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**THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION ORAL LANGUAGE  
PROFICIENCY TEST: STRATEGY USE, PROFICIENCY, AND  
ANXIETY IN TEST PERFORMANCE.**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master's of Arts

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## **ABSTRACT**

Many Government of Canada employees need to verify their proficiency levels in reading, writing, and/or speaking English (or French) in order to obtain new positions, or keep their existing or acting positions. Proficiency for government employees is tested by the Public Service Commission (PSC) of the Government of Canada. Because so much depends on their performance on the test, it is not surprising that students experience test anxiety to differing degrees, which may in turn affect their test performance. However, there is little information in the literature with regard to the interaction with strategy use, anxiety and test performance (Cohen, 1998).

Taking a case study approach (Patton, 1980), this study collected data from 8 participants who were taking the PSC oral test of English in semi-structured pre-test interviews, and a post-test questionnaire. The findings suggest that strategy use (language training), proficiency level, and anxiety influence test performance in this high stakes testing context.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### Government Classification System

AS-01	Administrative Service Group (Level 1)
AS-02	Administrative Service Group (Level 2)
CR-04	Clerical and Regulatory Group (Level 4)
PM-01	Project Management (Level 1)
PM-02	Project Management (Level 2)
EX-01	Executive (Director of the Department) (Level 1)

### Other Key Terms

ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
PSC	Public Service Commission
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
SAS	Style Analysis Survey

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Sarason (1959, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) states, “we live in a test-conscious, test-giving culture in which the lives of people are in part determined by their test performance” (p. 4). Zeidner (1998) points out that, since tests can determine the lives of test-takers, we cannot be surprised that they may cause anxiety reactions in many people: “Test anxiety results in crucial real-life consequences for many examinees” (Zeidner, 1998, p. 4).

Many Government of Canada employees need to maintain or improve their proficiency levels in reading, writing, and/or speaking English (or French) in order to obtain new positions or keep their acting or existing positions. In order to achieve their goals, many take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Proficiency for government employees is tested by the Public Service Commission (PSC) of the Government of Canada. Because so much depends on their performance on the test, it is not surprising that students experience test anxiety to differing degrees, which may in turn affect their test performance. Zeidner (1998) states “many students have the ability to do well on exams, but perform poorly because of their debilitating levels of anxiety” (p. 4).

I taught ESL to Government of Canada employees at a private language school for two years. These students needed to pass a test for work purposes; hence, test anxiety was and continues to be a concern among these students. Since performance on this test was very important and test anxiety in students was high, I felt a need to learn more about test anxiety and test performance as a means of improving the effectiveness of my teaching.

The students who participated in this study are government employees taking an oral (speaking) test administered by the PSC. Therefore, in order to introduce the study, in this chapter I will describe the context including the government system, the PSC test, the PSC oral language proficiency test, and the anxieties faced by students. Next I will describe the English program at the private school where I conducted my study, and present background research on strategy use.

### **The Government System**

“Under the Official Language Acts of 1969 and 1988, the federal government has a commitment to the provision of government services in both official languages: French and English” (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.184), hence approximately 60% of the positions in the Government of Canada are designated as bilingual.

### **The Public Service Commission (PSC) of the Government of Canada**

Bilingual positions have descriptions of their language requirements, which are related to a classificatory system developed by the PSC of Canada, which administers the language tests that civil servants need to pass. These employees need to achieve a certain proficiency level in oral (which refers to speaking), reading and writing, to maintain or increase their proficiency level in order to keep their acting or regular positions, or to obtain a new position. There are five proficiency levels, X (no proficiency), A (elementary), B (intermediate), C (advanced), and E (exempt from further testing). These five proficiency levels apply to three areas: oral skills (speaking and listening), reading, and writing. The order of language skills for the grading system is reading, writing and oral. For example, if an employer’s proficiency in English is BAC, this indicates that the employer has a ‘B level’ in reading, an ‘A level’ in writing and a ‘C level’ in oral. Some

bilingual positions require advanced skills in all areas (CCC), a mix of advanced and intermediate skills (CBC) or intermediate skills only (BBB). The language requirements are determined by the manager or may be the policy.

Civil servants who work for the federal government occupy positions that are classified at various levels of seniority. For example, AS classification stands for Administrative Service Group, CR classification stands for Clerical and Regulatory Group. The CR classification has higher seniority than the AS classification. The numbers reflect the pay; the higher the number, the higher the pay rate. So CR-01 classification has a lower pay rate than CR-02 or CR-03 or CR-04. Civil servants need to be retested every five years, but are tested earlier if they move positions.

### **The PSC Oral Language Proficiency Test**

Participants in this study had completed the oral test and not the reading or writing test. The oral test is organized as follows: First, there is a warm up discussion, which is not marked. The warm up discussion allows the test taker to talk to the evaluator about a topic chosen by the test taker for 15 minutes. Examples of topics for the warm up discussion are family, vacation, sports, hobbies, etc. Second, the evaluator asks the test taker detailed questions about their job. Finally, there is a role-play between the evaluator and test taker. For the role-play, the evaluator and the test-taker act out a character (boss, colleague, secretary, etc) in a certain scenario given by the evaluator. For example, the scenario may be that the test taker wants a raise and thinks they deserve one. The test taker must explain to their boss that they want a raise and convince him/her why they deserve one.

The measurement scale used in the oral test includes various aspects such as the ability to converse, ease in using the language, and clarity of communication. “The three levels are defined in the following terms:

A = delivery may be slow

B = speaks with some spontaneity

C = has a natural delivery

Under ability to converse, the levels are as follows:

A = can sustain a simple question and answer exchange

B = can sustain an informal conversation on concrete topics

C = can participate effectively in discussions on a broad range of topics.”

(McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.187).

There is a larger gap between levels B and C than between levels A and B (McNamara & Roever, 2006). This may suggest that it is more difficult for test takers to achieve a C level in oral as oppose to a B level.

### **Test Anxiety as a Result of the PSC Oral Language Proficiency Test.**

Cheng, (1997, in Doe, 2006) states “tests that have important decision making consequences for stakeholders are considered high-stakes exams”, and “the presence of these exams leads to behaviour from students that would not have been present if the exams did not exist” (p.1). The PSC oral language proficiency test has caused my participants to adopt certain behaviour about learning a L2 and created anxiety for them for different reasons:

First, there is a gap between the goals of the Official Languages Act and the public servants’ view on language training. Instead of viewing language training as

something that will help them acquire a second language that is essential to their career development, they focus on “passing the test” as though obtaining a certain proficiency level is an obstacle to be overcome (McNamara & Roever, 2006).

Second, many who complete language training quickly lose whatever fluency they had acquired. During my two years of teaching Government of Canada employees, I have never come across a student who was interested in learning English for themselves. Rather, they seemed to be motivated solely by work requirements. As a result, teachers were influenced to teach based on the content of the test. For example, teachers would help students practice role-plays and help them answer questions related to their jobs. This suggests that tests have the potential to influence both learning and teaching. Cheng, Curtis and Watanabe (2004) state, “ ‘washback’ or ‘backwash’ refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning” (p.3).

The PSC language proficiency test has been controversial among some test takers especially the oral test and the oral test has had the most complaints (McNamara & Roever, 2006). There have been many complaints from my participants (see chapter 4) and my students whom I have taught during my two years of teaching at the private language school where this study was conducted. Students/participants often complain that the test did not test test-taker’s language skills but rather their knowledge about other factors, which are not related to their duties at work. For example, one of my participants said during the interview that the evaluator was testing her knowledge about her computer skills as opposed to her language ability. “Candidates might be required to discuss things with which they are not familiar, which the candidate will struggle to discuss, as he might have even in his first language...this led the candidate to question

not only the choice of topic but also the fundamental relevance of the test to the workplace and, hence, the whole policy” (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.190).

Other complaints have been about role-plays, which is another task on the test. My participants and the students I have taught have mentioned that it is difficult for them to perform role-plays because they are not comfortable with acting out another character. “Obviously, a role-play cannot establish (instil) context in the same way as the real world; there are no real-world stakes involved and the presentation of self is not actually of the test taker being themselves but rather the test taker pretending to be another person” (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.71)

Further complaints from test-takers (including those in this study and those I have taught) have been revealed by a study conducted by Mitchel (2005). The participants in an interview study with 20 senior Anglophones civil servants, report that these executives felt that:

- “testing is much more rigorous than it was a few years ago (and unfairly so)”
- “testing is unfair and needlessly subjective”
- “people are being tested to a standard that bears no relation to their jobs”
- “the whole testing method is unnecessarily stressful and artificial”

(Mitchel, 2005, p.17 in McNamara &Roever, p.187).

So does this mean that the reliability and validity of the PSC oral language test is a concern? Considering the complaints of the informants reported here, there may be a number of problems with the administration of the test that threaten its validity and reliability. One evaluator gives the oral tests; hence, reliability is a concern (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p. 187). One test-taker from a study by Bessette states, “The variables

that play in are the time of day, the personality of the tester, [and] the types of questions the tester wants to ask. [...] You'll always get a different tester every time you go to the testing facility [...] and] so much depends on their personality" (2005, in McNamara & Roever, 2006, p. 187).

Construct validity is another concern. Teachers and evaluators are not communicating about the kind of performance the evaluators are looking for. Another test-taker from a study by Bessette (2005) states, "You just do not know what their procedures are. [...] None of the information is ever shared."...She could not comprehend why it did "not seem to be shared with those who are tasked with the training so that they can help the students they have...you never really know what the evaluator really wants from you". These issues that test-takers report regarding the PSC oral language proficiency test cause feelings of anxiety, which in turn affects their test performance.

Another issue is that test-takers are frustrated about not being able to communicate in a natural fashion with the evaluator during the PSC oral language proficiency test, hence, they experience anxiety which may also depress performance.

Passing the test is so crucial for these test-takers that they sometimes take months of English language training, and even then some fail the test number of times. "The test has significant impact both on the lives of those who take it and the work setting from which they are removed, often for months, to undergo intensive one-on-one language training" (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.190). People sometimes fail the test over and over again, even after many months of language training. This was the case for two of my participants (see chapter 4). As a result, test-takers' confidence decreases and so instead

of improving the next time they do the test, they do worse. “Those candidates who experience repeated failure have referred to the experience of taking the test as a “ritual of humiliation” ” (McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.191). The participants from this study, who failed the oral language proficiency test before, have also made comments about feeling embarrassed about failing (see chapter 4).

The evaluator’s impersonality behaviour and anonymity is another complaint of test-takers. Another test-taker from the Bessette (2005) study noted, “one evaluator that I had was somebody who has a reputation within the testing community <laughs> and.... I associated this individual with what I thought the outcome would be and that might have some bearing on not passing. Another evaluator refused to look me in the eye when I was speaking, ...and consequently trying to build a rapport, and eye-to-eye contact was impossible” (cited in McNamara & Roever, 2006, p.192). One of the participants in my study also mentioned that her test results (among other factors) would depend on her comfort level with the evaluator (see chapter 4).

I have presented the context of the test and now I present the context of the study.

### **The Context of the Study**

The school, from which this study’s participants were drawn, is a private language school. Students are referred to as “clients” because the school runs like a business. The school provides students with either private or group English instruction. A large percentage of students are Francophone Government employees. Students are evaluated and placed in one of the following levels: beginner 1 and 2, Intermediate 1 and 2, and Advanced 1 and 2. There are two programs: the intensive program, and the part-time program. The intensive program is 30 hours a week of language training and the part-

time program can be as little as 3 hrs a week to 25 hours a week. There is no specific start or end date for the program; students make their own decision as to when they want to start and end their language training. After the evaluation is complete, students are given a proposal by the coordinator for estimating the total number of language training hours needed, and the time period frame in which classes should be scheduled in order to achieve their desired level of proficiency. Students then present this to their employer who will decide, based on the departments' budget, whether the student will be allotted the proposed hours. The scheduling of hours is based on the proposal created by the coordinator and the student's schedule at work. Students are not forced by their employer to take language training.

Much of the emphasis on instruction in the school relates to strategy – development and use. The next section examines why.

### **Research on Strategy Use**

Allwright and Little (1990, 1991, as cited in Oxford, 2003) state that learning strategies can help students become lifelong learners. Oxford (1990) states “strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence” (p.1). She also reports that learning strategies are steps taken by students in order to build their own learning.

Researchers and teachers want to discover which strategies are most effective in order to help students become more productive in their learning (Bremner, 1999).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state, “once strategies used by good language learners are identified and the strategy use of effective and less effective learners are compared, the

questions arise of whether less effective learners can learn to use strategies to assist their learning and, if so, what strategies can and should be taught, and what instructional approach can be used to teach the strategies selected” (p. 54).

Language learning strategies are important for enhancing proficiency, and so is how to use these strategies. “Research indicates that appropriate use of language learning strategies, which include dozens or even hundreds of possible behaviors, results in improved L2 proficiency overall, or in specific language skill areas” (Oxford, 2002, p.126). Some (Oxford, 1990) contend that when language-learning strategies are used appropriately, proficiency will be improved.

Not only are strategies for learning a L2 necessary for learners, but there are also strategies used to do well on tests known as test-taking strategies. “Since preparing for tests and taking them can be an important part of the learning process, it is useful for learners to know how to do a good job on tests, just as they would want to know how to improve their language learning and language use in general” (Cohen, 1998, p. 268). Curriculum planners and teachers should not only inform students of the content of the test, but to also inform them of the kinds of test-taking strategies which may help them with certain testing formats (Cohen, 1998). The Government of Canada employees whom I taught reported using strategies known as ‘language learning strategies’ (Cohen, 1998) in order to aid them with the processes of learning ESL, and reported using strategies known as ‘test-taking strategies’ (Cohen, 1998) in order to help them pass the PSC language proficiency test.

Strategies may be helpful for doing well on tests, as the researchers above contend but if students feel undue anxiety, they may do poorly. Zeidner (1998) argues that

decreasing anxiety levels is one possible way to improve test performance for students who underachieve on exams. Zeidner (1998) states “a number of studies provide illustrations of the toll anxiety takes on student performance and well-being... therefore, test anxiety should be “better understood and appropriately dealt with” (p.5).

As the literature above suggests, teachers or schools need to utilize test preparation strategies in order to help students become test wise, and work on ways to manage test anxiety so that students can improve their test performance in order to reach their professional goals.

In this study, I investigated test-anxiety, proficiency, and strategy use reported by test takers in the context of a high-stakes test of English and the influence of these factors on test performance.

The study took place at a private language school where test anxiety and test performance is a concern. The purpose of this thesis is to help better understand the factors that support or constrain students’ test performance.

Specifically, I explored the following research question: What influences test performance in the high stakes testing context of the PSC of the Government of Canada oral language proficiency test? In order to examine this question, I address the following key underlying questions (see 1 to 3 below):

1. Do strategies make a difference? How does language training affect test performance?
  - What is the relationship between test performance and language development background?

- What is the relationship between test performance and taking Intensive Language Training before taking the PSC oral language test?
2. What role does proficiency level play?
    - What is the relationship between proficiency background and test performance?
  3. What role does anxiety play in test performance in this high stakes context?
    - What is the relationship between level of anxiety and the test taker's goal?
    - What is the impact of test failure? Does the anxiety level change?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Having introduced background to the study in Chapter 1, in this chapter I review the literature regarding strategies, the relationships between language learning strategies and second language acquisition, anxiety and performance. I also consider other key factors that may affect test performance and learning, with a particular focus on factors that may affect test performance, namely: strategies, level of proficiency and test anxiety.

### **Strategies**

An agreement on a definition for language learning strategies between researchers has yet to be found. Bremner (1999) states, “there is considerable debate as to appropriate ways of defining language learning strategies, and no strong consensus as yet” (p. 492). Hence, strategies are defined in different ways by different researchers. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) define language learning strategies as special thoughts or behaviours that learners use to help them understand, study, or remember new information. Oxford (2002) defines language-learning strategies as specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students deliberately use to enhance their L2 skills. Cohen (1998) describes language learner strategies as processes consciously selected by learners that may improve their progress in learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall and application of information about that language. Are language learning strategies conscious as Cohen suggests or unconscious as Oxford suggests? Cohen (2006) mentions that strategy experts came to an agreement and disagreement about what language learner strategies are. He states that the disagreement was about the degree to which learners need to be conscious of their

language behaviours in order to consider those behaviours as strategies. The agreement is that learners use strategies “in sequences or clusters” (Cohen, 2006, p. 1005). Cohen (2006) states “while there was consensus that learners deploy strategies in sequences or clusters, there was some disagreement as to the extent to which a behaviour needs to have a mental component, a goal, an action, a metacognitive component (involving planning, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy), and a potential that its use will lead to learning in order for it to be considered a strategy” (p. 1005). Therefore, two different views on language learner strategy developed. One view is that strategies must be specialized, small, and part of a pool of strategies related to tasks; the other view is that strategies must be at a universal, flexible and general level (Cohen, 2006).

Despite the differences in defining strategies, Bremner (1999) describes two commonalities. The first is the commonalities between the terms used to describe strategies and their purpose. “The terms which have been used to describe strategies (e.g. technique, behaviour, operation, action) and to account for their purpose (to acquire knowledge, to regulate learning, to make learning more effective) vary, but they have much in common” (Bremner, 1999, p. 492). The second is the idea of strategy use and its effectiveness will depend on the learners themselves, the task, and the environment. Cohen (2006) mentions the same thing. He states, “there is an agreement for the view that strategy use and effectiveness will depend on the particular learners, the learning task, and the environment” (p. 1005).

Aside from the various ways of defining strategies, there are also different ways of categorizing them. Categorizing strategies is a way for researchers to describe them, but it is not an easy task since people are all different. According to Oxford, (1990, in

Doe, 2006), learners are real people that are intellectual, social, and emotional, hence, cannot be categorized simply. I present some of the ways strategies are categorized by different researchers.

Based on Cohen's (2006) two views mentioned above (about language learning strategies), he categorizes strategies in three kinds: language learner strategies (i.e. looking for definitions or examples in the text to help with meaning), test-management strategies (i.e., eliminating other options in order to help with choosing the correct option) and test-wiseness strategies (i.e., choosing an answer because it has a key word from the text).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990), for example, have discovered through their studies that second language acquisition (SLA) involves mental processes that can be grouped into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, social strategies and affective strategies. Cohen (1998) defines cognitive strategies as strategies that include language-learning strategies (identification, grouping, retention, and storage of language material), and language use strategies (retrieval, rehearsal, and comprehension or production of words, phrases, and other elements of the second language). He defines metacognitive strategies as strategies that deal with pre-assessment and pre-planning, on-line planning and evaluation, and post-evaluation of language learning tasks and of language use events. He defines affective strategies as strategies that help to regulate emotions, motivation, and attitudes. He defines social strategies as strategies that are actions performed by learners in order to communicate with other learners and with native speakers.

