



The International Research Foundation  
for English Language Education

**Researcher**

Leigh Anne Benzaia  
University of Utah

**Title of Project**

Evaluating Miranda Rights Comprehension Among Immigrant and Formerly Incarcerated Populations: A Quantitative and Qualitative Investigation into Native and Nonnative English-Speakers' Understanding of their Constitutional Rights

**Research Supervisors**

Prof. MaryAnn Christison, University of Utah  
Dr. Scott Jarvis, Northern Arizona University

**TIRF Research Topics Investigated**

Language Assessment  
Migrants and Refugees: Teaching and Assessing English

**Bio**

Leigh Anne Benzaia is a Ph.D. candidate in the Linguistics Department at the University of Utah, specializing in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and forensic linguistics. Her research takes a mixed-methods approach to explore how formerly incarcerated and gang-affiliated L2 English speakers, particularly L1 Spanish speakers, comprehend U.S. constitutional rights, including Miranda warnings. Her dissertation assesses Miranda warning comprehension among immigrant and formerly incarcerated individuals, using predictive models based on English proficiency and qualitative error analysis to meet U.S. court evidence standards.

---

**Project Summary**

The present dissertation explores how native (L1) and nonnative (L2) English speakers in the United States comprehend the Miranda warning. Articulated in three distinct studies, this study investigates the oral comprehension of rights encoded in the Fifth and Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution by English L1 (American variety) individuals born and raised in the U.S., English L2 immigrants to the US, and finally, Spanish L1 (Mexican variety) and English L1 (American variety) formerly incarcerated individuals on the California/Mexico border. Study 1 employed an elicited imitation (EI) task with standard EI sentences and Miranda warning sentences (EIMR) to investigate the relationship between L2 proficiency and Miranda comprehension and found that the latter can be predicted with 85.4% accuracy. Study 2 will perform further analysis of data from Study 1 by using an updated scoring rubric to determine whether Study 1's findings can be replicated by scoring Miranda EI results with a rubric based on six fundamental concepts, and anticipates finding that the model used in Study 1 can predict Miranda understanding with relative accuracy. Lastly, Study 3 will use Study 1's EI to test English L1 and Spanish L1 formerly incarcerated individuals and will employ a triangulation of scoring methods to calculate results. Study 3 anticipates that years of incarceration will not aid in Miranda comprehension and that Spanish L1 formerly incarcerated individuals will perform worse than their English L1 counterparts on all three scoring measures.