proficient the learners are, the more they have to lose. What's more, Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, and Evers (1987) got to the positive correlation between motivation and foreign language use in their findings. It is noteworthy to mention that although many scholars confirmed the role of motivation in language use, they have not specified what types of language use are affected by such driving factor. Comparing to the mentioned authors, this fact has been characterized in the current study through analyzing the participants' expressions regarding their experiences of maintaining their foreign language proficiency.

The first and most applied technique under the influence of integrative motivation factor was self-study. The participants' self-governed and problem-solving activities were considered the focal point of maintaining their language proficiency. This conception of a learning process meant that it was not possible to structure or pre-determine the participants' activities in a learning process, and the activities must be developed on the basis of the student's own problem-solving. An open-ended learning environment provided students with multiple possibilities for activities. The technique of self-study was accomplished in eight different forms by the participants.

The first form of self-study technique was reviewing or re-studying the pre-studied English textbooks during the learning period. The participants have spent proper times on re-studying their institutional textbooks and reviewed a large amount of materials. Most of the time, this trend was followed in the case of facing grammatical problems through practicing other techniques. In other words, when the participants had problem in any area of English language via other sources of language input, they referred to the books they had studied before during their learning period. Highlighting the role of review in language proficiency maintenance, applying such technique by the participants was in favor of what Bahrick (1984) found in his study in which his participants were involved in a space review method and could recall about 72% of the materials they had studied fifty years earlier.

The second form of self-study technique was recognized as watching foreign movies even with subtitles or without it. This technique was welcomed by most of the participants as they thought of it as the best way of getting familiar with slang and colloquial expressions in the target language. Due to the individual differences among the participants, they made use of this technique in different ways as some of them believed in effective watching foreign movies by subtitle and some did not think so. The findings of this part can be related to the studies of some scholars such as De Bot, Jagt, Janssen, Kessels, and Schils (1986) who indicated that all television viewers of all sorts benefited from the spoken language but in different rates. Regarding making use of subtitles, the findings of the studies of Garza (1991), Markham (1999), Goldman and Goldman (1988), Koolstra and Beentjes (1999), Koskinen et al. (1985), Markham and Peter (2003), Neuman and Koskinen (1992) confirmed the useful manner of applying such method by the participants of the current study in a sense that they increased their skill in reading English language vocabularies significantly after lengthy exposure to the target language captions. On the other hand, the manner of watching foreign movies by some of the participants was in accordance to the findings of Huang and Eskey (2000) who revealed that closed-captions improved not only listening comprehension skills of college-level ESL students, but also their general comprehension and vocabulary development.

The other explored technique was listening to the foreign music which was favored highly by the participants. The participants applied such technique, appreciated the lyrics

accompanied by the music in helping them to improve their foreign language knowledge. The high fondness of the participants towards listening to the foreign music was consistent with the arguments of Ross (2006) and Sacedo (2002) who believed that motivating students were best accomplished by determining the suitability of the listening material such as the use of song as authentic material. In addition, employing this technique caused the songs to be stuck in participants' mind to experience success with certain language structures, learn features of the target culture, or achieve listening enjoyment.

As a further technique of maintaining language proficiency, some scholars got to a conclusion that attending foreign language maintenance classes offered mostly at private institutions had a large effect on the participants' ability in keeping their foreign language proficiency. The participants made use of various ways of being in contact with the foreign language through the face-to-face communication with others also aimed at retaining their foreign language proficiency. Participating in free discussion classes was one sort of the mentioned various ways. In such classes a specific issue was selected by the leader of the class and the participants started to discuss around the issue. The peer correction method was favored by majority of the members and they claimed that they could understand from each other in better manner. Staying in contact and keeping on the friendship with those who used to be their classmates in the English language classes and whoever already knew English language could also be considered as one type of free discussion but in different context. This type of explored technique was in contradiction with Yashiro's (1992) finding in which the participants got the very little chance of direct interfacial communication with foreign friends or those who already knew the foreign language to maintain their knowledge of the foreign language. In addition, an important variable concerning foreign language retention was introduced by Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, and Evers (1987) which was related to intergroup interaction and language behavior. The mentioned variable was in favor of my participants' applying methods in the shape of being in contact with whoever could also speak English and participating in the free discussion courses. One of the participants of the Kuhberg's (1992) study used basic communication 'routine' patterns in order to not lose all of her language proficiency. For example, talking about the personal situation and life in general within small communities was exactly the same as what my

participants benefited from it in the disuse period. This kind of practice with foreign language found in the Kuhberg's (1992) study was in conformity with the technique of being in contact with the friends also knew English and discussing with them around the routine topics. Regarding one aspect of free discussion technique, the researcher considered chatting on internet with foreign people as one of the effective strategies through which the participants were connected to the foreign language as one of the participants of Wong's (2007) study stated that she liked English because of being interested in making foreign friends and talking to net friends from different parts of the worlds.