Oxford (1990) has also produced a classification system, which is similar to O'Malley and Chamot's. Her classification system categorizes strategies as cognitive, metacognitive, affective or social, but she further divides them into six categories in her SILL: Affective, Social, Metacognitive, Memory, Cognitive and Compensatory strategies. The SILL described by Ellis (1994, in Bremner, 1999), is maybe the most in depth classification of learning strategies at the present time. Hence, the SILL classification system has been used widely to observe and analyze strategy use (Bremner, 1999). "According to Green and Oxford (1995, as cited in Bremner, 1999), studies using SILL have involved around 8,000 students in different parts of the world"(p. 493).

Cohen (1998) divided strategies into *language learning* and *language use strategies*. Cohen's (1998) definitions for language use strategies (see p.20) and his definition for Language Learning strategies are mentioned below. He states that Language learning strategies are strategies used for identifying the material that needs to be learned, setting it apart from other material if necessary, grouping it for easier learning, repeatedly interacting with the material, and recalling the material.

As discussed above, there is some agreement on a definition for strategies, and there are a variety of classification schemes. These classification schemes are common in a few areas but, as is noted by Oxford and Ehrmann, (1995, as cited in Bremner, 1999) these strategy systems have made it difficult to compare results across studies for those researchers who believe it is important to do so.

A second language is acquired through cognitive skills and so are language-learning strategies. Cognitive Theory explains how language-learning strategies are

learned and can become automatic. The next section discusses the relationship between language learning strategies and second language acquisition.

## **Language Learning Strategies and Second Language Acquisition**

### Cognitive Theory

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state, "SLA cannot be understood without addressing the interaction between language and cognition" (p. 16). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that Cognitive Theory is a framework that describes learning strategies as complex cognitive skills and is used to address specific language comprehension and language production processes. To be more precise, O'Malley & Chamot (1990) mention that Cognitive Theory (theory of learning processes) will define learning strategies, explain how information about learning strategies is stored in memory, how strategies are learned and may become automatic, and why they influence learning in a positive manner. In addition, they state that Cognitive Theory has succeeded in answering these questions. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) explain that in cognitive theory, individuals process information (which involves thoughts) which is a cognitive activity referred to as "mental processes". They also state that learning strategies are unique ways of processing information that increase comprehension, learning, or retention of the information.

In Cognitive theory, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) report that information is stored as either declarative knowledge (what we know) or procedural knowledge (what we know how to do), which includes complex cognitive skills. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) discuss that one of the advantages for having such different knowledge, is the fact that each type is learned most effectively in different ways. They state that learning

strategies are represented in memory as procedural knowledge and that a major issue in Cognitive Theory is the way learning strategies become proceduralized. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that research on learning strategies is based on the notion that strategies begin as declarative knowledge that can become proceduralized with practice and, like complex cognitive skills, occur through the cognitive, associative, and autonomous stages of learning. They define all three stages: a cognitive stage involves a declarative understanding of the steps required in skill performance; an associative stage is when errors in understanding or performance are decreased and performance of the skill becomes more fluid; and an autonomous stage, is when the skill becomes spontaneous.

#### What Role Do Learning Strategies Play in the Language Acquisition Process?

Studies by Padron and Waxman (1988, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990), Zimmerman and Pons (1986, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990), and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have given clear evidence about the ways in which strategic processing influences SLA. A study by Padron and Waxman (1988) looked at English reading comprehension between Hispanic ESL students in grades 3 to 5 who were in the beginning and intermediate levels of English proficiency. The results indicate that negative strategies may interfere with English reading comprehension for Hispanic students, and suggest that positive strategy use was not associated with learning. Therefore, not so good strategies interfered with reading comprehension and good strategies had no influence on learning.

A study by Zimmerman and Pons (1986, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) looked at the issue of the relationship between strategies and reading achievement.

Although this study did not involve second language acquisition, it confirms that “self-reported strategy use has a meaningful relationship with learning outcomes in reading” (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990, p. 112). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) conclude that “this study shows that learners can report on their own learning processes, and suggest that self-reported strategy use is associated with learning outcomes” (p. 112). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) state that there has been little confirmation of the effectiveness of strategy training with second language tasks. Some implications, which have emerged from another study in O’Malley and Chamot (1990) are:

1. “Although students reported using strategies, they rarely used them on integrative tasks and often relied upon strategies that did not demand elaborative or active mental processing.
2. Although, the teachers of these students had little awareness of the types of strategies their students actually used and little familiarity with processes by which strategy use could be encouraged, they expressed interest in strategy uses and inquired how they could find out more about the topic.
3. Strategy use and conscious analysis of learning occur with both classroom and nonclassroom learning”.

(p. 112)

According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990), these first two points suggest that a strategy training approach could be useful for both students and teachers. Another study in O’Malley and Chamot (1990) addresses the question of ESL students’ comprehension processing while listening to academic texts. They wanted to know if there were differences in the strategies reported by effective and ineffective listeners. They found

significant differences between the two groups. They explained that students identified as effective listeners used strategies more successfully than those identified as less effective listeners. This suggests that the less successful students may need help with using strategies; thus, strategy training can be useful. In another study by O'Malley, (1985, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) it was shown that strategy training could be useful in a natural classroom environment with integrative language tasks such as speaking and listening.

Since strategies may influence the way learners learn a L2, they may affect how well they perform on language tests. Students' test performance on high stakes exams is crucial; therefore, I present test-taking strategies in the next section.

### **Test Taking Strategies**

In this thesis, I have adopted Cohen's (1998) definition of test-taking strategies. As mentioned above in the strategies section, Cohen (1998) groups test-taking strategies into two kinds of strategies: language use strategies and test wiseness strategies. Language tests can test for two things; test takers knowledge about the given language and their ability to use that language knowledge (language use strategy) and the students' knowledge on how to take tests (test-wiseness). Cohen (1998) states "while a part of language test performance is dependent on the knowledge that the learners have about the given language and on their ability to use that language knowledge, another part is dependent on their test wiseness, independent of their language knowledge and language use skills"(p. 218). Thus, test-taking strategies consist of both *language use strategies* and *test-wiseness strategies*.

## Language-Use Strategies

Cohen (1998) defines Language use strategies as steps or actions that learners consciously select in order to accomplish language tasks, and include retrieval strategies, rehearsal strategies, cover strategies, and communication strategies. He defines retrieval strategies as strategies used to retrieve language material from storage. He defines rehearsal strategies as strategies for practicing structures of language. He defines cover strategies as strategies that learners use to generate the idea that they have control over material when they do not. He defines communication strategies as approaches to communicating meaningful and informative messages for the listener or reader. Cohen (1998) explains how all four types of language use strategies are used in test taking. He explains that learners need to retrieve information for use on the test (retrieval strategies), may need to rehearse the information before using it (rehearsal strategies), are likely to use some cover strategies in order to pretend they know the information (cover strategies), and depending on if the test is an expressive one, may need to communicate the information (communication strategies). He states that these language use strategies make up test taking strategies when they are used to help produce responses on tests.

Examples of language use strategies discussed in Cohen (1998) are: Read the text first and remember where different kinds of information are located, Read the questions twice to make sure that their meaning is clear, and try to answer the question on your own without looking at the options. So from these examples of language use strategies and others, how do students choose which ones to use? Cohen (1998) explains that student's choice of language use strategies depends on the modality (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) and the nature of the task.

## Test Wise Strategies

What are test wise strategies? Millman and Bishop (1965) define '*Test-Wiseness*' as "a subject's capacity to utilize the characteristics and formats of the test and/or the test taking situation to receive a high score" (p. 707). Hence, test wise strategies are strategies that are not related to how much language test-takers know but depend on knowledge about how to take the test. Test-wiseness is independent of the test taker's knowledge of the subject matter for which the items measure (Millman and Bishop, 1965). In other words, as Cohen (1990) explains, "test-wiseness strategies are not necessarily determined by proficiency in the language being assessed, but rather may be dependent on the respondent's knowledge of how to take tests" (p. 219). Some examples of test-wisness strategies presented by Cohen (1990) are: look for the part of the text where the answer may be found and then look for clues which will lead you to the answer; look for answers to questions which are in chronological order in the text, and read the questions before reading the text so that you are familiar with the kinds of answers to look for. Cohen's (1990) example of a not-so-wise strategy is to continue working on material which is difficult rather than moving on to different material that is easy to complete quickly, and then returning to the problematic material if time allows.

There is evidence through research, that test-wiseness can make a difference; therefore, is worth paying attention to. "Although no comprehensive investigation of test-wiseness is known to exist, data from a few empirical studies indicate that it is a factor which may deserve attention" (Millman and Bishop, 1965, p. 708). Evidence of the importance of test-wiseness is shown in a study of 40 college students who were interviewed individually in two institutions as they were taking regular course

examinations (Millman, Bishop, and Ebel, 1965). They discovered that students gave sophisticated reasons for responding as they did to test questions for which they did not know the correct answers. Bloom and Broder (1950, as cited in Millman and Bishop, 1965) found high-test performers who were trained in general problem-solving techniques, but not trained in subject-matter knowledge, made significant gains in subsequent achievement test scores.

While looking at test-taking strategies, it is necessary to explore its relationship with proficiency. “One reason for research on test-taking strategies is to look at the relationship between respondents’ language proficiency and their test-taking strategies” (Cohen, 2006, p. 1006). Hence, the next section is on proficiency and strategy use.

### **Proficiency and Strategy Use**

Research has discovered a relationship between high/low proficiency learners and the kind and amount of strategies used. There is research on the relationship with test-takers proficiency level, their reported use of strategies in test taking, and performance on L2 tests. For example, Purpura (1997, 1998, as cited in Cohen, 2006) looked at 1,382 test takers from Spain, Turkey, and the Czech Republic. Test takers filled out questionnaire on Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies. It was found that the low-proficiency group reported stronger use of metacognitive strategies like monitoring, self-evaluating and self-testing than did the high-proficiency group. A study by Yoshida-Morise (1998, as cited in Cohen, 2006) looked at the relationship between L2 learners’ (native Japanese speaking adult English learners in Japan) use of communication strategies and their proficiency levels. It was observed that the lower-proficiency respondents used more strategies and greater variety of strategies than the higher-proficiency respondents in

order to make up for their lack of knowledge of the target language. A study by Purpura (1997, as cited in Cohen, 2006) examined the relationships among strategy use, levels of proficiency, and levels of foreign language aptitude of Japanese University students learning EFL. It was observed that strategies were used in developmental stages as learners' proficiency improved, which confirms Purpura's (1997) findings that strategy use varies by proficiency level. Phakiti (2003, as cited in Cohen, 2006) mentions a study that looked at the relationship between cognitive and metacognitive strategies on an EFL reading test and success on the test. It was found that the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies had a weak but positive relationship to the reading test performance. Also, it was found that the highly successful test-takers reported using more metacognitive strategies than the moderately successful test-takers, and the moderately successful test-takers reported using more metacognitive strategies than the unsuccessful test-takers.

Green and Oxford (1995, as cited in Cohen, 1998) found through a study of language learning strategy use that more successful learners used more learning strategies. However, there has been research that has shown the opposite: better learners use fewer strategies. "The literature is replete with studies suggesting that higher-proficiency or lower-proficiency learners use more or fewer strategies than the other group - usually indicating that the better learners use more strategies but sometimes just the opposite" (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p. 8). For example, Chen (1990, as cited in Cohen, 1998) noticed that in a study, the higher-proficiency learners used fewer communication strategies when communicating both concrete and abstract concepts to a native speaker in an interview setting, and used those strategies more effectively than did

the lower proficiency learners. This means that the kind and amount of strategies used does not determine one's performance on a task. "The total number or variety of strategies employed and the frequency with which any given strategy is used are not necessarily indicators of how successful they will be on a language task" (Cohen, 1998, p. 24).

The way learners use strategies is also important to keep in mind and depends on a variety of factors. Cohen (1998) states that an individual's effective strategy use depends on the learner's characteristics, the language structure(s), the context, or the interaction of these. The amount of strategies used is not as important as how well they are being used. Cohen (1998) states, "some respondents may get by with the use of a limited number of strategies that they use well for the most part" (p. 220) whereas "others may be aware of an extensive number of strategies but may use few, if any of them, effectively" (p. 220).

Abraham and Vann (1990, in Bremner, 1999) looked at language learning strategies used by successful and unsuccessful learners in two different studies. They found that unsuccessful learners were using useful strategies and often they were the same ones that the successful learners used but there was a difference between the two groups in terms of learners' flexibility in choosing strategies, and the effectiveness of their usage in the given situation.

Because of some of the research, Bremner (1999) asks, do successful learners use less of a variety of strategies and use them more frequently than unsuccessful learners? Oxford (1995, as cited in Bremner, 1999) does not agree based on other studies. Green and Oxford (1995, as cited in Bremner, 1999) state, "in studies investigating the

relationship between proficiency and language learning strategy use, students who were better in their language performance generally reported higher levels of overall strategy use and frequent use of a greater number of strategy categories” (p. 494). So from all of this, do strategies have something in common with proficiency? Bremner (1999) doesn’t think so. He concludes, “it could equally be argued that strategies do not contribute to proficiency, but are simply features of it; in other words, only by reaching a certain level will a student be likely to use a given strategy” (p. 494).

As the literature suggests, strategies can have an effect on test performance, but there may be more factors involved. For instance, since students need to perform well on high stakes exams, they may experience anxiety, which in turn may affect their performance.

In the next section, I examine the literature regarding anxiety and test performance.

## **Anxiety and Test Performance**

What is anxiety? The term “anxiety” was derived from the Latin word, *angere* that means ‘to strangle’. (Zeidner, 1998). Spence (1958, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) states that anxious people are emotionally responsive, therefore tend to respond more strongly to stressful or aversive stimuli. He states anxiety is a basic human emotion, expressed when individuals are uncertain or feel threatened in the environment, and is one of the most important reactions to stress. In testing situations where students are evaluated, anxiety gets in the way especially while developing oral skills (Phillips, 1992). Phillips (1992) states, “Research suggests that the oral skill is problematic for second language learners; although students indicate they are most interested in developing their capacity

to communicate verbally in the target language, the anxiety they experience may have a debilitating impact on their ability to speak it” (p. 1). He also mentions, that based on some of the literature, anxiety intensifies in testing situations. Research also “provides ample evidence that anxiety increases in evaluative situations” (p. 1).

Research has been done in the area of anxiety and performance, and different studies have found different results. Studies have found that anxiety can both positively and negatively influence test performance. For example, there is research focusing on language anxiety and its relationship to second language competence such as a study by Gardner that shows how language anxiety is inversely related to achievement in grades seven, nine and eleven (Phillips, 1992). Tucker (as cited in Phillips, 1992) discovered a negative correlation between language anxiety and scores on a standardized achievement test. But Horwitz (as cited in Phillips, 1992) states that research shows an inverse relationship between anxiety and achievement. Only Bachmann’s study (as cited in Phillips, 1992) showed no association between language anxiety and achievement but strangely enough, the two subjects with the lowest ability had the highest and the lowest anxiety scores. Spanish and French students who showed higher foreign language anxiety received lower course grades than students who showed lower anxiety. Horwitz, (as cited in Phillips, 1992) concludes, “it appears a significant, inverse relationship exists between anxiety and achievement but its effects are moderate so they explain only a small part of the picture” (p. 2). So it seems that anxiety could negatively influence test performance but could anxiety positively influence test performance? Chastain (as cited in Phillips, 1992) believes “that some anxiety may actually enhance performance whereas too much anxiety is debilitating” (p. 2).

Based on the literature above, anxiety influences test performance positively and negatively but is there a specific time or situation in which anxiety affects performance? Zeidner, (1998) found that anxiety interferes with performance in the early stages of learning, but may even help performance at later stages of learning. Spence and Spence (1966, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) find that anxiety helps performance on easy tasks and weakens performance on difficult tasks.

### **Test Anxiety**

What is test anxiety? Sieber, O'Neil & Tobias (1977, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) define "the term test anxiety as a scientific construct, which refers to the set of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioural responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure on an exam or similar evaluative situation" (p. 17). So anxiety is responses that associate with feelings of failure or negative attitude towards a test. When does anxiety occur? I.G. Sarason and Sarason (1990, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) state test-anxious behaviour occurs when a person believes that her or his intellectual, motivational, and social capabilities and capacities are burdened by the requirements of the test situation.

Test anxiety in learners may affect their test performance. "Test anxiety results in crucial real-life consequences for many examinees" (Zeidner, 1998, p. 5). "Test-anxious students tend to be easily distracted on an exam, experience difficulty organizing or recalling relevant information during the test" (Zeidner, 1998, p. 4). Decreasing these effects of anxiety may help students' test performance. Zeidner (1998) argues, "reducing the effects of anxiety on performance is viewed as one possible avenue to improving the test performance of underachieving examinees (p. 4). Some students express a concern

that their anxiety will affect the way they perform on the test, and that failing is embarrassing. Some of the participants in my study felt the same way (see chapter 4). Sarason and Sarason, (1990 as cited in Zeidner, 1998) state “high-test-anxious students express concern about the consequences of not performing at a satisfactory level on major exams and embarrassment at probable failure” (p. 4). For these reasons, anxiety puts a lot of pressure on students’; thus, test anxiety needs to be controlled. Zeidner (1998) states, “a number of studies provide illustrations of the toll anxiety takes on student performance and well-being” (p. 5). Therefore, test anxiety should be “better understood and appropriately dealt with” (p. 5).

There has been some research on helping test-takers reduce anxiety. For example, Bill McKeachie and his coworkers (McKeachie, 1951; McKeachie, Pollie, & Speisman, 1955, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) conducted research to find ways of reducing anxiety on students’ classroom performance. Zeidner (1998) reports the study of test anxiety was officially introduced in the early 1950’s by Seymour Sarason and George Mandler at Yale University in 1952. These researchers are pioneers in the field of test anxiety and established and validated the test anxiety construct (Zeidner,1998). Research on test anxiety has increased recently because of the public’s concern for test anxiety. (Zeidner, 1998, p. 5). Research has shown that anxiety can affect test performance. For example, Hill and Sarason (1966, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) compared the performance of the most anxious with that of the least anxious elementary school children and revealed that the high-test anxious students were over 1 year behind in reading and math skills performance whereas the low-test anxious students were 1 year ahead.

Spielberger (1966, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) followed high-trait anxious students in college for 3 years and found that more than 20% of the high-anxiety students, were categorized as academic failures, but fewer than 6% of the low-anxiety students were categorized as academic failures.

Different models have been constructed by different researchers in order to comprehend different aspects of anxiety. The ‘cognitive-attentional’ or ‘interference’ model states that test-anxious persons concentrate on task-relevant activities, and task-irrelevant cognitive activities (preoccupations with worry, self-criticisms, and somatic concern, etc.) during exams (Zeidner, 1998). Zeidner (1998) presented an *integrative transactional model* of test anxiety which investigates the interaction between individuals and evaluative context. Zeidner (1998) presents two influential test anxiety models – *the cognitive-attentional model* (test anxiety reflects attentional deficits) and *study-skills deficit model* (test anxiety reflects academic skill deficit). Two existing motivational models of test anxiety are *the self-regulation model* and *the self-merit model* (Zeidner, 1998).

