

# ProSpeak - Research Plan – Sarah Baron

How might we connect intermediate language learners to native speakers to improve their practical speaking skills?

## Study 1 [Qualitative]: Semi-Structured Interview

### Background

Language learning is the most challenging problem to solve in getting connected as you adapt to the society that they are in. While there are many resources available to learn vocabulary and grammatical structure, as well as access tutors to personalize your learning, language learning communities are harder to access. The traditional method of having a personal teacher seems to be the solution but not everybody has the good fortune to afford it in the long term. People need to be able to speak the language in practical settings, and often that problem gets unsolved due to the lack of practice that people who are not native speakers have.

### **What about the non-native adults who try to learn English or another language through an app?**

Most of these adults have an intermediate level, having a decent level about listening and reading, but still fear to speak because of their pronunciation and fluency level. ProSpeak aims specifically to overcome that fear by connecting them to native speakers so that they can speak the language much more practically.

### Research Goal

The research goal is, in one hand, to know how these adult learners improve their speaking skills through the apps they already tested and what they think about it to create the best user experience for them.

The other goal is to design an intuitive, modern and efficient app enabling users to improve their speaking skills in English in 2 parts:

- **A Conversational simulator** to allow the users to evaluate their level and upskill their fluency about every type of subject until they feel comfortable enough to practice their new skills in the feature of the app ;
- **A community to practice**, where matches are suggested to the users to practice their speaking skills with other users who have a more advanced level than them. By providing users freedom and control to provide another language to learn, or give a custom donation, provides incentive to more advanced people who can help them.

## Research Questions

	Research Question	Rationale
Research Question 1	What is essential for a speaking/language learning app in English?	This data will help to identify what are the fundamental features to keep the user engaged.
Research Question 2	What are some goals of language learners and how do the existing apps in the marketplace help them accomplish those goals? What is missing that could make that experience better?	That question will help to know how users interact with these apps and why they use them.
Research Question 3	What are the main pain points of learners on an app?	This data will allow us to know if users have any difficulty to accomplish their task.

## Method

- 45-minutes in person semi-structured Interviews to collect qualitative data
- Using the script as a guide and ask follow-up questions based on the answers from the users.

## Recruiting criteria

We want to recruit 2 non-native people who have an intermediate level in English and 3 native people who have an intermediate level in any language (to have both side of the user experience) who:

- Use apps to improve their speaking skills in English or any language, whether they interact with other users or not.
- Use at least weekly the app
- Use whatever app for at least 3 months.

To recruit these participants, we will send a link of the screener survey on an English Facebook group with learners.

## Screening Questions

### NON ENGLISH PATH (if the person is looking to learn English)

- 1) What is your native language?
  - a. English (screen out)
  - b. Others:
  
- 2) What is your level in English?
  - a. Elementary (screen out)
  - b. Intermediate To sort the participant as the learner
  - c. Advanced To sort the participant as the helper
  
- 3) What is your way to learn English?
  - a. In one-to-one lesson with a teacher (screen out)
  - b. Through language learning apps
  - c. Trying to find a language community
  - d. Through YouTube videos
  - e. Through music, movies, podcasts, or books (screen out)
  - f. Others (screen out)
  
- 4) Have you ever used an app to learn English?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No (screen out)
  
- 5) Which skills were you looking to improve?
  - a. Reading (screen out)
  - b. Speaking/Pronunciation
  - c. Listening (screen out)
  
- 6) How long have you been learning English through apps?
  - a. Less than 1 month (screen out)
  - b. Between 3 to 6 months
  - c. Between 6 months to 1 year
  - d. Over 1 year
  
- 7) How often did you use these apps?
  - a. Every day
  - b. 2-3 times a week
  - c. 2-3 times a month (screen out)
  - d. Hardly never (screen out)