The other explored technique was reading novels and story books through which the participants were provided with factual information about the world, and the rules of letter-sound relations. The participants accomplished this method through highlighting the new words and difficult structures for further practice. In other words, reading novels and story books without making any noted did not help anyone to increase or maintain his/her language knowledge. As Kopke (2004) stated that literacy enabled the participants to stay in contact with the foreign language via books or written correspondence, the researcher concluded that employing such technique by the participants demonstrated their literacy ability and also leaded them to achieve higher literacy level. In addition, the gained meanings from the participants' expression regarding reading novels and story books were in consistent with the findings of Rott's (1999) study in which reading was identified as a valuable resource of acquiring and retaining words due to the high probability of several exposures to the specific vocabularies. Furthermore, the participants' expressions concerning reading novels, stories, newsletters, and journals related to their area of interest were in harmony with the claim made by Marefat and Rouhshad (2007) through which the role of context (in which the words and structures were applied) was emphasized in order to overcome the occurrence of attrition phenomenon.

Another technique which was necessitated the participants' motivation was benefiting from internet. Self-governed, problem-based and collaborative activities call for tools which support construction, presentation, reflection, collaboration, and tools for finding people and other resources of relevance to the encountered problems. The most reliable tool in this regard is recognized as internet. Through this technique the participants

looked for their faced problems- in terms of the English language knowledge- in internet and made use of the provided information in different websites. Chatting with others abroad on internet was also characterized as an advantage of internet in helping the participants regarding their effort to keep their second language proficiency. Making use of social software technologies to empower participants in their self-governed activities was found as another advantage in this approach. Generally speaking, participants were directed at solving a problem, and they were provided with tools which they used to solve problems on their own and in collaboration with other participants. The findings in terms of Internet voice chatting were proved by Hoven (1999) concerning the use of the second language in this way might aid the communication capabilities of the participants. In addition, the findings related to the provided social software technologies by the internet can be connected to the Kenworthy's (2004) claim that via internet, language learners were provided with useful websites to enhance their reading abilities and build their vocabulary knowledge through getting accessed to a huge number of resources available in the form of newspapers, magazines, journals, electronic libraries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and newsletters.

Reading newsletter was also investigated as one of the applicable tool of maintaining foreign language. Participants mastered new types of sentencing and structures through following such method. The similarity between the findings of the current study and Murtagh and Van-Der-Slik's (2004) study was the participants' involvement in catching original news via news channels accompanying with subtitles in the first language. Reading daily or weekly newspapers was also found in both of the studies.

The participants of Gardner, Lalonde, and Macpherson (1985) demonstrated that they spent relatively a great deal of time on watching French movies and reading French newspapers. They also tried a lot to reside in French-speaking regions. The first two mentioned techniques were as equal as what the participants of the current study followed in their maintenance procedure. Depending on different social situation of different countries, being in contact with those who also know English language through internet or face-to-face communication by my participants can be in some degree the equivalent of residing in French-speaking regions by the participants of the mentioned authors.

Most of the participants preferred following each of the mentioned techniques whenever they were in mood of doing so and their minds were fresh. None of them put his/her self under pressure to maintain his/her foreign language proficiency on any cost. In other words, they never engaged themselves in any mentioned technique when they felt tired. Such expressions confirmed the findings of Bloom and Shuell's (1981) study in which the distributed-practice of foreign language showed high effects on language learning and its retention after a while. The main reason may be the activation of the long-term memory and subsequently retrieving the information from the long-term memory in an easier and faster manner. Bahrick et.al (1993) also found the positive effect of providing the EFL learners with distributed-practice on their ability to recall the materials in future after intervals.

The other recognized technique was sharing knowledge and helping others in lower level of language proficiency. This technique was done by the participants in two types; teaching and doing translation. The participants reviewed and practiced large amounts of language materials through teaching. Regarding the translation method, the participants' exposure frequency was increased and also their awareness of applying different words and structures in different context was improved. The participants appreciated such method in comparing the one to one correspondence of the both languages elements. Correspondingly, the method of helping others with lower level of language proficiency was also indicated by Murtagh and Van-Der-Slik (2004) which was described as helping siblings with their homework in the foreign language.

Making use of casual opportunities to develop foreign language proficiency was another extracted technique which was under the influence of instrumental motivation. Most of the participants were engaged in other learning contexts different from the language learning one. They had to develop their language proficiency in order to be successful in their fields of study. For example, the participants tried a lot to practice English language through reading essays related to their fields of study. In this manner, the participants added further information in terms of language materials to their pre-existed language knowledge storage. Another found learning context was tour leader courses through which the participants were connected to English language in high degree and also

they increased their communication skills through discussing around different topics, places, and cultures with their classmates. In addition, they appreciated such opportunity to be able to speak with native speakers directly. Having connected to English language again in further contexts was the key to success in the language proficiency maintenance.