Carver and Scheier (1984, 1991, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) put forth a *self-regulation model* to better comprehend the nature of anxiety in testing situations and its impact on performance. Covington & Omelich (1979, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) explain, “according to the self-worth model, test anxiety is often best understood by observing the individual’s attempts to maintain self-worth and a positive self-image, particularly when risking academic failure” (p.8). *Drive theory* assumes that when there is too much drive or arousal in a particular learning or evaluative situation, performance is jeopardized, especially if the performance is difficult (Zeidner, 1998). Zeidner (1998) also states *the*

*drive model* “assumes that the effect of anxiety on drive level depends on the relative strength of the correct and competing response tendencies that are evoked by a learning task” (p. 62). Spence (1958, as cited in Zeidner, 1998) reports the model also suggests, “the negative relationship between anxiety and performance will hold only at the early stages of learning (p.8).

Having considered the research relating to anxiety, I now examine the washback phenomena of tests – namely their impact on teaching and learning.

### **Benefits of test taking strategies**

There is research about the influence of testing on teaching but there is little evidence to support the assertions of either positive or negative washback (Mehrens and Kaminsky 1989, in Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996). Washback (sometimes also known as backwash) is the influence a test will have on teaching and learning (Cheng, Curtis and Watanabe, 2004). Mehrens and Kaminsky (1989, in Alderson and Hamp-Lyons, 1996), say, the higher the stakes of the test, the bigger the desire to take test preparation courses.

Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’s (1996) study looked inside TOEFL preparation classrooms, both independently and by comparison with other language classes to try to find out if whether washback truly exists. The study was to see if students who take a TOEFL preparation course will succeed in raising their TOEFL scores. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’s (1996) study did not show that taking the TOEFL preparation course raised student’s TOEFL scores. They noticed that TOEFL by itself does not cause washback. They observed that it is the administrators, material writers and teachers who

cause the washback. The study also showed the TOEFL affects both what and how teachers teach, but the effect is different among teachers.

Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) state, “tests will have different amounts and types of washback on some teachers and learners than on other teachers and learners” (p. 296).

Hamp-Lyons and Alderson (1996) state, “The amount and type of washback will vary according to

- “The status of the test (the level of the stakes): TOEFL is high stakes;
- The extent to which the test is counter to current practice: this varies for our two teachers;
- The extent to which teachers and textbook writers think about appropriate methods for test preparation: there is little evidence for this in our data; and
- The extent to which teachers and textbook writers are willing and able to innovate: on this we can only speculate, at present”.

(p. 296)

There are no studies that suggest TOEFL preparation courses improve scores and yet, this is the reason students take such courses. Hampton-Lyons (1998) states, that the TOEFL will more likely have a powerful washback effect because it is a high-stakes test and that the effect will be negative as oppose to positive. She looked at five TOEFL preparation textbooks in order to describe her concerns about test preparation practice in TESOL but not to critique them. She developed a framework in order to help her evaluate the textbooks. She found that the books did not help learners or teachers with

figuring out problems, the kind of needs, or the areas of strength. Instead the books offer students another practice test (Hampton-Lyons, 1998). Hampton-Lyons (1998) states, “these test preparation books consist, to a greater or lesser extent, of practice tests or exercises that they follow exactly the same format as the subsection of the test they are preparing students for” (p. 332). One book does not even explain why the correct answers are correct ... and only one book gives explanations of why the distractors are incorrect. Hence, teachers or self-study students need to teach each question themselves (Hampton-Lyons, 1998).

There are two studies performed by Alderson and Hamp-Lyon (1996). The first study showed how an experienced teacher, who was new to teaching TOEFL preparation, had a difficult time organizing classes according to the chapters in the textbook. The teacher was consistently vague, confused and gave incorrect explanation of grammar points which are considered to be on the TOEFL according to the textbook author. The second study showed that even a highly experienced teacher of TOEFL preparation courses was unable to come up with an explanation for his classes. Each lecture consisted of going over the practice test material in the textbook in the same pattern as the inexperienced teacher, but with accurate, and clear grammatical explanations. The strategies used were for the teachers or self-study students to check their answers in the answer key and to read the rationale behind the incorrect answers (Alderson and Hamp-Lyon, 1996). What strategies could they use next? “The answer in which the books generally offer is to go over another practice test. No guidance is available to teachers on good conduct in test preparation teaching or on how to choose ethical and appropriate test preparation materials.

## **How Do Test-Taking Strategies Support Learning?**

Do tests measure what they are supposed to measure? Cohen (1998) thinks sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. Cohen (1998) states, "Teachers may be deluding themselves into thinking that their tests are assessing language ability in some meaningful way, when in reality they are actually only assessing more limited aspects of language, and in some cases not even that, but rather just the ability to psyche out the test"(p .215). Hence, validity is jeopardized. He continues to say, in other cases, the test or quiz measures what the teachers want to measure, and therefore, validity is not at stake. Cohen (1998) explains, that there is not much evidence about the actual processes that the respondents go through when produce the answers to a test. He also adds, since the late 1970's, interest has begun to grow in approaching L2 testing from the point of view of the strategies used by learners going through the process of taking the test. Cohen (1998) explains, as of the 1990s, L2 testing textbooks have taken this concern into consideration as a possible source of insights concerning test reliability and validity. There are two factors to consider when looking at whether a test is reliable and valid. The first, what is being tested, and the other is what test-takers go through when they answer questions on a test. Cohen (1998) then mentions, "on the one hand we have presumptions held by test constructors and administrators as to what is being tested, and on the other we have the actual processes that test takers go through to produce answers to questions and tasks but the two are not the same" (p. 219). Professionals, who create tests, need to take both into consideration to help understand which items and which test-taking strategies are causing incorrect responses in order to aid students with test performance. Cohen (1998) states, "even if the problem resides exclusively with the test

taker, a concerned test developer and test administrator may wish to have more information about the items that elicit such illogical responses or about the nature of those test-taking strategies that result in incorrect answers” (p. 218).

Another possible way of helping students with test performance is to train them to use strategies for learning (language learning strategies) and for test taking (test taking strategies).

### **Strategy Training: for Learning and Test Taking**

As mentioned earlier, learning strategies can aid students to become better L2 learners. Allwright and Little, (1990, 1991, as cited in Oxford, 2003) state “Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, lifelong learners” (p. 9). But learners are not always aware of which strategies are most effective or even which ones they are using. Nyikos & Oxford, (1993, as cited in Oxford, 2003) state “students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective” (p. 9). For this reason, some teachers help train their students to become aware and use learning strategies effectively. Oxford (2003) reports experienced teachers help their students become aware of learning strategies and help them to use a variety of appropriate strategies. “To increase L2 proficiency, some researchers and teachers have provided instruction that helped students learn how to use more relevant and more powerful learning strategies” (Oxford, 2003, p. 11).

Studies in this area have shown that strategy training has had a positive effect and sometimes no effect at all. Dadour & Robbins (1996), and O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, & Russo (1985), as cited in Oxford, (2003) state that in ESL/EFL

studies, there were positive effects of strategy instruction which emerged for proficiency in speaking, and Park – Oh (1994, as cited in Oxford, 2003) mentions that there were positive effects for reading as well. Nunan (1997, as cited in Oxford 2003) states, in other studies, it was found that enhanced strategy instruction led to enhanced EFL learning motivation.

Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, and Robbins (1996, as cited in Oxford, 2003) state in other studies involving native-English-speaking learners of foreign languages, strategy instruction led to greater strategy use and self efficacy. O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo (1985, as cited in Oxford, 2003) state that the findings for listening were not meaningful. Effective Strategy training entails more than simply teaching effective strategies. It involves demonstrating when and how to use strategies, and evaluate them, and how to transfer these strategies to other language tasks and situations (Oxford, 2003).

There are other factors that must be taken into consideration when planning learning strategy instruction and when acquiring learning strategies. In the next section, I present these characteristics.

### **Other Key Factors that Affect Test Performance and Learning**

There are other factors that may play an important role in helping students respond well to learning strategy training and in helping them acquire learning strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). They are learning styles, demographic factors (age, sex, prior education and cultural background), and motivation (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

## **Learning Styles**

Learning strategies come hand in hand with learning styles (and other factors such as motivation and demographic factors). Cohen (1998) states, “Learning strategies do not operate by themselves, but rather are directly tied to the learner’s underlying learning styles (their general approaches to learning) and other personality-related variables (such as anxiety and self-concept) in the learner” (p. 15). There has been research done in this area. For example, Oxford (1993, as cited in Cohen, 1998) pinpoints five learning style contrasts in her Style Analysis Survey (SAS) (p. 15). The learning style contrasts that appear on Oxford’s (1993, as cited in Cohen, 1998) SAS are: “the use of physical senses for study and work: visual v. auditory” (p. 15), “dealing with other people: extroversion v. introversion, handling possibilities: intuitive-random v. concrete-sequential, approaching tasks: closure-oriented v. open and dealing with ideas: global v. analytic” (p. 16). She makes the point that each learning style preference gives significant advantages for learning and most importantly learners must identify the style preferences that works and to apply them whenever possible.

Cohen (1998) believes that students choose learning strategies, which are closely tied to their preferred learning style. He states, “once learners have a sense of their style preference, it may be easier for them to see why it is they prefer using certain strategies and not others” (p. 16). Cohen’s (1998) example is, if the learners are more global in their style preference, they may enjoy using reading strategies which aid them in getting the meaning of an article, such as using their judgements. Also, if learners are more prone to focus on details, they may feel uncomfortable when using a global approach, and

may prefer to write out the meanings of particular items in the text before they try to make sense of its meaning.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) also believe an individual's learning style may cause that person to adopt particular learning strategies. Their example is that a visual learner may prefer the strategy imagery, and a field-independent or analytic learner may prefer strategies such as grouping and deduction. McCarthy (1987, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) explains that there is not much research in this area, but instructional programs recommend that teachers include activities in their lessons that address the needs of students' different learning styles. But since students choose learning strategies related to their preferred learning style, they need assistance with using learning strategies that are not related to their preferred learning style. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that although teaching to different learning styles seems healthy, students probably need assistance and additional practice in those learning strategies that may not be closely tied to their natural learning styles but which nevertheless are valuable in successfully completing language learning tasks.

O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) examples of such strategies are those which require focusing, monitoring of comprehension, elaboration of prior knowledge, making inferences, using deduction to apply language rules, taking notes on listening and reading materials, asking questions for clarification, and cooperating with peers to successfully complete a learning task.

Students choice of using learning strategies that are closely tied to their preferred learning style is not always the best thing to do, since there are many other learning strategies which are beneficial for learning. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) pinpoint that

“not all of these strategies may fall into the natural learning style preferences of a second or foreign language student, yet all are of potential value in increasing language learning effectiveness” (p. 174). So students need to practice using other learning strategies. Oxford (1993b, as cited in Cohen, 1998) notes, “learners’ ‘comfort zone’ is their favourite style” (p. 15) and that “learners can stretch their comfort zone through practice” (p. 15).

### Demographic Factors

O’Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that demographic factors (age, sex, and prior educational experiences and cultural background) are another student characteristic that needs to be considered in planning learning strategy instruction in order to help learners acquire learning strategies. Cohen (1998) also noticed that learning strategies are related to demographic factors such as age, sex, and ethnic differences.

Research found that cultural background could be the cause of choosing certain strategies as well. O’Malley (1985, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) states, “for instance, in our own work with strategy training, we found that acceptance of new strategies during training was related to prior success with alternative strategies, and this overlapped with ethnicity (or prior educational background)” (p. 160). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) discuss that in the second language learning arena, cultural background may have to do with two things: the kind of learning strategies students use to complete a task, and the ease or difficulty with which new strategies can be learned. They believe that part of students’ cultural background is their prior educational experiences. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) state that “although these differences in strategy approach and application could be attributed to cultural differences, they could in fact be due

merely to differences in prior schooling (which of course is embedded in a cultural context)” (p. 165). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) give the example of students whose initial educational training emphasized rote memorization, have developed effective memory strategies but are inexperienced with comprehension or problem-solving strategies. Also, O’Malley (1985, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) found that Asian students would resist using strategies for imagery and grouping in order to learn vocabulary definitions. There is research that shows that using strategies which students are accustomed to as part of their cultural background can be beneficial. O’Malley et al. (1985, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) also found that Asian students in the control group successfully applied rote memorization strategies to the vocabulary task and outperformed the experimental groups who had been trained in what they perceived as more sophisticated strategies. But O’Malley and Chamot (1990) state that on the other hand, Hispanic students seemed to enjoy being trained for new learning strategies and performed better on the post-test than did Hispanic students in the control group. In this case, using strategies, which is a part of their cultural background, was not beneficial. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) concluded that more research in this area is needed.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is an important characteristic for learning. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) mention that “motivation is probably the most important characteristic that students bring to a learning task” (p. 160). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) state that learners’ confidence in their ability to learn develops when they have experienced success in learning. Students, who have been successful with learning in the past, have confidence in their ability to learn, and as a result have greater motivation for learning

new tasks. Students who have not been successful with learning in the past develop a negative attitude towards their ability to learn, thus, their motivation is low. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state that the students "are likely to approach new learning tasks with a higher degree of motivation than students who, because they have not been successful in the past, may have developed a negative attitude toward their ability to learn" (p. 161).

What can be done about their negative attitude? Training students to use strategies successfully may change their negative attitude towards their ability to learn to a positive one. Jones (1987, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) indicates a major objective of strategy training should be to change students' attitudes about their own abilities by "teaching them that their failures can be attributed to the lack of effective strategies rather than to the lack of ability or to laziness" (p. 56). As mentioned earlier, strategy training can also help students use new strategies but students may not be comfortable in using new strategies, and therefore, need to be motivated to do so. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that "strategy training programs could benefit from a motivation component to help get reluctant students over the initial hurdle of learning to use new strategies" (p. 161).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) report that once students start to experience some success in using strategies, their attitudes about their own abilities may change, and thus, increase their motivation. So language training seems to be a positive thing but there also seems to be a concern.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state that one of the main concerns in the research of instruction in learning strategies has been the description of strategies used by more effective versus less effective language learners. They state that first we need to identify

the kinds of strategies that are used by good language learners, and then compare strategy use of effective and less effective learners. Once this is done, the questions we want to answer are: can less effective learners learn to use strategies to help their learning, and if so, what strategies can and should be taught, and what instructional approach can be used to teach these chosen strategies? They discuss two major issues that need to be addressed in training learning strategies. The first is whether instruction should focus only on learning strategy instruction, or whether it should be integrated with classroom instruction in the language or content subject (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) mention the arguments for and against each approach. Jones (1987, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) discuss that those who argue in favour of separate training programs bring up the idea that strategies are generalizable to many contexts and that students will better learn strategies if they can focus all their attention on developing strategic processing skills instead of trying to learn content at the same time.

What is the argument in favour of integrated strategy instructional programs? Wenden (1987b, as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) says that "those in favour of integrated strategy instruction programs, on the other hand, argue that learning in context is more effective than learning separate skills whose immediate applicability may not be evident to the learner and that practicing strategies on authentic academic and language tasks facilitates the transfer of strategies to similar tasks encountered in other classes" (p. 105).

There seem to be pros and cons for each approach, and some researchers have looked at using both approaches at the same time. Dansereau (1985, as cited in O'Malley

and Chamot, 1990) suggests, “future studies evaluate a learning strategy system that integrates both content-independent strategies and content-dependent ones” (p. 153). This type of integration is also suggested by Derry’s (1984, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) incidental learning model, where students receive short periods of separate strategy training followed by reminders to use the strategies in content classrooms.

Weinstein (1982, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) and her coworkers (Weinstein and Underwood 1985, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) have developed and implemented both separate and integrated instruction in learning strategies. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) state for separate training, students are taught how to effectively use learning strategies through a special university course and that the course provides practice for applying these strategies to learner’s other courses.

O’Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that for the integrated training content, teachers are taught to incorporate learning strategy instruction into their regular classrooms. The second major issue, which needs to be addressed in training learning strategies, is whether the actual training should be direct or embedded. In direct instruction, students are educated about the importance and purpose of strategy training, whereas in embedded instruction, students are introduced to activities and materials to elicit the use of the strategies being taught but are not educated about the reasons why this approach to learning is being exercised (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990).

There has been research that shows the negative side to the embedded approach. Brown, Armbruster, and Baker (1986, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) explains that “early research on training learning strategies following the embedded approach

found little transfer of training to new tasks” (p. 153). More recent studies have included a metacognitive component to training by notifying students about the purpose and value of the strategies to be trained and teaching them about how to regulate and monitor strategies (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990). The addition of this metacognitive component has been helpful in maintaining strategy use over time and in transferring strategies to new tasks (Brown et al. 1986; Palincsar and Brown 1986, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Wenden (1987, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) states that a criticism is that students who are not aware of the strategies they are using do not develop independent learning strategies and have little opportunity of becoming autonomous learners. For this reason, many researchers recommend that instruction in learning strategies be direct instead of embedded (Brown et al. 1986; Palincsar and Brown 1984; Wenden 1987b; Weinstein and Mayer 1986; Winograd and Hare 1988, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) or that direct instruction be included to a curriculum or instructional materials designed with embedded strategies (Derry and Murphy (1986, as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Having examined strategies, proficiency, test anxiety, test performance, and other key factors that affect test performance and learning, it is important to step back from these findings and consider how they were obtained. In the next section, I present how data has been collected in research.

### **Assessment Tools**

Data has been collected in research in a variety of methods: observation and interviews (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978 as cited in Bremner, 1999);

observations, student self-report and diaries (Rubin, 1981 as cited in Bremner, 1999); self-report through questionnaires (Politzer, 1983; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Oxford, 1990 as cited in Bremner, 1999); and interviews (Wenden, 1987, as cited in Bremner, 1999). Strategies used by L2 learners have been revealed through many assessment tools: self-report surveys, observations, interviews, learner journals, dialogue journals, think-aloud techniques, and others (Oxford, 2003). Each one has advantages and disadvantages and some are used more widely than others.

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (an appendix in Oxford, 1990) is the most widely used survey. It has been “translated into more than 20 languages and used in dozens of published studies around the world” (Oxford, 2003, p. 15). A full description of the SILL follows below.

As summarized at the beginning of this chapter, research on strategies is important for gaining insight on how to improve on ways to assess learners and tests and to help students do well on tests. Cohen (1998) points out that “the insights gained from looking at the test-taking strategies used by L2 learners can help both to improve the assessment instruments themselves and to improve the success that learners have in responding to these instruments” (p. 215). Hence, he explains, “there is a need for including test-taking strategy data in the process of test validation” (p. 257). He states that this goal can be achieved by using verbal report feedback from students and by collecting verbal report protocols from students as soon as they complete a set of interviews.