**ENGLISH PATH (if the person is a Native English speaker)**

1. Did you ever try to learn another language?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No (screen out)
2. What is your level in that language?
  - a. Elementary (screen out)
  - b. Intermediate (screen out)
  - c. Advanced
3. What is your way to learn another language?
  - a. In one-to-one private lesson with a teacher (screen out)
  - b. Through digital solutions (desktop, mobile apps)
  - c. Others (screen out)
4. Have you ever used an app to learn a language?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No (screen out)
5. Which skills were you looking to improve?
  - a. Reading
  - b. Speaking/Pronunciation
  - c. Listening (screen out)
6. How long have you been learning another language through apps?
  - a. Less than 1 month (screen out)
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  - b. 2-3 times a week
  - c. 2-3 times a month (screen out)
  - d. Hardly never (screen out)

# Interview

## **Introduction**

My name is Sarah Baron and I wanted to take the time to thank you very much for participating in this study. I am currently working on a project related to understanding how learning adults work on their speaking skills in English, and any insights you have on this will be super helpful to me solving specific problems related to language learning.

This conversation will take about 30 minutes. I wanted to preface all of this by saying that there's no right or wrong answer, and this is not a test, but rather it's encouraged that you speak about the negatives and positives of language learning with equal importance so we get a better understanding of what works, and what doesn't. May I ask your permission to record the interview for note-taking purposes? The interview will be strictly confidential and won't be shared with anyone else.

## **Warm-up questions** *[Build rapport with the interviewed]*

- 1. Could you tell me more about yourself? Where are you originally from and where do you live now?**
- 2. Why did you get into learning English/a new language?**  
(Was it for leisure, professional or educational goals?)
- 3. What kind of things and subjects do you like to talk about?**

## **Questions** *[Probe into needs and behaviors]*

- 1. Are you currently learning any language? If so, which one?** *[This data will help to identify what kind of app get people interested in to learn a language and in that way, identify the essentials features which can make the users engaged]* **{Related to Research Question 1}**

Follow-up questions:

- Are you using a specific app to learn that language? If so, which one?
- What other apps did you try before?

- 2. Why do you want to try apps to learn the X language as opposed to other methods?** *[This data will help to know why lead people to use apps more than traditional methods]* **{Related to Research Question 1}**

Follow-up questions:

- When did it happen?
- What was the trigger?

3. **You just mentioned that you used the app X in your journey to learn English/that foreign language. How long have you been learning through that app?** *[this date will allow to know what motivate people to learn through specific apps in their learning in the long term]* {Related to Research Question 1}

Follow-up questions:

- How often did you use it? (Every day? Many times a week?)
- What times of the day did you use the app? (During the morning before work? At lunch time? During the break in the afternoon or more after work in the evening?)
- Why did you choose to learn through that specific app?
- What did you like about it and made you engaged to use it?

4. **What was your main purpose of using the app?** *[This question aims to know what the users hope to achieve as needs and to know their habits]* {Related to Research Question 2}

Follow-up questions:

- Did you want to improve your listening, reading, and/or speaking?
- Do you still use the app to learn through it?
- What was the last time you used the app?
- What did you learn?

5. **Between before and after using the app, how would you evaluate your progress on a scale of 0 to 10?** *[That data will help to know evaluate the progress of users achieving their goals through apps]* {Related to Research Question 2 and 3}

Follow-up questions:

- Which skills did you improve? (Listening, reading, and/or speaking?)
- How did the app make you progress in your learning?
- How do you feel about speaking in the language you are into now?

6. **How would you evaluate your speaking skills in X language?** *[That question will help to know what type of task is difficult to achieve as users who are trying to improve their speaking skills and how the app can offer a better user experience]* {Related to Research Question 3}

Follow-up questions:

- Are there any tasks that you couldn't accomplish by using the app in your learning experience? If so, what are they?
- In order to make your experience better, how would you want the app to help you out?

## Wrap-up

Thank you so much for sharing your experience and insights. Your answers will help me to build a better solution for everyone who wants to speak English with confidence. If you have any additional thoughts and comments, please feel free to reach out to me at [sarah.baron.sb@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.baron.sb@gmail.com), I would love to hear them. Hope you have a wonderful day.

## Study 2 [Quantitative]: Survey Study

### Background

In our previous study, we learned that learners keep writing over speaking even on a social media platform oriented to improve speaking skills. This is a promising opportunity we may be able to target with our future product, but more data is needed to better understand the feelings and the needs of these learners.

### Research goals

From this quantitative study, we want to better understand users' needs and pain points related to building confidence before speaking for real with someone.