One other type of casual opportunities through which the participants could maintain their English language was their job situation. Only two kinds of job were introduced by the participants which helped them to be connected with English language; computer engineer and cellphones shop keeper. To meet the requirements of their vocational situation and be good respondents to the related market's demands, they had to be proficient enough in English language. To this end, they tried to get the related information in English language to develop their technical knowledge. Thus, being aware of such useful opportunities and take them for granted depends highly on the participants' degree of willingness towards maintaining their second language at the first stage. In conformity with such approach in foreign language maintenance, Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, and Evers (1987) counted some important variables playing essential role in foreign language attrition or maintenance among which the opportunities to use the foreign language can be considered as an equivalent to making use of casual opportunities by the participants of the current study.

As a whole, retaining the English language knowledge through such approach was highly due to the repetition of using the related materials and lengthy exposure to such opportunities.

As a last finding, depending on final language learning goals, the participants applied different types of strategies to maintain their foreign language proficiency. In other words, none of the participants did confine his/her self only to apply one type of technique in foreign language maintenance. The most successful ones were those who made use of any situation and technique to retrieve their foreign language proficiency.

5.3. Implications for Practice

Most of the learners of any second language are endangered to forget their knowledge in second language especially after the time of completing the learning process. Identifying the strategies to maintain the learned second language can help anyone to make use of his/her knowledge. For example, some second language learners who have been graduated from university in B.A have forgotten most of their acquired language proficiency and they constantly complain about their weaknesses in the second language. The result is losing their confidence regarding their ability in the field. I would be glad if the findings of this survey will help them and others having similar condition to retrieve and keep their second language proficiency.

Whoever has finished his/her learning process of any foreign language can benefit the findings of this paper to maintain his/her language proficiency and feel free in the case of getting involved in a situation in which he/she would be asked or required to use the acquired knowledge; for instance going abroad, finding a job required knowing English language, and making decisions to continue their education in second language. What's more each learner in any age with any level of language proficiency can benefit from the findings of this study as the presented techniques can be used based on different required levels. One more thing is providing the appropriate ways of using each technique which in turn would lead to the second language proficiency development. Therefore, since everyone put much effort and energy on learning any second language, they would better to use others' experiences through which they have been successful in retrieving the missed knowledge and retaining them for the whole life. Here's the experiences of the successful persons in the discussed issue have been presented in order to help those who do not want their put effort and energy on learning English language to be wasted.

5.4. Suggestions for Further Studies

Many studies have discussed around the areas in which language learners may encounter problems after completing their learning courses. Discovering different solutions to prevent the occurrence of attrition phenomenon have also been done by some scholars. Although these explored strategies are specific to be applied during the learning process,

some of them can be used after this period. The present study have discussed about the experiences of successful persons in retrieving and maintaining their knowledge in second language after some years of finishing their learning process in language institutes and universities. The only unsolved problem regarding foreign language maintenance is finding the different success rate of each technique in helping persons to keep their second language knowledge. For example, finding the most appropriate, workable, effective, reasonable, and more welcomed technique with also high degree of progress in the followers' language knowledge would be a good survey to help others to keep their second language in a better manner. So, each found technique through this study needs to be tested to find the degree of its effectiveness on learners' foreign language proficiency maintenance.

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چکیده

پس از توسعه ی مهارت زبان خارجه، برخی از زبان آموزان دچار از دست دادن میزانی از مهارت زبانی خود می شوند. هدف این تحقیق، آشکار سازی تکنیکهایی می باشد که زبان آموزان برای حفظ مهارت زبانی خود به کار می برند. این تکنیکها از اظهارات پانزده شرکت کننده در زمینه ی موفقیتشان در حفظ مهارت زبانی، استخراج شده اند. در ابتدا، شرکت کننده ها از طریق روش نمونه گیری هدفمند و پس از آن از طریق روش نمونه گیری اسنوبال انتخاب شده اند تا مورد مصاحبه قرار گیرند. به علاوه، روش دیگری به نام یادداشت برداری جهت جمع آوری داده ها مورد استفاده قرار گرفت. در نهایت، اظهارات شرکت کنندگان براساس روش تجزیه و تحلیل داده در روش تحقیق پدیده شناسی، مورد تجزیه و تحلیل واقع شدند. یافته ها نشان دادند که تکنیکهای آشکار شده، به شدت تحت اثر فاکتور انگیزه با دو بعد درونی و ابزاری بودند. هر بعد از فاکتور انگیزه شامل تکنیکهای متفاوتی می باشد که از طریق آنها زبان آموزان موفق به حفظ دانش زبانی خود شده اند. بنابراین، تکنیکهای آشکار شده را می توان به عنوان رمز موفقیت زبان آموزان در حفظ مهارت زبان خارجه دانست که این تکنیکها میتوانند توسط هر شخصی که نگران آینده ی مهارت زبانی خود می باشند، به کار گرفته شوند.

کلیدواژه ها: حفظ دانش زبانی، از دست دادن دانش زبانی، فرسایش دانش زبانی، پدیده شناسی، تکنیک ها



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