Since the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) has been widely used, I present its six strategies in detail. They are:

1. **Affective Strategies** are strategies that help with reducing anxiety (i.e I try to relax when I am stressed about communicating in English, Bremner, 1999), encouraging one self through positive self talk, and rewarding oneself (Oxford, 2003, p. 14)
2. **Social strategies** are strategies, which include asking questions for verification, clarification, asking for assistance with language tasks, communicating with native speakers (i.e., I practice speaking in English with others, Bremner, 1999) and becoming culturally aware (Oxford, 2003). Oxford (2003) states, “social strategies help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language” (p.14).
3. **Metacognitive strategies** are strategies used to evaluate one’s success and progress of each learning strategy, planning for language assignments, searching for chances to practice the target language (e.i., I look for people to talk to in English, (Oxford, 1990, as cited in Bremner, 1999), be attentive, keep track of mistakes, diagnose one’s own learning style preference and essentials, gather and organize materials, arrange an area for studying and a schedule. Oxford (2003) states metacognitive strategies are “employed for managing the learning process overall” (Oxford, 2003, p. 12).
4. **Memory-related strategies**, allow learners to connect concepts together but without involving deep understanding. (i.e., I use new English vocabulary in a sentence so it will help me remember them (Oxford, 1990 as cited in Bremner, 1999). They also allow learners to store and retrieve information in an orderly string (i.e., acronyms), or through sounds (i.e., rhyming), mental pictures,

physical movement, objects (i.e., flashcards), location (i.e., on a page or blackboard) or categorizing (Oxford, 2003)

5. **Cognitive strategies** involve: manipulation or transformation of the language under study (i.e., I use the English words I am familiar with, in different ways (Oxford, 1990, as cited in Bremner, 1999)). “Cognitive strategies allow the learner to handle the language material in direct ways: “through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally.” (Oxford, 2003, p. 12)
6. **Compensatory strategies** make up for having little knowledge (Oxford, 1990). Oxford (1990, as cited in Bremner, 1999) states, “compensatory strategies allow learners to use the target language for either use or understanding no matter how little knowledge a learner has (i.e., I make guesses to understand vocabulary which is unfamiliar (Bremner, 1999)). “Compensatory Strategies are strategies used for guessing from the context in guessing meaning from the context, using gestures to express thoughts and ideas to replace the missing word to help with communicating and writing (Oxford, 2003, p. 13).

This chapter has described how strategies, test anxiety and other factors affect test performance and learning. In the following chapter I report on how the study was conducted, including the research questions, the participants, the instruments (semi-structured pre-test interview, post-test questionnaire and the SILL), the procedure (recruitment process, semi-structured pre-test interview and post test questionnaire) and

finally the analysis. The following chapter will “allow the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of the methods and the reliability and the validity of the results”, and “permit experienced investigators to replicate the study if they so desire”(Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 17).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

Using a case study (Patton, 1980) approach, this study consists of single cases (n=8) of students, studying at a private language school for the purpose of passing the PSC oral language proficiency test in English. My study was created by my research questions and not by any particular paradigm. I used Patton's (1980) Inductive Analysis framework to help arrive at my findings.

The study consisted of two parts: in phase one, eight students were interviewed at the end of their English language training and before their oral test. In phase two, a questionnaire was administered to the eight participants. Part one of the questionnaire (see instruments section below) was completed after they took the PSC oral language test (before they received their test results), and part two of the questionnaire was completed after they received their test results.

As discussed earlier, the literature identifies many factors that influence a L2 student's choice of learning strategies but fails to consider whether test anxiety could influence L2 students' choice of learning strategies, (how they use them or how many they use) and test performance. "Research indicates that factors influencing the L2 student's choice of learning strategies include motivation, career/academic specialization, sex, cultural background, nature of task, age and stage of language learning" (Oxford, 2002 p. 127). Also, there is limited research on strategies for high-stakes tests (Cohen, 2006) and there appears to be no research on test anxiety, test performance, and strategy use for government employees taking the high stakes PSC oral language proficiency test of English. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand the interaction

between these factors in this high stakes context for the purpose of supporting my students' success in meeting their goals.

In this chapter, I present the research questions, the participants, the instruments (semi-structured pre-test interview, post-test questionnaire and the SILL), the procedure (recruitment process, semi-structured pre-test interview and post test questionnaire) and finally the analysis.

## **Research Question**

In this study, my overall research question is, what influences test performance in the high stakes testing context of the PSC of the Government of Canada oral language proficiency test? In order to examine this question, I have broken it down into key underlying questions:

1. Do strategies make a difference? How does language training affect test performance?
  - What is the relationship between test performance and language development background?
  - What is the relationship between test performance and taking Intensive Language Training before taking the PSC oral language test?
2. What role does proficiency level play?
  - What is the relationship between proficiency background and test performance?
3. What role does anxiety play in test performance in this high stakes context?
  - What is the relationship between level of anxiety and the test taker's goal?
  - What is the impact of test failure? Does the anxiety level change?

## **Participants**

Eight students Case 1, Case 2, Case 3, Case 4, Case 5, Case 6, Case 7, Case 8, who took private classes at a private language school, were interviewed and given two questionnaires to complete. The participants were francophone government employees who needed to obtain a certain proficiency level on the PSC oral language proficiency test. The participants' first language was French and second language was English. All participants were interviewed on the last day of their English language training and a few days before their test.

It is important to note that there were key commonalities among the participants. These are: all participants (1) took the PSC oral language proficiency test, (2) studied in private classes at the same private language school, (3) spoke French as a first language, (4) were Government Employees, (5) spoke two languages (English and French), (6) circled "very nervous" on the questionnaire about taking the oral test, (7) said during the interview that they found the English training to be helpful and (8) indicated on the questionnaire that they were not shy about asking the teacher questions during class.

There were also differences among the participants in: (1) age, (2) where they were from, (3) the number of hours of English language training they had had (both at the private language school where I conducted this study, and during their lifetime), (4) the time span of English language training, (5) gender, (6) their positions and departments in the Government, and (7) their levels of proficiency, and proficiency/testing goals.

The individuals who participated in this study were representative of typical characteristics of government employees who study at the private language school. These were: (1) more females than males, (2) mainly speakers whose first language was

French, (3) the majority of students' hometown is Quebec, (3) ages fall between 25 and 50 years old, and (4) the majority study to attain a higher proficiency level rather than to maintain their proficiency level.

## **Instruments**

### **Semi-Structured Pre-test Interview**

The questions for the pre-test interview were organized in order to first, elicit information about the background, and second to elicit information about strategy use, their language proficiency, and test anxiety. Since the interview was semi-structured, I asked additional questions as the interview proceeded and participants were given the chance to speak freely if they wished about any comments or concerns they had. Each interview was recorded. (See Appendix II to view all the questions asked during the interview).

### **Post-test Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The students completed Part A of the questionnaire after they completed their test and Part B was completed after they received their test results. The questionnaire consisted of questions about strategy use, proficiency, test anxiety and test performance. (See Appendix III for the post-test questionnaire).

### **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)**

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) has been used for many studies to explore strategy use in language learning and has helped researchers explore many aspects about strategies. Oxford, (1990, as cited in Green & Oxford, 1995) states "A number of important findings concerning the relationship of strategies to a student's degree of success in learning have been generated by studies using the Strategy Inventory

for Language Learning, or SILL” (p. 264). SILL’s findings have helped us understand how students use learning strategies, and has been the major instrument used in more than 40 studies (Green & Oxford, 1995). In addition to strategy use, the SILL has also helped researchers examine other factors. “Strategy use has been significantly related in SILL studies to language performance, gender, whether a language is being studied as a second or a foreign language, and differences in student’s learning styles” (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 265). The SILL measures student’s strategy use in three different ways: across the entire survey, in terms of the six broad strategy categories and in terms of particular strategies (Green & Oxford, 1995). This research looks at the six broad strategy categories, which are presented in chapter two. I used these categories to explore a possible relationship between the number of strategy categories used and students’ test performance. Research has acknowledged that such a relationship exists. Studies demonstrate that “students who were better in their language performance generally reported higher levels of overall strategy use and frequent use of a greater number of strategy categories” (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 265).

## **Procedure**

### **Recruitment Process**

With each classroom teachers’ permission I visited the students who were scheduled to write the PSC oral language proficiency test. It happened that at the time of recruitment, there were only students who were scheduled to do the PSC oral language proficiency test at the private language school where the study was conducted; hence, none of the participants in this study wrote the PSC reading or writing language proficiency test. I explained to students the purpose of my study and how it might

potentially benefit them and their teachers. Then I asked if they would like to participate in the study. I assured them that the interviews would not take longer than 15 minutes to complete, the questionnaire would not take longer than 20 minutes to complete and that their participation would remain confidential.

### **Semi-Structured Pre-test Interview**

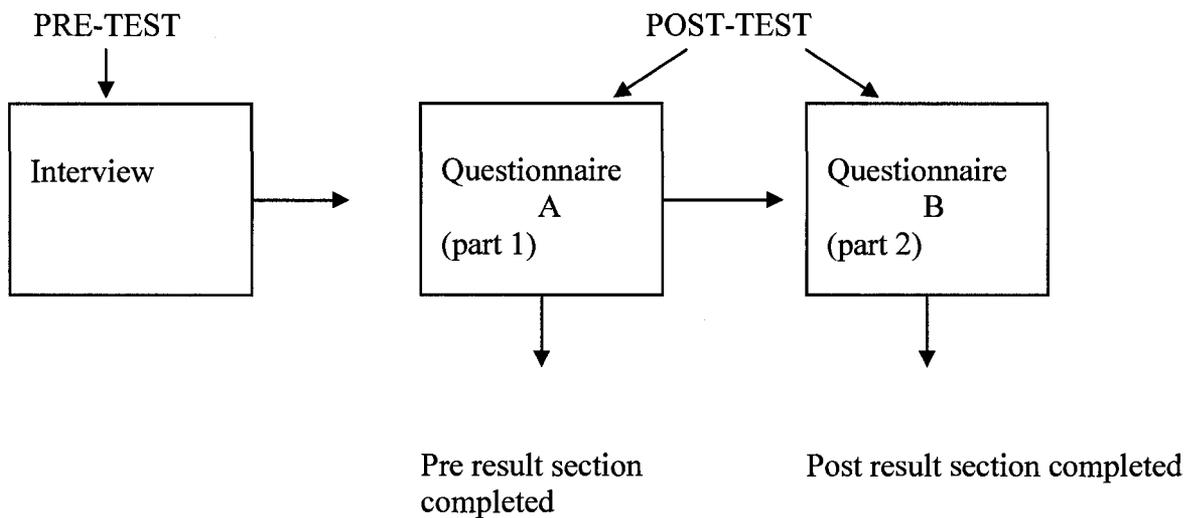
I interviewed each participant at the end of their English course, but before they took the test. The interview was semi structured; therefore, the questions were open-ended so that I could allow the interview to move to another direction. Subsequent questions depended on the interviewee's responses in order to engage them in a conversation. The questions during the interviews explored reported strategy use, proficiency and test anxiety. I recorded the interviews on a tape recorder and then transcribed them for analysis. I added some of the transcriptions in the discussion and results chapter. At the end of the interview, I gave the students a questionnaire (which consisted of two parts) to complete. Interviews were arranged outside the private language school at their convenience to insure confidentiality. The interview would not take longer than 15 minutes to complete. For some participants, the interview took longer because they expressed a number of concerns.

### **Post-test Questionnaire**

I gave participants a questionnaire to complete on the day of the interview, specifically on their last day of classes. The questions on the questionnaires explored strategy use, proficiency, test anxiety, and test performance. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. I asked them to complete part A of the questionnaire immediately after

writing the test and Part B after they have received their results. The questionnaire (including both parts) did not take longer than 20 minutes to complete.

**FIGURE I** Pre-test Interview and Post-test Questionnaire.



## **Analysis**

My findings were analyzed in two phases; in Phase 1, I examined what each participant said during the interview and what they wrote on their questionnaires in relation to strategy use, proficiency, test anxiety, and test performance. In addition, comments, which are not relevant to the research questions, are organized under the section 'additional comments'. In Phase 2, I used the "Inductive Analysis" approach (Patton, 1980, p. 306) to examine any patterns (similarities and/or differences) and themes among students' test anxiety, strategy use, proficiency, and test performance. In order to organize the patterns, I developed categories (Patton, 1980). "Categories divide some aspect of the world into parts" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). The patterns were categorized in the following way. Strategy use is categorized into the sections "high"

and “low” which were calculated in terms of the median of strategies reported among all 8 participants. For example, the number of strategies reported among all participants is 62 (see table 5). 62 divided by 8 (number of participants) equals 8. Look at p. 103 for more detail. Proficiency was categorized according to the Public Service Commission’s rating scale shown below:

Low proficiency level in oral – A level

Medium Proficiency level in oral –B level

High Proficiency level in oral- C level or higher

Exemption in oral – E level

The participants’ proficiency level corresponds to the level, which they originally had when I interviewed them, which was before completing the PSC oral language proficiency test. Test anxiety was not categorized in any way. Test performance is categorized into the sections “fail” and “pass”. Once I found patterns and themes, I adjusted my research questions based on these findings; therefore, the patterns of analysis (Patton, 1980) also emerged from my data and not solely from any particular paradigm.

This case study is an exploratory one; exploring first the experience I faced at the private language school where this research was conducted and second the research literature, which encouraged me to ask questions. These questions were modified as a result of my analysis. I also used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) in order to explore reported strategy use and their relationship with factors such as proficiency, test anxiety, and test performance. “The Structure of the SILL is based on Oxford’s (1990) system for classifying strategies into six groups” (Oxford, 1995). The

six groups are Affective strategies, Social strategies, Metacognitive strategies, Memory-related strategies, Cognitive strategies, and Compensatory strategies.

In this chapter, I presented the methods used to conduct my study. In the next chapter, I present what participants reported during the semi-structured pre-test interview and in the post-test questionnaire. Next, I present the results and discussion to explore my research question.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In chapter one, I introduced my study and presented my overall research question and key underlying questions. In chapter two, I presented the research literature on strategy use, test-performance, proficiency, and test-anxiety, how these relate to one another and how strategy use has been examined in the research literature.

In chapter three, I presented the methods used to conduct my study. In this chapter, first, I present a table summarizing the participants' characteristics to provide readers with a quick overview of key information. Second, I present a table summarizing the number of weeks of intensive language training taken before the PSC oral language proficiency test and indicate those who passed or failed the PSC oral language proficiency test. Third, I describe what each participant said during the pre-test interview in relation to strategy use, proficiency and test anxiety. Fourth, I describe each participant's response to Part A of the questionnaire (completed after the Oral test but before the test results were received) in relation to strategy use, proficiency, and test anxiety. Fifth, I describe each participant's response to Part B of the questionnaire (completed after the test results) in relation to strategy use, proficiency, test anxiety, and test-performance. Sixth, I discuss my findings. Seventh, I provide additional comments.

Table 1 and 2 below provide an overview of the participants (see participants, chapter three, for a full description of similarities and differences for quick reference by readers). The 8 participant's characteristics are summarized below in order to provide readers with a tool to support their consideration of the findings reported here.

**Table 1. Overview of Participants Interviewed**

CASES	AGE	GENDER	PURPOSE FOR ORAL TEST.	CITY/PROVINCE OF ORIGIN	PROFICIENCY LEVEL BEFORE THE TEST		
					reading	writing	oral
Case 1	28	Female	B level to keep her acting position.	Gatineau, Quebec	B	B	A
Case 2	30	Male	C level to keep his acting manager position	Quebec City, Quebec	C	B	B
Case 3	45	Female	C level to keep her acting position	Gatineau, Quebec	E	B	B
Case 4	39	Female	B level to keep her acting position	Gatineau, Quebec	B	B	A
Case 5	41	Female	C level to get a new position	Paris, France	E	C	B
Case 6	40	Female	C level to keep her position	Trois-Rivieres, Quebec	C	C	B
Case 7	39	Female	B level to get higher position	Gatineau, Quebec	C	C	A
Case 8	34	Female	Maintain C level in order to get a permanent position.	Gatineau, Quebec	E	E	C

**Table 2. Number of Weeks of Intensive Language Training.**

Participants	Number of Weeks of Intensive Language Training	Participants Results After Taking the PSC Oral Language Proficiency Test
Case 1	1 week of Intensive Language Training	PASS
Case 2	2 weeks of Intensive Language Training	PASS
Case 3	No Intensive Language Training	PASS
Case 4	No Intensive Language Training	FAIL
Case 5	1 week of Intensive Language Training	PASS
Case 6	2 weeks of Intensive Language Training	PASS
Case 7	1 week of Intensive Language Training	PASS
Case 8	No Intensive Language Training	FAIL

## **Results**

### **Semi-Structured Pre-Test Interview**

The interview took place at the end of the participants' English language training and before the PSC oral language test during the summer of 2007. In this section, I present each participant's answers to the interview questions and discuss the interaction of their strategy use, proficiency and test anxiety. For strategy use, I describe three key aspects of each participant: 1. Previous English language training, 2. English language training at the private language school where the study was conducted, and 3. Strategies they used inside and outside of their classes during their language training at the private language school where I interviewed them. I also discuss whether the participants found these strategies helpful. For proficiency I describe the level that they held at the time of

the interview and their goal of proficiency and purpose for obtaining their goal. For test anxiety, I present any feelings of anxiety they reported in relation to their test preparation, achieving their goal, and their language-training course.

### **Case 1**

Case 1 is a 28-year-old female from Gatineau. She speaks English and French. At the interview, she was very stressed and felt a lot of pressure to pass the PSC oral language test. Case 1 studied English at a private language school in order to obtain a B level on the PSC oral language test with the goal of being promoted from a CR-04 position to an AS-01 position.

During the interview she mentions she failed the PSC oral language test four times while trying to obtain a B level on the PSC oral language test. Case 1 believes that the reason is due to outside factors (which are discussed in the test anxiety section) and not because of her English language ability. She is very bitter about this. To substantiate her point, she mentions that most people (with whom she speaks in English) think that she already has her B level in oral and is studying English to obtain a C level. She adds that her teacher assigned her homework at a C level rather than a B level. She feels that she is capable of passing the PSC oral language test successfully if the evaluator evaluates her English ability as opposed to evaluating other factors such as the ones mentioned in the test anxiety section below.

### **Strategy Use**

Case 1 attended English language training at a language school from March 2006 until August 2006 (five months). The course was at 3 days a week at 3 hours a day. She

also completed an intensive week of English Language Training (at the private language school where I interviewed her) at 6 hours each day (total 180 hours) in July 2007.

In class, she talked to herself to stay focused on the teacher's lessons, and practiced applying the grammar rules while speaking in English to her teacher. She also would also transfer her knowledge of grammar rules in French to grammar rules in English. She also practiced talking about her job in English with her teacher.

She found that these strategies helped her.

Outside class, she bought an English book to read, watched T.V., and listened to the radio in English. Everyday she read English documents at work, and wrote in English for work purposes (i.e., e-mails, summaries, and analysis). She said these strategies have helped her. She added that she would relieve anxiety by telling herself to relax, calm down, and focus. She commented that she is a "smart girl" but simply needs to control her "stress level" during the next PSC Oral language Test.

### **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 1, she had an A level on the PSC oral language test and had already taken the PSC oral language test four times in order to obtain a B level in Oral. The reason for her goal was to be promoted from a CR-04 position to an AS-01 position.