### Research Questions

	Research Question	Rationale
Research Question 4	What are the difficulties learners face when they want to improve their speaking skills?	This data will help to identify their eventual level from which they learn, their obstacles and their pain points in their speaking learning journey
Research Question 5	How can apps best support and walk learners through in building confidence and fluency alone before speaking to people?	This data will help to know what methods learners are comfortable to interact directly with other users and make progress

### Methods & Recruiting

- Use surveys to collect data from at least 50 language learners
- Send surveys on an Facebook English Language Group whose answers in our screener survey meet the following criteria:
  - ✓ Use apps to improve their speaking skills in English, whether they interact with other users or not.
  - ✓ Use at least weekly the app
  - ✓ Use whatever app for at least 3 months

### Survey Questions

- 1) **What is your level in English?** *[Assumption; people might improve their speaking skills at different levels]* *{Related to Research Question 4}*
  - a. Beginner
  - b. Intermediate
  - c. Advanced

- 2) **Why do you want to improve your speaking skills?** *[Assumption: people might improve skills for different goals]* *{Related to Research Question 4}*
- d. For leisure
  - e. For education goals
  - f. For professional reasons
- 3) **What kind of subject do you like to talk about?** *[Assumption: people might improve skills for different interests]* *{Related to Research question 4}*
- a. Beauty
  - b. Sport
  - c. Food
  - d. Health
  - e. Politics
  - f. Technology
  - g. Science
  - h. Education
  - i. Workplace
  - j. Personal development
  - k. Others:
- 4) **How would you describe your speaking skills?** *[Evaluation of the level before using the app]* *{Related to Research Question 4}*
- a. It's awful, I can't barely pronounce a complete sentence
  - b. It's not hopeless, I can approximately introduce myself
  - c. It's not so bad, I can build sentences and express some ideas
  - d. It's good, I just do some grammar and gender mistakes sometimes
  - e. It's very good, but I just want to practice to not lose my touch
  - f. It's almost perfect, I even would like to help someone improving his English
- 5) **How do you practice your speaking skills?** *[To know different learning methods]* *{Related to Research Question 5}*
- a. By saying words out loud in order to work my pronunciation
  - b. By reading books
  - c. By recording yourself
  - d. By practicing with someone
- 6) **How often do you practice your speaking skills?** *[Assumption; people have their own usage frequencies]* *{Related to Research Question 5}*
- a. Everyday
  - b. 3-5 times a week
  - c. Once a week
  - d. Few times a month
- 7) **How comfortable are you to speak to people in a community?** *[To know if people are comfortable enough to interact directly with others]* *{Related to Question 5}*
- a. I don't like to talk to people
  - b. I like to talk to people
  - c. I am indifferent



- 8) **What is your ideal learning style to improve your speaking skills?** *[To know what how people prefer to learn]* *{Related to Research Question 5}*
- a. I prefer training myself by repeating words out loud
  - b. I prefer through audio only
  - c. I like to practice with real people in audio or video calls
  - d. Others:
- 9) **What makes you feel like you are making progress?** *[To know what make people engaged and motivated to use the app]* *{Related to Research Question 5}*
- a. Have a historic/inventory of words and expressions I've learned in the past
  - b. Have a tracking of the number of words I've learnt since signing up
  - c. Have my level compared to the standards of official language tests [IELTS/TOEIC]
  - d. Something else:
- 10) **What would make you feel comfortable to speak to someone you don't know in order to practice your speaking skills?** *[To understand how to break the ice easily between people and make them overcome their fear to speak or take the first step]*
- Answer:

### **Demographic Questions**

- 11) **What is your mother tongue?** *[In the context of the app, learn who need help in English and who can help whose learn that language]*
- a. English
  - b. Spanish
  - c. French
  - d. Italian
  - e. Hindi
  - f. Others:
- 12) **What is your age?** *[People from different age have different learning style]*
- a. Under 18
  - b. 18-25
  - c. 26-36
  - d. 36-65
  - e. Above 65
- 13) **What is your education level?** *[Education affects learning style]*
- a. Less than high school
  - b. High school degree
  - c. Bachelor's degree
  - d. Graduate degree

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