### **Test Anxiety**

There were five reasons why Case 1 was confident that she would achieve her goal this time. First, she was given the opportunity to practice the PSC oral language test in a pilot study where she temporarily obtained her B level (a month before I interviewed her). Second, she had been taking English classes and felt her English language training

helped a lot because she learned the kind of mistakes she was making while speaking in English. Third, she felt prepared this time to overcome her anxiety. She said: “I am prepared to fight my stress”. The fourth, she felt well prepared for the test because she had practiced talking about her job during English classes, which is part of the content for the PSC oral language test, as mentioned above in the strategy section. Finally, she had already completed the Oral test a few times and so was well aware of the kinds of questions she would be asked concerning her job.

Looking back at her test preparation, she says that she would have liked to have been calmer and more confident in herself. She said she would not have changed her course in anyway because she found her teachers helpful. Even though Case 1 felt confident about achieving her goal, there were many factors that caused Case 1 to become anxious about doing the PSC oral language test. These factors were: an error performed at the PSC, the loss of her position, the government system, the evaluators at the PSC, and her learning disability. I have discussed these in more detail below.

### **An Error Performed at the PSC**

Case 1 was not happy because she obtained her B level a month before the interview, but then lost it because of an error at the PSC. Case 1 explained during the interview that the PSC proposed to Case 1 that since she had failed her oral language test three times, they would give her the chance to take the oral language test with a student evaluator, and an evaluator who will also be in the room, in a pilot study. Case 1 decided to participate in this pilot study because she thought that even if she did not achieve a B level on the PSC oral language test, she would be given the chance to practice. During the time that Case 1 obtained her B level, she was promoted to an AS1 position (director

assistant) from a CR-04 position. Then suddenly she lost her AS-01 position when she was notified by the PSC that her test was invalid because the student evaluator had made an error while assessing Case 1. So for the fourth time, Case 1 failed the PSC Oral test and had no choice but to retake the test in order to keep her AS-01 position. This time she decided to study English with a teacher at a private language school (where this study took place) before taking the test for a fifth time. Since she lost her AS-01 position, she had to go back to her old salary as a CR-04 position. Case 1 said that she is still doing the work required for an AS-01 position but is getting paid for a CR-04 position because she has not achieved a B level on the PSC oral language test. If Case 1 does not achieve a B level on the PSC oral test, she will continue to get paid as a CR-04 position but will willingly do work as an AS-01 position because she enjoys the job. She said she is temporarily comfortable with this situation but will not be comfortable forever. She showed extreme test anxiety, but felt ready to conquer it. Here is what she said:

I received for 4 months the AS1 salary but now I lost it because I do not have my B level.... I lost my salary. I'm angry about everything so it doesn't help. I fight everyday for my English and I do my job in English. Probably the stress will win over me but I will try to fight the stress. I need to put my life on hold because for 4 months I lived my life with a big salary and after 4 months...Oh, o.k. you lost your position because you do not have your B and your test is in 3 months. And I do more than CR4 and I do more than AS1 people.

### **Government System**

Case 1 thinks that the Government system is less strict with Anglophones than Francophones in regards to achieving a certain proficiency level. Case 1 believes that

regardless of whether an Anglophone does or does not have the required level in order to obtain a certain position at work, she/he will be able to get that position. Conversely, a francophone would need to achieve that level in order to obtain that same position. Aside from the government being unfair, she thinks they work slowly. For example, test takers must wait three or four months to retake a test at the PSC. She is frustrated because, the longer it takes her to obtain her B level, the more time it will allow someone else to apply for the position she so desperately is trying to obtain. She said:

So if., if I ..if I ....do not have my B on Monday I will need to wait until October to get tested again.

### **Evaluator at the PSC**

Case 1 had a terrible experience the last time she took the PSC oral language test. The evaluator asked Case 1 how she would fix the photocopier if it jammed. Case 1 replied that she did not know how to fix a photocopier. The evaluator insisted on getting an answer from Case 1 and so asked her the same question four more times. Case 1 got frustrated with the evaluator, and shouted, "*I'm not a technician!*" From this experience, Case 1 believed that the evaluator tested her knowledge in the field of technology instead of her ability to speak English. She showed enormous amounts of stress when she was explaining her experience. She said:

The problem is ask me question about my job because the test is about my job. If you look on the website,.....preparation for the oral test....it gave you all the rules....ask question about your job, skill, so....and she ask me question about if the photocopier jam. I'm not a technician. After five same question, I tell the lady, sorry I'm not a technician. I try to explain her in English...we have at work a one hundred line. If the

photocopier,....the printer,.....you call the line.... You call the technician guy. Because we are not a technician. I'm a director assistant. I know some problems. And she asked me the question "o.k but it jammed again"....it jammed again. "No sorry, I'm not a technician. Or...If I do not have a answer. O.k I understand your question but the problem is I do not have a answer for you....because....if I ask a question about hunting, did you have a answer for me? No! So she asks me question on the subject. I do not know, I can't lie.

I asked Case 1 if she thought she was penalized for not answering the evaluator's question about how to fix the photocopier when it is jams, and she replied, Yah....Yah....because everybody looks....not professional....or not.... If you think before you give me an answer about the subject you do not know...you know... and if you try to find a word or if you try to give a good answer....probably she will think "Oh my God she doesn't know." If she asks me question about subject I do not know I look like lost. Because it's normal in French or in Spanish or in Chinese, it's the same meaning, ask me question about my job. I know my job.

After the situation about a jammed photocopier, Case 1 believed that the evaluator thought that Case 1 could not communicate her thoughts in English, but Case 1 explained that the real problem was that she could give explanations regarding technical problems.

### **Language and Learning Challenges**

Case 1 explained that her difficulty speaking any language was mistaken as an inability to communicate fluently in English. She thought the evaluator should have listened to how she communicated in French before he/she evaluated her speaking ability

in English. She felt that the PSC oral language test did not test her English ability but rather tested how she spoke as a person.

Case 1 is dyslexic and has attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). She mentioned that during all the oral tests she took in the past. She spoke fast because she is hyperactive by nature and because she was nervous about the test. As a result, she made more errors in her speech. She said she talks before she thinks. Since she is a hyperactive person, it is difficult for her to stay calm and speak slowly. Case 1 seemed really concerned about her learning disorder and reported a few strategies she uses to help her overcome her challenges. She said,

It's very hard for me to learn English because I need to talk to myself every minute. "O.k, stay concentrate. O.k listen to teacher." After 15 minutes I need to walk or go to the washroom. So imagine after a half an hour for a test I need to say (to herself) "O.k just....answer ....answer....the question. I know I'm ready for my oral. I know that.

Case 1's difficulties with speaking in her L1 are self-correction, hesitation while trying to find vocabulary, and misuse of vocabulary. Case 1 said she makes the same errors when she speaks in English (her second language).

### **Loosing her Position**

Case 1 is worried about losing her position to someone who already has the required B level in oral and the appropriate skills while she is busy taking language training. Case 1 demonstrated high anxiety regarding this issue. She said,

If someone says "hey I have the skills and I have my BBB and I want this position, they can take it and I can loose my position. The thing is, I like my job, I like the people I work with, my boss is a wonderful women and I'm so happy every morning to go work

so its...sure...It's....I want this job and I want to stay here. I speak in English and I know that so...

## **Case 2**

Case 2 is a 30-year-old male who was born and raised in Quebec City. He speaks French and English.

### **Strategy Use**

Case 2 took English language training in high school, 2 to 3 hours a week in a group and also 2 years ago, at 4 hours a week (group) for 4 months. In addition, he attended the language school where I interviewed him from December, 2006 to March 2007. There, he completed 6 hours a week plus two weeks intensive (144 hours in total) of English language training.

In class, he asked questions, talked about complex topics to help build his vocabulary and to help express his thoughts. He repeated words that were difficult to pronounce, made charts of grammar rules on paper and in his mind in order to organize the rules. The purpose of the charts was to help him remember the rules and to figure out how the English language works, in order to help him apply these rules in his speech. He found that these strategies helped him.

Outside of class, Case 2 spoke English with clients and colleagues at work everyday. He watched T.V. in English (with English subtitles) about three times a week, read almost all documents in English at work, and read English magazines, novels, and newspapers at home. He also thought in English outside of class, and occasionally listened to the radio and did his homework. He said these strategies helped him.

## **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 2, he had a B level on the PSC oral language test but wanted to obtain a C level in order to keep his acting managing position. In order to help him achieve his goal, he took English language training where I conducted the study. Case 2 was eager to take the PSC oral language test so after four weeks of his language training, but before his hours of language training were completed, he took the PSC oral language test and failed it. So, he continued his hours of English language training.

## **Test Anxiety**

Case 2 was extremely nervous about taking the PSC oral language test for two reasons. First, if he did not achieve his goal, he would lose his acting position and acting pay. Second, he hated being evaluated. He had doubts that he would achieve his goal because he felt a lot of anxiety during the last two weeks of his English language training, which he said caused him to regress in his speaking ability. For example, he said he was searching for his words, and therefore hesitating more than ever and missing certain grammatical aspects, like prepositions. He said,

“My level of ability has decreased because of stress and I know I will be stressed during the test. In class I’m a C, but I will probably not be a C at the interview.”

When I asked him if he felt prepared for the PSC oral language test, he said he felt well prepared for the test because he knows all the rules, principles and knows how to use the language; however, he felt that his high level of anxiety could cause him to speak ungrammatically.

He felt the course helped him because the teacher helped him focus on his difficulties. When I asked him what he would have changed about his test preparation,

he said he could have talked at home everyday with his girlfriend who lived with him, read more in English, talked more in English at work, listened more to English, and did more English homework even though he has done more homework in this class than he has ever done in his lifetime. The only thing he would have liked to change about his course is to have had more than one teacher teach him for more feedback about his English speaking skills.

### **Case 3**

Case 3 is a 45-year-old female who comes from Aylmer, Quebec. She speaks French and English. Case 3 is occupying a PM-02 position but is getting paid as a PM-01 position because she doesn't have a C level in oral communication. She says it was difficult for her to manage work and school. There were days she had to stay later at the office in order to finish her work.

### **Strategy Use**

From May 15, 2007 to Aug 17, 2007, Case 3 completed 2 hrs a week (total 64 hrs) of English language training at the private language school where I interviewed her. Case 3 took English classes in Elementary and High school, half French and half English and took English language training 13 years ago, once a week (at 4 hours) for 4 weeks (group class).

In class, she did her work and made sure not to miss any of her classes. She is a shy person, but was not shy about asking questions in class; these strategies have helped her.

Outside of class, Case 3 spoke English at home, and with colleagues at work. She listened to the T.V. and radio in English, and read English documents at work. She also

wrote English for work purposes (e-mails, summaries, analysis). She did her homework and grammar exercises from the grammar book she bought for herself. She also made sure to work more on the English files than the French ones at work; these strategies, too, have helped her.

### **Proficiency**

At the interview, Case 3 had a B level in Oral. She needed to take the PSC Oral test to obtain a C level in oral communication in order to keep her acting PM-02 position.

### **Test Anxiety**

When I asked Case 3 if she was confident that she would achieve a C level on the PSC oral test, her response was:

It depend....it depends on the person who will give me the interview. My teacher told me I should have a C but um...it depends on the reaction I will have that day I guess if...I'm not too nervous and also depends on the ah...the person who will give the ah...the interview because sometime you feel less comfortable with someone. So... I know the last time it was like that. She was.... I do not know. It depends on if she's having a good day or bad day. Some days it doesn't come easy. Some days its very easy other days...ah...it doesn't come to easy to um....to speak English. But for me its like that I do not know if its...if it's the same for everyone.

To sum up, Case 3 felt that whether she obtains her C level in oral communication or not will depend on if whether she feels comfortable or not with the evaluator. If she feels comfortable with the evaluator, she will feel less anxiety, and will therefore find it easier to speak fluently. The last time she did the PSC oral language test, she did not feel comfortable with the evaluator because she found that he/she did not have a sense of

humour and so it was difficult for her to speak fluently in English. She feels more comfortable with some people than with others. Case 3 also said that her success will depend on the day; some days she can speak better than other days. She says she's not 100% sure that she will achieve a C level but she is hoping to achieve it.

Case 3 felt well prepared for the test and said her teacher helped her a lot but that she has to practice more with grammar rules. She said the course helped her because the teacher helped her realize when she would forget to use the plural "s". There is nothing she would have changed about her test preparation and she would not have changed her course in anyway.

#### **Case 4**

Case 4 is a 39-year-old female who comes from Gatineau. She speaks French and English, and wants to obtain her AS-01 level position. In order to do so, she needs to obtain a B level in oral communication. If she doesn't achieve her goal, she will have to stay at the CR-04 position, which pays less. She took the oral PSC language test five or six times between 2000 and 2007.

#### **Strategy Use**

Case 4 completed 6 hours a week (at 2 days a week) for 5 weeks (total 30 hours a week) of English language training at the private language school where I interviewed her. She attended English language training at a different language school from February 2007 until May 2007. There she did 2 hours with a group and 1 hour of private classes each week.

In class she took notes and asked questions in class, and concentrated on what the teacher said. In order to help her put her thoughts together, she shuts her eyes, but she knows it's not a good strategy to use during the PSC oral language test. She said, "I need to close my eyes and I can see all my words but that's not good when you go pass your exam."

She said that these strategies helped her.

Outside of class, she spoke English to colleagues, listened to the T.V. and radio in English, read newspapers, novels, magazines, and documents (at work) in English. She also did assigned homework; she said these strategies helped her.

### **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 4, she had an A level in oral communication but wanted to take the PSC oral language test again in order to obtain her B level in oral so as to keep her acting position.

### **Test Anxiety**

Case 4 is a shy person in general and also is shy to speak in English, especially if she does not know the person she is talking to. This is what she said about it:

"I'm not shy with the teacher and not shy with somebody I feel comfortable but sometimes when I from someone I do not know about this person, I feel more shy."

She felt shy when she makes errors while speaking English because she worries about what others think of her. She felt stressed when she was being tested and when she was asked to take part in a role play (which is part of the content of the PSC Oral test). She felt confident about achieving her goal because she had been working hard for a long time and felt she's improved. She said she would try to stay positive. She felt well

prepared for the test because she practiced acting out role-plays (potential scenario's experienced at her work) with her teacher. She felt the course helped her because the teacher answered her questions. Looking back, there is nothing she would have changed about her test preparation and she would not have changed her course in anyway.

#### Case 5

Case 5 is a 41-year-old female who comes from France (south of Paris); she speaks French and English. Case 5 wants to obtain a C level in oral communication in order to get a new position. She did not allow me to tape her and did not discuss any concerns with me; she gave straight answers and did not make conversation.

#### **Strategy Use**

From the week of June 25, Case 5 did 30 hours in one week (intense week) of English language training at the private language school where I interviewed her. She studied English in elementary school plus in Montreal for two months full time, 10 years ago.

In class, she practiced using vocabulary necessary for the practice interview questions. She said if she had not practiced them, she would have struggled more while answering the questions during the PSC oral test. These strategies have helped her.

Outside of class, Case 5 read novels, and scientific articles, documents (at work) in English and reviewed her class notes. At work, she spoke 90% of the time in English, and at home, spoke with friends in English, and 35% of her written work was in English. These strategies have helped her.

## **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 5, she had her B level in oral communication and was taking English language training. She had to take the PSC oral language test to obtain a C level in oral communication in order to obtain a new position.

## **Test Anxiety**

She did not feel confident she would achieve her goal because she did not have time to work on the interview questions as much as she wanted to. She said colleagues do not correct her so it is not easy for her to know if she was making errors or not. She did not feel prepared for the PSC oral language test because she did not prepare for the interview topics her teacher gave her. Also, she did not take as much opportunity to speak as she should have. She continued to misuse prepositions, and has difficulty with pronunciation, and intonation. She also felt she did not 'improve enough' since the last time she took the test, which was in 2003. She was nervous about the test because of the impact that the results would have on her professional life and because of the level of stress she had about learning a foreign language. She felt that the course helped her because it gave her more confidence and because the teacher corrected her errors as she spoke in English.

Looking back at her test preparation, she thought she should have prepared more for the interview questions, should have written and spoken more in English. Looking back, there is nothing she would have changed about her course in anyway but says she did not really have enough hours of English language training to comment about the course.

## **Case 6**

Case 6 is a 40-year-old female who is from Trois-Rivieres, Quebec. She speaks English and French. Case 6 needs to achieve a C level in oral to keep her position. She took the oral test last year but failed it. She is working in a French environment.

### **Strategy Use**

Case 6 completed 6 hours a week for 3 months plus 30 hours a week (intensive) for 2 weeks (total 132 hours) of English language training at the private language school where I interviewed her. She also studied English in March 2006 for one month (private class), at 30 hours total and in the fall of 2005 (group class) at 4 hours a week for 12 weeks.

Case 6 feels she needs to practice gathering her thoughts and ideas about her job in order to be able to successfully answer questions about her job during the PSC oral language test.

In the classroom, she asked questions, attended all classes, and memorized how to use certain sentences in English related to her job. With her teacher she also practiced answering to potential oral test questions about her job, and practiced role-plays, which is also part of the content for PSC oral language test. These strategies helped her.

Outside of class, Case 6 spoke 30% of the time in English (70% in French) everyday at work. Case 6 spoke English at home, listened to the radio and watched T.V. She read English magazines, novels, and newspapers, including documents at work. She wrote in English for work purpose (e-mails, summaries, and analysis). These strategies have helped her.

She was not happy with the fact that her Employer gave her a short period of time to prepare herself to achieve a C level in oral communication. Because of this short time frame, she felt that memorizing how she would say her thoughts would help and found that doing so did help her. She also seemed to believe that if she memorized how she would utter her thoughts, and then she would concentrate more on making fewer errors in her speech. She said,

“I need to know it by heart so I know what I’m going to say. If I know it by heart I will less concentrate on what to say. I will more concentrate to make no mistakes. It was better for me to learn by heart but they say you need to...not by heart but I wasn’t....like....completely convinced that is was o.k, because of the time range. I’m not sure what will work for me.”

### **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 6, she had a B level in oral communication and completed English language training at the English language school where I interviewed her. She needed to take the PSC oral language test to obtain a C level in oral communication in order to keep her acting position and was given 4 months to achieve her goal.

### **Test Anxiety**

Case 6 is not confident that she will achieve her goal for the following reasons:

### **Last year’s Experience**

Last year she was confident she would achieve a C level in oral communication but did not. This made her feel less confident that she would achieve her goal this time.

### **Conversation skills**

She said that in her first language sometimes she can not express herself well, and so it will be more difficult in her second language.

### **Content of the PSC Oral Language Test**

She was not comfortable about the content of the PSC oral language test (which is about her job) because she was limited in what she could say. She said, “We speak about work. It depends on the subject. Some subject I’m o.k and I have a lot to say but when it comes to work, I do not have a lot to say and the interview in oral is about work so we talk about work. I know what kind of questions they’re going to ask me. Even if in French, I do not think I’d be ready. Sometimes you do not have the words in French and I need to do it in English.”

### **English Language Ability**

She feels she’s improving but did not think its good enough. She still makes mistakes with verb tenses and fears the fact that she cannot speak English spontaneously. She thinks she should not be making the kinds of mistakes that she is making at this point in time. For the past few days she has been feeling that she will not be able to achieve a C level in oral communication and is afraid that people (at work) will think she does not speak English well.

She felt well prepared for the test because she knew what kind of questions she would be asked during the interview. She said the course helped her because her teacher corrected her a lot and at work her colleagues do not because she worked in a French environment. There was nothing she would have changed about her test preparation and she would not have changed her course in anyway.

## **Case 7**

Case 7 is a 39-year-old female who was born and raised in Quebec. She moved to Gatineau in 1998. She speaks French and English. Case 7 studied English at the private language school where I interviewed her with the goal of achieving a B level in oral but would like to eventually achieve a C level in oral communication in order to get promoted to an EX-01 position (director of the department). Her goal is to be promoted to an EX-01 position in two or three years. She enjoys her position now but she says she is a goal achiever and believes she can do better.

### **Strategy Use**

Case 7 completed 30 hours a week (intensive) of English language training in July, and 6 to 9 hours a week of English language training in August and September (175 hours in total) at the private language school where I interviewed her. She attended English classes in high school for five years.

In class, she practiced potential questions on the PSC oral language test, and reviewed grammatical aspects (verb tenses, prepositions, etc.). These strategies helped her.

Outside of the classroom, Case 7 spoke English to colleagues everyday, listened to the T.V. and radio in English, read magazines, novels, and newspapers in English, and analyzed English speech when it was spoken around her. These strategies helped her.

### **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 7, she had an A level in oral communication. She needed to complete the PSC oral language test to obtain a B level in oral communication

in order to keep her position, but would rather achieve a C level in order to get promoted to a higher position.

### **Test Anxiety**

Case 7 was confident that she would achieve a B level in oral communication but would rather achieve a C level in oral communication in order to get a higher position. However although, she only needed a B level in oral communication in order to keep her position at work and was confident she would obtain it. She said, “I know I will have it... in a ...in a period...of two years but it...it is a conditional of employment.”

She said during the interview that she was a goal achiever and wants to keep striving and move to higher positions. She felt she would be well prepared for the test by the end of the day after she asked her teacher a few questions. She felt that the course helped her because she had a greater knowledge of verb tense and has gained vocabulary. Looking back at her test preparation, she said she should have spoken more in English. Looking back at her course, she would have changed from a private class to a group class. Private classes were difficult for Case 7 because she did not think it was realistic to go through grammar rules and do exercises for 3 hours of class. She thought that it would have been a good idea if she were able to communicate with a group of students at times. She said communicating with the same person for a full day in class was boring. Case 7 was not confident about obtaining a C level, but although she was confident about obtaining a B level, she did express some anxiety about the following issues.

### **Friend's Oral Test Experience**

Case 7 was a little discouraged about her friend's situation, which happened the week before my interview with Case 7. She said that her friend does not have an accent when she spoke English, and she spoke really well. For this reason, Case 7 believed that her friend should have gotten her E (exemption) level in oral communication. Case 7's friend told Case 7 that the reason why she did not achieve an E level in oral was because she did not provide the evaluator with a detailed description about her job. This frightened Case 7. She said,

“One of my friends had a C last week but when...when...I hear...I say “she's a C level?” Why she have her “C”? The evaluator told her...you did not talk about uh your job and you were to general. But sometimes its difficult to explain uh...your job in specific...words...or specific situation because the evaluator...do not know all about the...the difference between each department.”

After this situation occurred, Case 7 asked her English language teacher if it was true that evaluators looked for detailed answers. Case 7's teachers said it is true. This discouraged Case 7 and was left with the impression that evaluators were tough to please and felt very nervous about completing the PSC oral language test. She said,

“I know they will ask me, “describe your job”, then describe your job....what will I have to say about my job...a little bit...then ah....nothing.... I do not have....more to say and then my teacher told me a few times that if you want to be at the level you are you must be specific and point little things.”

### **PSC Oral Language Test**

She said she is also stressed about being assessed because she has doubts that the evaluators are assessing accurately. She is also nervous about being asked by the evaluator to give detailed answers during the PSC oral language test.

### **Losing her Position**

Case 7 has been working at the same position since February 2007. When she got hired, she received a letter of offer that stated she has a time frame of two years to achieve a B level in oral; if she does not get it, she will lose her position. She failed the oral test several months ago, but believes she will achieve a B level in oral communication within the two year time frame. However, the fact that she doesn't have a B level in oral communication is consistently on the back of her mind.

### **Case 8**

Case 8 is a 34-year-old female who comes from Gatineau, Quebec. She speaks French and English.

### **Strategy Use**

She completed 4 hours a week for 13 weeks, minus three weeks (60 hours in total) of English language training at the private language school where I interviewed her. Six years ago, she took several sessions to obtain a C level in writing with the PSC. She also attended English language classes, once a week for five to six months in 1998.

In class, Case 8 studied theory and practice, and talked a lot with the teacher. She said that these strategies helped her. She also reviewed grammatical aspects (verb tenses, prepositions). She doesn't like studying and never did as a kid in school.

Outside of class, Case 8 spoke with colleagues at work in English 25% of the time everyday. She also wrote in English for work purposes (e-mails, summaries, and analysis). She read magazines, novels, and newspapers in English. She watched one movie a week and listened to the radio in English. She said that these strategies helped her maintain her level, which was her goal.

### **Proficiency**

When I interviewed Case 8, her C level in oral communication had expired on May 15, 2007 (a few months before I interviewed her). Since she changed her work position, she needed to re-take the PSC oral test to obtain a C level in oral.

### **Test Anxiety**

When I asked Case 8 if she was confident about achieving her goal, she said she had not worried about studying at home so somehow she must have been confident. She mentioned it was difficult to put her thoughts together in English. She said she was nervous about the test because of the consequence she would have to face if she fails. However, she would get another position that did not require a C level in oral communication if she did not achieve a C level in oral communication so maybe she did not really care about failing. If she did not achieve her C level in oral communication, she would lose her new position. She was not comfortable with doing role-play, which was part of the PSC oral language test. She said some days she thought she would achieve a C level in oral communication and on other days she did not. She said, "I do not know. There is a part of me that is not confident...but I guess I am because I am not worried too much or and study on my own. All I do are things in class. So I must be

confident some how. I do not know (she laughed). And also it's different because my...If I do not get ....my C. Let's say I do not get it, my life is not in danger or I won't. I may not ...be able to stay in this position but I'll find something else that doesn't require a C (she laughed). So...may be I do not really care. I'm not sure what it is but..."

Case 8 did not feel well prepared for the test. She said she should have studied at home but said she did not have time. She said the course helped her gain knowledge in grammar and theory and helped her become more conscious about the use of grammar and also to be more confident with speaking English. The course also helped her to understand how the interview will be structured. Looking back at her test preparation, she said she could have prepared more but did not have enough time.

Looking back at her course, she would have changed from private to group classes in order to have discussions with more people. She said sometimes the class was boring and she would have liked to speak about more challenging topics, for example, topics from the newspaper, politics, etc.

At the end of the interview, she indicated that she felt guilty about talking a lot during class even though she was getting feedback from her teacher. She said there were times in class when she and her teacher did not even open a book. She was also nervous about the PSC oral language test because she was uncomfortable with acting out role-plays.

Above I presented participants' answers to the interview questions in relation to proficiency, strategy use and test anxiety. Next, I will present the participant's answers from Part A of the questionnaire.

## **Post Questionnaire (Part A)**

This part of the questionnaire was completed after the participants took the oral test, but before receiving their test results. In this section, I present the answers to Part A of the questionnaire in relation to strategy use, and test anxiety for each participant. For strategy use, I describe whether participants read, wrote or spoke in English outside of the classroom, how often and for what purposes. For test anxiety, I describe any anxiety towards taking the test, their English training, test experience, their proficiency compared to others and the consequences they will face if they do not achieve their goals. Two common answers among all participants were that they circled “very important” for them to achieve their goal, and circled “very nervous” about taking the test. Some participants left some questions unanswered; I indicate if this was the case. See Appendix III for the questions on the Post Questionnaire. For an overview of the participants see Table 1, page 69, in chapter four.

### **Case 1**

#### **Strategy Use**

Case 1 spoke, wrote and read in English everyday at work.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Case 1 circled ‘N/A’ for rating her English ability compared to her colleagues because her colleagues do not speak English. On a scale from Excellent, good, fair, and poor, Case 1 rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “Good”. If she does not achieve her goal, the consequence she faces is she will not get her AS-01 position back. She will lose all benefits including her salary. She said she could lose her position to someone who already has the skills. Case 1 circled on the questionnaire that

she was “very nervous” about taking the test. On the questionnaire she wrote that she was very nervous because she felt a lot of pressure on her shoulders to achieve a B level in oral in order to obtain the position that has the salary and benefits that she wants. She circled she was ‘very satisfied’ with her English classes

Case 1 felt calm during the oral test just like she said she would but she was not positive that she did well because the evaluator asked her questions that did not relate to her job.

## **Case 2**

### **Strategy Use**

Case 2 spoke English with his clients and colleagues while at work. He watched T.V. in English about three times a week. He read almost everything in English while at work and a couple of articles at home.

### **Test Anxiety**

Case 2 rated his English ability compared to his colleagues and/or classmates as “poor”. He rated his English ability compared to native English speakers as “poor”. He circled it was “very important” to achieve his goal. He stated that if he does not achieve his goal, he will not be able to supervise people any more and will probably lose his acting pay. He circled that he was “very nervous” about taking the test; his nervousness was due to the consequences he will face if he does not achieve his goal and because he hates to be evaluated. He circled that he was “very satisfied” with his English classes. About his test experience, he said he was not satisfied with his test performance. He wrote, “I made a lot of mistakes and I knew it. I should have taken my time and spoken slowly but I did not”.

### **Case 3**

#### **Strategy Use**

Outside of the classroom, she read wrote and spoke in English everyday.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Case 3 rated her English ability compared to her colleagues and/or classmates as “fair”. She rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “Fair”. She circled that she was “very nervous” about taking the test. The consequences that she will face if she does not achieve her goal is that she will continue to get paid as a PM-01 position instead of as a PM-02 position even though she is performing tasks for a PM-02 position. She circled she was “very nervous” about taking the test, because obtaining her “C level” in oral communication is very important for her. She circled she was “very satisfied” with her English classes. About her test experience, she felt well prepared but she thinks she was too nervous and probably forgot a lot of knowledge she learned in class.

### **Case 4**

#### **Strategy Use**

Outside of class, CASE 4 read, wrote, and spoke in English with her colleagues and listened to the radio as often as she could.

#### **Test Anxiety**

CASE 4 rated her English ability compared to her colleagues/classmates as “good”. She rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “good”. She circled that it was “very important” that she achieves her goal. If she doesn’t, she will loose her acting position, and therefore take a lower paying position. She also will

not be able to obtain the bilingual bonus in which government employees receive once a year only if they are bilingual. She circled that she was “very nervous” about taking the test because she doesn’t like to be evaluated and because of the consequences she will face. She circled she was “very satisfied” with her English classes. She felt stressed and nervous when she was asked questions during the PSC oral language test but did not mention thinking she did not do well on the test.

### **Case 5**

#### **Strategy Use**

CASE 5 wrote that she read English as much as she did in French. She wrote that she read novels, scientific articles, and reviews. She added that 90% of employees at her work are Anglophones and so most of her interaction with them was in English. At home, she has some friends who are Anglophones and she speaks both English and French with them. Writing in English is very difficult for her. Most of the e-mails she sends are in English, although she started to write more analysis in English. 35% of her written work is in English and when she works with English documents, she writes the analysis in English.

#### **Test Anxiety**

CASE 5 rated her English ability compared to her colleagues/classmates as “good”.

She rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “Fair”. On a personal level she thinks it is very important for her to be able to improve her English skills, and on a professional level it is essential for her to be able to work both in French and in English in any situation. She circled that she was “very nervous” about taking the

test because of the impact that the result will have on her professional life and because of the stress she has about learning a foreign language.

She circled “very satisfied” with her English classes. She did not respond to the question about how she felt about her test experience.

## **Case 6**

### **Strategy Use**

Most of the letters Case 6 reads at work are in English. Everyday at work, she writes summaries and revises the sequence of events. She speaks French more than English at work; 70% of speaking is in French and 30% is in English.

### **Test Anxiety**

Case 6 rated her English ability compared to her colleagues/classmates as “fair”. She rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “Fair”. She circled that it is “very important” that she achieves her goal. If she doesn’t achieve her goal, she will face the consequence of losing her acting position as an AS-04. She was given a four-month period to achieve a “C level” in oral communication. She circled that she was “very nervous” about taking the test because for the past few days, she felt very nervous and felt that she wasn’t going to achieve her “C level” in oral communication. The reason she felt this way is because she cares about receiving a C level in oral communication. She put a lot of pressure on her shoulders and was afraid that people may think that she does not speak English well. She circled “very satisfied” with her English classes.

She felt that during the PSC oral language test, she spoke well about her job and about work in general, but found it difficult to speak about a subject for which she was

unprepared (she mentioned during our interview that memorizing what she was going to say was helpful but her comment indicates that it is not a good idea to memorize speech). She added that she did not know if she did well, but did not want to think about it because she did not want to feel discouraged.

### **Case 7**

#### **Strategy Use**

Outside of class, Case 7 watched TV shows and movies in English. She also read, wrote and spoke in English everyday at work.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Case 7 rated her English ability compared to her colleagues/classmates as “fair”. She rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “Fair”. She circled that it was “very important” to achieve her goal. If she does not achieve her goal within the given two-year period, she may lose her position. She circled that she was “very nervous” about taking the test because of the context of the test and assessment. She circled that she was “very satisfied” with her English classes. During her oral test, she said she did not do well at all because she was too nervous, which she thinks influenced the results despite her practice interview questions in class. When she feels anxiety, her English vocabulary does not come as easy as it does in class.

### **Case 8**

#### **Strategy Use**

Case 8 wrote most of her e-mails in English everyday and spoke 25% of the time in English.

## **Test Anxiety**

Case 8 rated her English ability compared to her colleagues/classmates as “fair”. She rated her English ability compared to native English speakers as “poor”. She circled that it was “very important” to achieve her goal. If she does not achieve her goal, she will have to look for another position. She circled that she was “very nervous” about taking the test because of the consequences of failure if she does not achieve her “C level”. She circled that she was “very satisfied” with her English classes. Taking the oral test was challenging for Case 8; she said that the evaluator pushed her hard, and did not make it easy for her to speak. She thinks the evaluator was evaluating her opinion rather than her English skills. But she did not mention that she did not do well on the test.

## **Post Questionnaire (Part B)**

This part of the questionnaire was completed after the participants received their test results. See Appendix III for the questions on the Post Questionnaire. In this section, I present participants’ answers to Part B of the questionnaire in relation to proficiency, test anxiety and test performance. For proficiency, I present participants’ level in oral before completing the test. For test anxiety, I present what students thought they would achieve on the test. For test performance, I present their results, and any feelings of anxiety regarding their test results, test performance, test preparation, and their English training, and if the test results changed any attitudes they had during the interview or during Part A of the questionnaire.

Table 3 (below) summarizes each participant’s level on the oral test at the time of the interview and their level on the oral test after taking the PSC oral language

proficiency test. The table also indicates which participants failed and which ones passed the test.

**Table 3. Participant's Proficiency Before and After the PSC Oral Language Test.**

	READING	WRITING	ORAL (before the oral test)	ORAL (after the oral test)	PASS OR FAIL
Case 1	B	B	A	B	PASS
Case 2	C	B	B	C	PASS
Case 3	E	B	B	C	PASS
Case 4	B	B	A	A	FAIL
Case 5	E	C	B	C	PASS
Case 6	C	C	B	C	PASS
Case 7	C	C	A	B	PASS
Case 8	E	E	C	B	FAIL

**Case 1**

**Proficiency**

Case 1's goal was to achieve a B level in oral communication from an A level.

**Test Anxiety**

Before the oral test, Case 1 thought she would remain at an A level in oral communication.

### **Test Performance**

Case 1 achieved her goal. She circled on the questionnaire that she was very satisfied with her results. She also indicated that she was very satisfied with her test performance. Case 1 also indicated on the questionnaire that the test results did change a way she felt during the interview and during the first part of the test. She says she has more confidence in herself now. She did not answer to the remaining questions on the questionnaire.

### **Case 2**

#### **Proficiency**

Case 2's goal was to achieve a C level in oral communication from a B level.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Two weeks before the test Case 2 thought he would not achieve a C level in oral communication.

#### **Test Performance**

He achieved his goal. He circled that he was "very satisfied" with the test results, but circled "a little satisfied" with his test performance. He wrote he was a little satisfied with his test performance because he was too nervous. His answers were incomplete and he did not elaborate. He says he should have given more details and more information.

Since he wrote the test, his attitude did not change towards his preparation for the test. He mentioned for the second time that he felt he should have spoken English with his girlfriend. Since he wrote the test, his attitude about his English course has not changed. He does not plan to take the oral test again until it expires in five years. The

test results did not change any of his feelings during the interview or during the first part of the test.

### **Case 3**

#### **Proficiency**

Case 3's goal was to achieve a C level in oral communication from a B level.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Before the test, she thought she would achieve a C level in oral communication.

#### **Test Performance**

Case 3 achieved her goal. She circled she is "very satisfied" with her test results and circled she is "very satisfied" with her test performance. She is satisfied with her responses because she thinks she did her best. Since she wrote the test, her attitude changed towards her preparation for the test. She felt she was well prepared this time. Since she wrote the test, her attitude has not changed about her English course. She wrote that the reason why she achieved her goal was because of her English course. She does not plan to take the test again. The test results changed the way she felt during the interview and during the first part of the test. During the test she was stressed and was not sure if she was using the correct verb tenses.

### **Case 4**

#### **Proficiency**

Case 4's goal was to achieve her B level in oral communication from an A level.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Before the Oral test, she thought she would achieve a B level in oral communication.

### **Test Performance**

Case 4 did not achieve her goal. She obtained an A level in oral communication, hence, the same level she started at. She circled she is “not satisfied at all” about the results. She circled she is “very satisfied” with her test performance. She plans to take the test again because it is important for her to achieve a “B level” in Oral Communication for her career and for the challenge. The test results did not change any of her feelings during the interview or during the first part of the test. She mentioned that during the first part of the Oral test she felt comfortable but felt stressed and nervous as soon as she was asked questions.

In the comments section of the questionnaire, she wrote that she is very disappointed with her test results again.

### **Case 5**

#### **Proficiency**

Case 5’s goal was to achieve a C level in oral communication from a B level.

#### **Test Anxiety**

Before the test, she thought she would achieve a B level or a C level in oral communication.

#### **Test Performance**

She achieved her goal. She circled that she was “very satisfied” with her test results and circled “very satisfied” with her test performance. Since she wrote the test, her attitude has not changed towards her preparation for the test. Since she wrote the test, her attitude has not changed about her English course. She plans to take the course

again to get “exemption”. The test results did not change any of the ways she felt during the interview or during the first part of the test.

## **Case 6**

### **Proficiency**

Case 6’s goal was to achieve a C level in oral communication from a B level.

### **Test Anxiety**

Before the test, she thought she would achieve a C level in oral communication.

### **Test Performance**

She achieved her goal. She circled that she was “very satisfied” with her test results and circled “very satisfied” with her test performance. She was satisfied with her test responses because it proved that she improved her communication in English and that she progressed. Since she wrote the test, her attitude has not changed towards her preparation for the test, or towards her English course. She does not plan to take the test again. The test results did not change any of the ways she felt during the interview or during the first part of the test. In the comments section of the questionnaire, she wrote she has studied English for three months and was unsure if her English had improved. She felt more confident after she received her test results. She was aware that even though she achieved her goal, she would need to continue to practice speaking English. The reason why she was positive that she would achieve her goal was because she had enough time to study English before taking the Oral Communication Test.

## **Case 7**

### **Proficiency**

Case 7's goal was to achieve a B level in oral communication from an A level, but preferred to achieve a C level.

### **Test Anxiety**

Before the oral test, she thought she would receive a C level in oral communication.

### **Test Performance**

She did not achieve her goal. She achieved a B level in oral but wanted her C level for future positions. She circled she is "a little satisfied" with her results and circled "a little satisfied" with her test performance. She did not comment as to why she was not satisfied with her performance. Since she wrote the oral test, she realized that, in preparation for the test, she should have been practicing day by day. Since she wrote the oral test, her attitude has not changed about her English course. She thought her English course was excellent. She plans to take the test again. She wants to keep improving until she achieves her E level. The test results did not change any of the ways she felt during the interview or during the first part of the test.

## **Case 8**

### **Proficiency**

Case 8's goal was to maintain a C level in oral communication.

### **Test Anxiety**

Before the oral test, she thought she would obtain a C level in oral communication.

## **Test Performance**

Case 8 did not achieve her goal. She obtained a B level, which is the level she started with. She circled she is “not satisfied at all” with her results, however, during the interview she said it would be “ok if she failed”. She circled she was “a little satisfied” with her test performance. She wrote that she would not change her responses during the oral test and adds that her results do not correspond to her performance. Since she wrote the oral test, her attitude has not changed towards her preparation for the oral test. Since she wrote the test her attitude has not changed about her English course. She plans to take the oral test again since she did not achieve her goal. In the comments section of the questionnaire, she wrote she was upset and thinks the interviewer was unfair.

## **Discussion**

In this section, I discuss my findings in relation to my overall research question, namely, ‘what influences test performance in the high stakes testing context of the PSC of the Government of Canada oral language proficiency test?’ In considering this question, I asked:

1. Do strategies make a difference? How does language training affect test performance?
  - What is the relationship between test performance and language development background?
  - What is the relationship between test performance and taking intensive language training before taking the PSC oral language test?

It was found that language-training affects test performance in two ways:

- A. Those who did not achieve their goal had the least number of hours of language training in their lifetime. Language training was longitudinal, from elementary school until this study's interview. Table number 4 below presents participants' past English language training.
- B. The participants who had an A level in oral communication before taking the PSC oral test, and who took one week of intensive language training, passed their test. The participant who had an A level in oral communication before taking the PSC oral language test, and did not take an intensive week of language training, failed the test. So the two out of the 8 participants who failed did not take Intensive Language Training but five out of six participants, who passed, took Intensive Language Training (see Table 2).

2. What role does proficiency level play?

- What is the relationship between proficiency background and test performance?

There was a relationship between proficiency background and test performance. All the participants whom were at their B level in oral at the time I interviewed them, passed the test. This may be an indication that it is easier to move from a B level to a C level than it is to move from an A level to a B level in oral communication. However, as discussed in chapter one, there is a larger gap between levels B and C than between levels A and B (McNamara & Roever, 2006). It is also possible that those who needed to move from a B level to a C level believe that it is more difficult; hence, study harder to achieve their goal.

3. What role does anxiety play in test performance in this high stakes context?

- What is the relationship between level of anxiety and the test taker's goal?
- What is the impact of test failure? Does the anxiety level change?

It was found that anxiety plays a role in test performance in two ways.

- A. There is a relationship between level of anxiety and the test taker's goal. Case 8's goal was to maintain her level of English proficiency and the other participants' goal was to obtain a higher level of English proficiency. Case 8, whose goal was to maintain her English proficiency, expressed less anxiety than those whose goal it was to obtain a higher English proficiency. Compared to the others, Case 8 did not show much concern about passing the test. During the interview, she mentioned that she would be satisfied if she did not pass the PSC oral language proficiency test.
- B. For those who failed, anxiety level did not change from after completing the test to after receiving the results. Case 8 and Case 4, who failed their test, were satisfied with their test performance after the test (but before their test results) and after their test results.

**Table 4. Participant's History of English Language Training.**

CASES	Number of hours a week and length of time of English language training at the private language school.	Have you studied English before? If so, how many years/months ago and for how long?
Case 1	One week at six hours each day (Total 30 hours a week)	- March 2006 – August 2006 (private) at three days a week at three hours a day (total 144 hours).
Case 2	December 2006 to March 2007, six hours a week plus two weeks intensive. (144	- High school, two to three hours a week in a group - Two years ago, four hours

	hours in total)	a week (group) for four months (total 64 hrs).
Case 3	May 15, 2007 to August 17, 2007, two classes at two hours a week. (Total 64 hrs)	- Elementary and High school, half French and half English - 13 yrs ago, once a week (at four hours) for four weeks (group class) (total 16 hours).
Case 4	Six hours a week (at two days a week) for five weeks. (Total 30 hours a week)	- February 2007 to May 2007, two hours with group and one hour of private each week (total 48 hours).
Case 5	Week of June 25, 30 hours in one week. (Total 30 hours)	- In elementary school - Ten years ago in Montreal for two months full time (total 48 hours).
Case 6	- Six hours a week for three months plus 30 hours a week for two weeks. (Total 132 hours)	- March 2006 for one month (private class) (30 hours total). - Fall 2005 (group class) 4 hours a week for 12 weeks (total 48 hours)
Case 7	- 30 hours a week in July - Six to nine hours a week in August and September (175 hours in total)	- One English class in high school for five years
Case 8	- Four hours a week for four months, minus three weeks. (60 hours in total).	- Six years ago, took a few classes to do her writing test to get her C (approx. 12 hours) - 1998, once a week for five to six months (approx. 88 hours)

### **Additional Comments**

In this section, I present information on strategies participants reported using, strategies they reported using on the SILL and the anxieties they expressed before taking the test. The information on the anxieties they expressed was originally gathered to

explore whether there was a relationship between their anxieties and test performance and strategies, and proficiency. The information on strategies was originally gathered to explore whether there was a relationship between these strategies and test performance and test anxiety, and proficiency. I found no relationship.

Below I present a table, which presents the type of anxieties expressed by participants before taking the PSC oral language proficiency test.

**Table 5. Participants' Anxieties Before the Test.**

	Content of the test. Ex. role-play	Validity of the test	Themselves as learners	The course	The teacher	The assessor	Test preparation	Being tested	Social Pressure
Case 1	*	*	*			*			
Case 2			*				*	*	
Case 3			*			*			
Case 4	*							*	*
Case 5							*		
Case 6			*						*
Case 7	*			*		*		*	
Case 8	*		*	*	*		*		

Below I present a table, which presents the number of strategies reported by participants.

**Table 6. Number of Strategies Reported.**

PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF STRATEGIES REPORTED
Case 1	7
Case 2	11
Case 3	9
Case 4	8
Case 5	5
Case 6	11
Case 7	6
Case 8	5

The median number of strategies reported among all participants calculates high or low strategy users. The medium of number of strategies is eight. Therefore, those who reported 8 or more strategies are considered to be high strategy users among the eight participants and those who reported below eight strategies are considered to be low strategy users among the eight participants.

The type of strategies reported by participants are demonstrated in Table 7 below.

**Table 7. Type of Strategies Reported.**

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8
Talk to oneself to relax/focus	*							
Speak English at home			*			*		
Speak English to colleagues	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Speak English to clients		*						
Listens to English (TV, radio)	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
Reads English		*		*	*	*	*	*

(magazines, novels, newspapers)								
Reads English at work (documents)	*	*	*	*	*	*		
Write English for Work purpose (e-mails, summaries, analysis)	*		*		*	*		*
Practice vocabulary								
Does homework		*	*	*				
Writes notes in class				*				
Ask questions in class		*		*		*		
Think in English		*						
Talked about complex topics in class to help with vocabulary and expressing thoughts		*						
Transfers rules in French to rules in English	*							
Bought grammar book and did their own exercises at home			*					

Took on more of the English files than the French ones at work			*					
Attended all classes			*			*		
Memorizing what they want to say						*		
Make charts with rules of grammar on paper and in their minds to organize the rules		*						
Analyze English speech when spoken around them							*	
Practice vocabulary for interview questions					*			
Concentrates on what the teacher says				*				
Practice interview questions for the exam						*	*	
Reviewed grammatical aspects (verb tenses, prepositions)							*	*
Practice Role plays						*		
Repeat words that are difficult to pronounce		*						

To sum up, I found the following:

- All participants claimed they spoke English at work to colleagues
- 7 out of 8 participants claimed they watched TV and/or listened to the radio.
- 6 out of 8 participants claimed they read at work (documents).
- 6 out of 8 participants claimed they read at home (newspaper, novels, magazines).

The type of learning strategy categories on the SILL which students reported are:

Affective Strategies (only one person reported using it), Social strategies, Metacognitive Strategies, Memory-related strategies, and Cognitive strategies (only one person reported using it). Compensatory strategies were not reported. Metacognitive strategies were used the most, the second most used was social strategies, and the third most used was Memory-related strategies. The least used was Affective strategies and Cognitive strategies. Compensatory strategies were not reported. Below, I present the strategies in Table 6 under the appropriate learning strategy category on the SILL.

**The Affective Strategies reported by participants were:**

- Case 1 talks to herself to help her focus again, and says, “its time to relax”.

**The Social Strategies reported by participants were:**

- Case 6 talked English a lot to help her with fluency example spoke with her husband. Case 6 spends 30% of the time each day speaking English.
- Case 4 practices talking with co-workers, tries to use English more than French depending on who the English speaker is because most speak back to her in French.
- Case 4 speaks in English with colleagues at work.

- Case 2 spoke English with clients and colleagues when he was at work.
- Case 3 talks English with her family
- Case 5 took opportunities to speak English but not as much as she should have; she spoke English at work most of the time,
- Case 3 spoke in English everyday at work
- Case 7 practiced talking (during meetings).
- Case 7 spoke English at work everyday.
- Case 8 spoke English 15 minutes a day on average (spoke 25% of the time in English).
- Case 1 practiced speaking.

**The Metacognitive Strategies reported by participants were:**

- Case 6 asks questions in class.
- Case 6 listens to the radio in the car, read English magazines, watched TV a little, read letters in English at work, wrote summaries in English.
- Case 6 – attends class
- Case 5 worked in English 90% of the time, Case 5 read as much as in French example Novels, scientific articles, reviewed, wrote more analysis in English and most e-mails in English; 35% of written was in English.
- Case 5 practiced vocabulary for interview questions.
- Case 4 concentrates on what the teacher said, wrote a lot of notes, did her homework, she read, she listened to the radio as often as she can, she watched T.V in English about three times a week, she read almost everything in English when she was at work and a couple of articles at home.

- Case 4 asks questions and asks “why” in class.
- Case 2 watched T.V. in English about three times a week, he read almost everything in English when he was at work and a few articles at home, he watched T.V with English subtitles, tried to read as much as he could, tried to think in English and tried to do all his homework, he asked questions in class, tried to talk about complex topics during class to help with vocabulary and to help express his thoughts, watched T.V 85% of the time and 30% of the time he read and thought in English,
- Case 1 watched T.V in English and spoke, wrote and read in English everyday at work.
- Case 1 used the rules in French to help her with the rules in English.
- Case 3 watched T.V. in English, and did exercises in her English grammar textbook in which she bought on her own (grammar book by Azaar) Case 3 also took more English files to take care of at work than French ones. Case 3 read in English too.
- Case 3 did all her homework and did not miss any classes
- Case 3 wrote and read in English everyday at work.
- Case 7 watched TV. CASE 7 listened to shows like Oprah because she thought she learns more English since it’s everyday social language.
- Case 7 reviewed her verb tenses and prepositions and practiced oral questions for the exam, and did reading.
- Case 8 talked to the teacher a lot during her class, sometimes for two hours at a time. Case 8 read English books and watched one movie a week. She said

it helped her maintain her level. She wrote her e-mails in English most of the time everyday.

- Case 8 studied theory and practice.

**The Memory-related Strategies reported by participants were:**

- Case 6 memorized what she wanted to say which helps her make fewer mistakes.
- Case 2 made charts to help him remember the rules and figure out how the language works and how he can use it (easier to use the grammar rules and remember them when they are in a chart), prepared charts in his mind for the verb tenses especially for models.

**The Cognitive Strategies reported by participants were:**

- Case 7 listened to people talking around her to listen to verb tenses and analyses people's speech when they are talking.

**The Compensatory Strategies:**

- None were reported by any of the participants.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to better understand my students' test anxiety and their test performance: these are two main concerns at the private school where the study was conducted, and where I taught for two years. In order to investigate these issues, I explored the relationship between strategy use (do some strategies aid with test performance? if so, which ones?), proficiency (previous skill), and test anxiety to find out if they affect test performance. Research in SLA is always looking for better ways of improving the learning and teaching of a second language.

In this chapter, I present the study's limitations, discuss its implications and give suggestions for future research.

In considering my overall research question, 'what influences test performance in the high stakes testing context of the PSC of the Government of Canada oral language proficiency test?' I conducted a study using 8 participants. All participants were given a pre-test interview, and a questionnaire, which consisted of two parts. Part A of the questionnaire, was completed after they completed the PSC oral language proficiency test and Part B was completed after they received their test results. I investigated the relationship between strategy use, proficiency, and test anxiety as potential factors for test performance. The framework I used was Patton's (1980) "Inductive Analysis" approach.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are three reasons why we cannot generalize the findings to the population of test takers. First, the study examined specific students (government employees) at a specific language school; thus we cannot generalize the findings to other student populations or other settings. Second, the study used a small sample size. Third, the

strategies reported were ones used for a particular test, the PSC oral language proficiency test; thus the study has no external validity.

Furthermore, I did not observe participants in the classroom, so I do not know if they used more strategies than reported. It is possible that students are not aware of all the strategies they use. As Nyikos & Oxford (1993, in Oxford, 2003) state “students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective”(p. 9). For this reason, the literature suggests that using verbal report is the best way to monitor students’ strategies used for tests and learning. Cohen (2006) mentions that the best way to conduct test-taking strategy research is verbal report (the learner describes their thoughts while completing a task) because it is during this procedure that students are conscious of the kinds of strategies they are using. Instead, my study used an interview and a questionnaire to explore my research question. The disadvantage of using interviews for strategy investigation was that my interview questions regarding students’ strategy use did not occur immediately after the learners completed a task (unlike the stimulated recall method) but rather at the end of their English language training. Chamot, (2005, in Doe, 2006) stated that stimulated recall is the most effective form of interviews for strategy investigation. The disadvantage of using a questionnaire was that some questions were left unanswered.

In addition, most participants were happy with their teachers and English language training, but at the time I interviewed them, I was a teacher at that school. Therefore, some of the participants could have been reluctant to express their true feelings towards their teachers and their course.

## **Implications of the Study**

My findings have the potential of changing to a degree, the teachers' and students' way of teaching and learning at the private language school where this study was conducted. First, my findings give teachers and learners an idea about factors that cause anxiety in test-takers, which is the first step to addressing the problem. The study has demonstrated that students express large amounts of anxiety including the variety of reasons for their anxiety, such as, the content of the test, social pressure, evaluators, ways of learning, and competition with other employees. Second, as the literature summarized in chapter two suggests, teachers should help students with test-taking strategies and language learning strategies to help them improve on tests. Teachers should aid students to become aware of the strategies they are using, help them monitor which ones are helpful and which ones are not in order to aid them with their progress, which in turn may help them overcome their anxieties about learning; this was expressed by some of my participants. Third, as my findings suggested, language training taken over time results in success on tests; therefore, language learning is a process, and cannot be done in a short time. Hence, students should not be learning English for the purpose of passing a test, but for the purpose of communicating better in English. Language training should be viewed as an experience to aid students to learn a language instead of as a tool to help pass a test, which is how all participants viewed their language training. Fourth, in addition to learning a language as a process, my findings suggest that taking intensive language training before completing the PSC oral language proficiency test prompts success on tests. This may suggest that test takers need to use the language extensively to help them switch from their first language to their second language.

In retrospect, there are a few things I would have liked to have done differently while conducting this study. First, a few questions on the questionnaire were not completely filled out and so in order to avoid incomplete questionnaires, I could have collected the questionnaires personally (instead of via e-mail) so that I could have asked participants politely to complete the missing information. Second, I could have asked my participants if any of the concerns they had mentioned before taking the PSC oral language proficiency test were in fact a concern that caused them to feel anxiety during the test. For example, one of my participants mentioned that he thought he would fail his test because he started to regress in his ability to speak during the last week of his language training. My question for him should have been whether he thought he showed regression during the PSC oral language proficiency test. If he did think so, it would be an indication that this perception in fact did not affect his overall test performance because he passed the test. Another example is the participant who mentioned that her test results would depend on (among other factors) whether she would feel comfortable with the evaluator. My question for her should have been whether she was comfortable with the evaluator. If she was not, did she pass any way? This would indicate whether a participant's perception was accurate or not. I could then compare those who were accurate with those who were not with regard to their test performance.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Other than this study, I found very little research on the PSC (oral, writing and reading) language proficiency test and on Government employees taking the test; therefore, more research should be undertaken to:

- find out what the students' educational background is, to see if there is a relationship between their educational background and their strategy use and test performance, and anxiety.
- compare strategies that students report with strategies they use. Do they report more or less than they actually use?
- look at whether there is a relationship between students' complaints (about evaluators and the test) and their test anxiety.

As shown in this thesis and as mentioned from McNamara & Roever, 2006, there are concerns and issues with the PSC oral language proficiency test that cause test-takers a great deal of anxiety; therefore, more research should be done in this area in order to improve the reliability and validity of the test and to help ease some of the test takers' anxieties.

As shown in this research and as stated by Zeidner (1998), test takers lives are determined by their test performance, and as a result experience test anxiety.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethics Certificate



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1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada  
Tel: (613) 520-2516  
Fax: (613) 520-2521  
[www.carleton.ca/cu/research/curo/](http://www.carleton.ca/cu/research/curo/)

#### Ethics Clearance Form

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee has examined the application for ethical clearance. The committee found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and, the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

New approval

Renewal of original approval

Original date of approval: 2 April 2007

Date of approval	<b>15 April 2008</b>
Researchers	<b>Giuseppina DeSousa</b>
Status	<b>M.A. candidate</b>
Department	<b>School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies</b>
Supervisor	<b>Professor Janna Fox</b>
Title of project	<b>Strategy Use, Test Anxiety and Test Performance: Their Relationship</b>

Ethics approval expires on: **28 April 2009**

#### All researchers are governed by the following conditions:

**Annual Status Report:** Ethics clearance is valid for one year from date of approval unless otherwise indicated. You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

**Changes to the project:** Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

**Adverse events:** Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

**Suspension or termination of approval:** Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Leslie J. MacDonald-Hicks  
Research Ethics Committee Coordinator  
For the Chair of the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee  
Prof. Antonio Gualtieri

## Appendix B: Semi- Structured Pre-test Interview

(The interview was given at the end of the English course)

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender?
4. Where are you from?
5. How many languages do you speak?
6. How many hours a week of English language training did you take? How long was the course?
7. What is your current proficiency level of English in reading, writing and oral? (circle the appropriate level):  
  
Reading: A B C  
Writing: A B C  
Oral communication: A B C
8. What level do you need to achieve in reading, writing, and/or oral (circle the appropriate level):  
  
Reading: A B C  
Writing: A B C  
Oral communication: A B C
9. What is your purpose for achieving the above level?
10. Which test(s) will you be taking during this study? (reading, writing or oral)
11. Have you studied English before? If so, how many years/months ago and for how long?
12. Are you in a private or group class?
13. Do you ask questions in class? Are you hesitant about asking questions? Do you feel you are interrupting the class? Do you feel you are wasting your classmate's time?

14. Do you feel confident that you will achieve your goal? Why or why not?
15. Do you feel well prepared for the test? Why or why not?
16. What have you done in the classroom to help you achieve your goal and have they helped you?
17. What have you done outside of the classroom to help you achieve your goal and have they helped you?
18. Did the course help you? Why or why not?
19. Looking back, what would you have changed about your test preparation?
20. Looking back, if you could have changed your course in anyway, what would you do?

### Appendix C: Post-test Questionnaire (two parts)

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of test: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part A** Please complete this section after you complete your test(s).

1. How do you rate your English ability compared to your colleagues? (circle one)

Excellent      Good      Fair      Poor

2. How do you rate your English ability compared to native English speakers?  
(circle one)

Excellent      Good      Fair      Poor

3. How important is it for you to achieve your goal? (circle one)

Very important      Fairly important      Not important at all

4. Are there any consequences if you did not achieve your goal? If so, what are they?

5. Did you read, write or speak in English outside of the English classroom? If so, where, how often and for what purpose?

6. How nervous were you about taking the test? (circle one)

Very nervous      A little nervous      Not nervous at all

7. If you felt nervous, explain why?

8. How satisfied were you with your English classes? (circle one)

Very satisfied      A little satisfied      Not satisfied at all

9. How did you feel about your test experience?

**Part B** Please complete this section after you receive your test(s) results.

1. Which test(s) did you write? (Circle your response)

Reading  
Writing  
Oral

2. What were your goals for each test? (Circle your response)

Reading: A B C  
Writing: A B C  
Oral Communication: A B C

3. Before the test(s), what test result(s) did you think you would achieve for each test? (Circle your response)

Reading: A B C  
Writing: A B C  
Oral Communication: A B C

4. What were your test results? (Circle the appropriate level):

Reading: A B C  
Writing: A B C  
Oral communication: A B C

5. Did you achieve your goal(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How satisfied are you with your results? (circle one)

Very satisfied      a little satisfied      Not satisfied at all

7. How satisfied are you with your test performance?

Very satisfied      a little satisfied      Not satisfied at all

8. If you are not satisfied with your responses, explain why and how you would change them. If you are satisfied with your responses, explain why.

9. Since you wrote the test, has your attitude changed towards your preparation for the test? If so, how?

10. Since you wrote the test has your attitude changed about your English course? If so, how?

11. Do you plan to take the test again? If so, why?

12. Did your test results change any of the ways you felt during the interview or during the first part of the test?

Any comments?

## **Appendix D: Ethics Application**

### **Pina De Sousa's Ethics Application**

#### **Strategy Use, Test Anxiety and Test Performance: Their Relationship.** **Supervisor – Janna Fox**

##### **Summary**

Many government of Canada employees need to verify their proficiency levels in reading, writing, and /or speaking English (or French) in order to obtain new positions or keep their acting positions. In order to achieve their goals, many take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at language schools. Proficiency for government employees is tested by the Public Service Commission (PSC) of the Government of Canada. While students use strategies in order to aid them with the processes of learning ESL, they also use strategies that will help them pass the PSC test. Because so much depends on their performance on the test, it is not surprising that students experience test anxiety to differing degrees, which may in turn affect their test performance. In the proposed study, I plan to explore the relationship between strategy use, test anxiety and test performance.

##### **Methodology and Procedures**

Using a case study approach my study will develop multiple cases (n=6) of students, studying at a language school for the purpose of passing the PSC proficiency test in English. At the end of each student's English course, and before they actually take the test, I will interview them. I will record the interviews on a tape recorder and then transcribe them for analysis. At the interview, I will give the students a questionnaire to complete. The first part of the questionnaire will be completed once they have taken their tests and the second part will be completed once they have received their test results. As results of the test are typically available quickly, I will ask the participants to respond to the test immediately after writing it, and then again, when they have received their results. The questions during the interviews and on the questionnaire will explore reported strategy use, test anxiety and test performance. Interviews will be arranged outside the private language school at their convenience to insure confidentiality. The interview will not take longer than 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire (including both parts) will not take longer than 20 minutes. For the purpose of triangulation, I will ask teachers for their observations based on their students' anxiety and strategies.

##### **Description of the Participants**

The six participants will be students from a private language school. They will be francophone government employees who need to obtain a certain proficiency level on the Public Commission reading, writing and/or oral test.

##### **Recruitment Process**

With each classroom teachers' permission, I will go to each class in the college to explain to students the purpose of my study and how it will benefit them and their teachers.

Then I will ask if they would like to participate in the study and leave my contact information with them. I will assure them that the interviews will not take longer than 15 minutes to complete, the questionnaire will not take longer than 20 minutes to complete and that their participation will remain confidential.

### **Risks**

There are no known risks or potential discomfort in this project. Participants will be informed in the consent form that they may refuse to answer any questions for any reason. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. Interviews will be arranged outside the College at their convenience to insure confidentiality.

### **Benefits**

Participation in the research will potentially aid students who will have the opportunity of reflecting on their use of strategies and talking through any anxiety they may feel with a sympathetic listener. When the study is completed, the results will be e-mailed to students. It may help students to better deal with test anxiety and improve their strategy use in test performance. This in turn may help students perform more effectively on the PSC tests if they do not achieve their goal and need to write the test a second time or on any future PSC tests. Teachers may also benefit from the results because it may help them to be more sensitive to the affects that test anxiety and strategy use can have on test performance, which in turn will give them the opportunity to reflect upon how to improve future courses.

### **Informed Consent**

An informed consent form will be signed by each participant and a copy of this consent form will be provided to them.

### **Anonymity of Participants**

I will let students know that their participation will be anonymous. I will assign students a fictitious name so that their identity will not be associated with the data. Any meetings will occur at the participants' convenience outside the College.

### **Confidentially**

I will let students know that the data will only be available to myself, and to Professor Janna Fox, who is my thesis supervisor. I will let them know the tapes will only be heard by me.

### **Security of Data**

The recordings of the interview will be stored on a cassette and will be located in my house along with the questionnaires. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants when the recordings are transcribed. After the project is completed, I will keep the transcripts in my filing cabinet for five years and break the cassettes, which hold any

interview recordings. Five years later, I will destroy the transcripts with a paper shredder. The questionnaires will be kept in my house indefinitely.

### **Future Use of Data**

In the informed consent form, I will let participants know that if I plan to use any data in the future, I will contact them for their permission.

### **Research Instrument**

I will give participants a questionnaire to complete on their last day of classes and then interview them. The questions in the interviews and on the questionnaires will explore test anxiety and strategy use. I will ask them to complete part A. of the questionnaire immediately after writing the test and part B. after they have received their results. The interview will be semi structured so that the interviewee can lead the interview to another direction. Subsequent questions will depend on the interviewee's responses in order to engage them in a conversation. For those participants whose level of English proficiency is low, the interview will be in French and the questionnaire, the letter and consent forms will be written in French and English.

### **Dissemination**

My findings will be presented in my thesis, therefore, will be accessible to anyone interested in this research. If the results are promising then I will also present my findings at conferences or as articles in journals. I will also e-mail participants and my colleagues (teachers) the description of the study.

## **Appendix E: Letter for Course Instructor**

Dear Course Instructor:

I am conducting research in order to look at strategy use, test anxiety, and test performance. The title of the project is *Strategy Use, Test Anxiety, and Test Performance: Their relationship*. I am completing this study to complete my Thesis for my M.A. in Applied Language Studies. I will be under the supervision of Dr. Janna Fox, School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Carleton University, (Janna\_Fox@carleton.ca).

### **Rationale for the Research:**

The purpose of this project is to explore the relationship between strategy use, test anxiety and test performance in order to help government of Canada employees to perform better on Public Commission oral, writing and/or reading tests.

### **Procedures:**

Using a case study approach, my study will develop multiple cases (n=6) of students, studying at a language school for the purpose of passing the PSC proficiency test in English. At the end of each student's English course, and before they actually take the test, I will interview them. I will record the interviews on a tape recorder and then transcribe them for analysis. At the interview, I will give the students a questionnaire to complete once they have taken their tests and once they get their test results. The questions during the interviews and on the questionnaire will explore reported strategy use, test anxiety and test performance. As results of the test are typically available quickly, I will ask the participants to respond to the test immediately after writing it, and then again, when they have received their results. Interviews will be arranged outside the College at their convenience to insure confidentiality. For the purpose of triangulation, I will ask you for your observations based on your students' anxiety and use of strategies.

### **Anonymity of Participants**

I will let students know that their participation will be anonymous. I will assign students a fictitious name so that their identity will not be associated with the data. Any meetings will occur at the participants' convenience outside the College.

### **Confidentially**

I will let students know that the data will only be available to myself, and to Professor Janna Fox, who is my thesis supervisor. I will let them know the tapes will only be heard by me.

**Risks:**

There are no known risks or potential discomfort in this project. Participants will be informed in the consent form that they may refuse to answer any questions for any reason. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity. Interviews will be arranged outside the College at their convenience to insure confidentiality.

**Benefits:**

Participation in the research will potentially aid students who will have the opportunity of reflecting on their use of strategies and talking through any anxiety they may feel with a sympathetic listener. When the study is completed, the results will be communicated to students. It may help students to better deal with test anxiety and improve their strategy use in test performance. This in turn may help students perform more effectively on the PSC tests if they do not achieve their goal and need to write the test a second time or on any future PSC tests. Yourself, as a teacher, may also benefit from the results because it may help you to be more sensitive to the affects that test anxiety and strategy use can have on test performance, which in turn will give you the opportunity to reflect upon how to improve future courses.

**The Right to Withdraw:**

The participants may withdraw for any reason and at any time throughout the study. If a participant wishes to withdraw it will be their decision if whether I can retain the information they have provided me with or have it destroyed.

**Security of Data:**

The recordings of the interview will be stored on a cassette and will be located in my house along with the questionnaires. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants when the recordings are transcribed. After the project is completed, I will keep the transcripts in my filing cabinet for five years and break the cassettes, which hold any interview recordings. Five years later, I will destroy the transcripts with a paper shredder. The questionnaires will be kept in my house indefinitely.

**Debriefing:**

I will e-mail the participants including you the results of my study.

**Future Use of Data**

In the informed consent form, I will let participants know that if I plan to use any data in the future, I will contact them for their permission.

If you have any questions about the research, you can reach me by email at [pinabar2003@hotmail.com](mailto:pinabar2003@hotmail.com). If you wish to contact my supervisor, Professor Janna Fox, she can be reached at 520-2600, ext. 2046, or by email which is [jfox@ccs.carleton.ca](mailto:jfox@ccs.carleton.ca).

In the case of ethical concerns, please contact:

Professor Antonio Gualtieri  
Carleton University Ethics Committee  
Carleton University  
1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
(613) 520-2517  
email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca).

_____ Researcher's Name (Please print)	_____ Researcher's Signature	_____ Date
_____ Supervisor's Name (Please print)	_____ Supervisor's Signature	_____ Date

## Appendix F: Letter for Test-Takers

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research project that will look at the relationship between strategies use, test anxiety, and test performance. The title of the project is *Strategy use, Test Anxiety and Test Performance: Their relationship*. The study will be conducted in order to complete my Thesis for my M.A. in Applied Language Studies. I am under the supervision of Professor Janna Fox of the School of Linguistics and Applied language Studies, Carleton University (Janna\_Fox@carleton.ca).

### **Rationale for the Research:**

The purpose of this project is to explore the relationship between strategy use, test anxiety and test performance in order to help you perform better on future Public Commission oral, writing and/or reading tests.

### **Procedures:**

I will interview you at the end of your English course, and before you take the test. I will record our interview on a tape recorder and then transcribe the data for analysis. At the interview I will give you a questionnaire to complete. Part A is to be completed as soon as you write the test and part B. is to be completed as soon as you get your results. The questions during our interview and on the questionnaires will explore reported strategy use, test anxiety, and test performance. Interviews will be arranged outside the language school at your convenience to insure confidentiality. The interview will not take longer than 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire (including both parts) will not take longer than 20 minutes to complete.

### **Anonymity/Confidentiality:**

The data will only be available to myself, and to Professor Janna Fox, who is my thesis supervisor. The tapes will only be heard by me.

### **Risks:**

There are no anticipated risks or discomfort in this project. You may refuse to answer any questions for any reason. You will be assigned a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy. Meetings can be arranged outside the College at your convenience to insure confidentiality.

### **Benefits:**

Your participation in the research will potentially aid you to reflect on your use of strategies and will allow you to talk through any anxiety you may feel with a sympathetic listener. When the results of the study are available, I would like to share them with you. Learning more about the relationship between strategy use and anxiety in test performance may help improve performance. Teachers may also benefit from the results because it may help them to be more sensitive to the affects that test anxiety and strategy

use can have on test performance, which in turn will give them the opportunity to reflect upon how to improve future courses.

**The Right to Withdraw:**

You may withdraw for any reason and at any time throughout the study. If you wish to withdraw it will be your decision if whether I can retain the information you have provided me with or have it destroyed.

**Security of Data:**

The recordings of the interview will be stored on a cassette and will be located in my house along with the questionnaires. A pseudonym will be assigned to you during the interviews and when the recordings are transcribed. After the project is completed, I will keep the transcripts in my filing cabinet for five years and break the cassettes, which hold any interview recordings. Five years later, I will destroy the transcripts with a paper shredder. The questionnaires will be kept in my house indefinitely.

**Debriefing:**

I will e-mail you the results of my study.

**Future Use of Data**

If I plan in the future, to use any data, which involves your participation, I will contact you for your permission.

If you have any questions about the research, you can reach me by e-mail at [pinabar2003@hotmail.com](mailto:pinabar2003@hotmail.com). If you would like to contact my supervisor, Professor Janna Fox, her phone number is 520-2600, ext. 2046, and her email is [jfox@ccs.carleton.ca](mailto:jfox@ccs.carleton.ca).

In the case of ethical concerns, please contact:

Professor Antonio Gualtieri  
Carleton University Ethics Committee  
Carleton University  
1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
(613) 520- 2517  
email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca).

_____ Researcher's Name (Please print)	_____ Researcher's Signature	_____ Date
_____ Supervisor's Name (Please print)	_____ Supervisor's Signature	_____ Date

## **Appendix G: Test-Taker's Informed Consent Form**

**Title:** Strategy Use, Test Anxiety and Test Performance: Their Relationship.

**Researcher:** Pina De Sousa

**Department:** School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Carleton University

**Email:** Pinabar2003@hotmail.com

I am conducting research to complete my Thesis for my M.A in Applied Language Studies. I will be under the supervision of Professor Janna Fox. The purpose of this project is to explore the relationship between strategy use, test anxiety and test performance in order to help you perform better on future Public Commission oral, writing and/or reading tests.

### **Procedures:**

I will use a case study approach. I will interview you at the end of your English course, and before you take the test. I will record our interview on a tape recorder and then transcribe the data for analysis. At the interview I will give you a questionnaire to complete. Part A is to be completed as soon as you write the test and part B is to be completed as soon as you receive your test results. The questions during our interview and on the questionnaires will explore reported strategy use, test anxiety, and test performance. Interviews will be arranged outside the language school at your convenience to insure confidentiality. The interview will not take longer than 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire (including both parts) will not take longer than 20 minutes.

### **Anonymity/Confidentiality:**

The data will only be available to myself, and to Professor Janna Fox, who is my thesis supervisor. The tapes will only be heard by me.

### **Risks:**

There are no anticipated risks or discomfort in this project. You may refuse to answer any questions for any reason. You will be assigned a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy. Meetings can be arranged outside the College at your convenience to insure confidentiality.

### **Benefits:**

Your participation in the research will potentially aid you to reflect on your use of strategies and will allow you to talk through any anxiety you may feel with a sympathetic listener. When the results of the study are available, I would like to share them with you. Learning more about the relationship between strategy use and anxiety in test performance may help improve performance. Teachers may also benefit from the results because it may help them to be more sensitive to the affects that test anxiety and strategy use can have on test performance, which in turn will give them the opportunity to reflect upon how to improve future courses.

### **The Right to Withdraw:**

You may withdraw for any reason and at any time throughout the study. If you wish to withdraw it will be your decision if whether I can retain the information you have provided me with or have it destroyed.

**Access to Information:**

The recordings of the interview will be stored on a cassette and will be located in my house along with the questionnaires. A pseudonym will be assigned to you during the interviews and when the recordings are transcribed. After the project is completed, I will keep the transcripts in my filing cabinet for five years and break the cassettes, which hold any interview recordings. Five years later, I will destroy the transcripts with a paper shredder. The questionnaires will be kept in my house indefinitely.

**Debriefing:**

I will e-mail you the results of my study.

**Future Use of Data**

If I plan in the future, to use any data, which involves your participation, I will contact you for your permission.

If you have any questions about the research, you can reach me by email at [pinabar2003@hotmail.com](mailto:pinabar2003@hotmail.com). If you would like to contact my supervisor, Professor Janna Fox, she can be reached at 520-2600, ext. 2046, or by email, [jfox@ccs.carleton.ca](mailto:jfox@ccs.carleton.ca). In the case of ethical concerns, please contact Professor Antonio Gualtieri at (613) 520-2517, or by email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca).

I have read the above descriptions of the study on “Strategy Use, Test Anxiety and Test Performance: Their relationship” and understand the conditions under which I will participate. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

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Participant's Name (Please print)	Participant's Signature	Date
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Email Address

I require your e-mail to contact you.

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Researcher's Name (Please print)	Researcher's Signature	Date
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